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Sonia linked to organisation financed by George Soros Foundation: BJP

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: The BJP on Sunday alleged that former Congress president Sonia Gandhi has links to an organisation financed by the George Soros Foundation and which has backed the idea of Kashmir as an independent nation. This association shows the influence of foreign entities in India's internal affairs, the ruling party said in a series of posts on X. Meanwhile, notwithstanding the US' dismissal of BJP's allegations that it is backing attempts to destabilise India, party MP Nishikant Dubey said he would pose 10 questions to leader of opposition Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha on the issue. He said media portal Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and Hungarian-American businessman have colluded with the opposition to ruin India's economy and defame the Modi government. The BJP claimed that Sonia Gandhi, as the co-president of the Forum of the Democratic Leaders in Asia Pacific (FDL-AP) Foundation, is linked to an organisation



tion financed by the George Soros Foundation. "Notably, the FDL-AP Foundation has expressed their views that treat Kashmir (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Photos of scribes, women used on social media for sleaze content Himanta directs police to take action

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday asked the police to look into reports of women, including several journalists, being targeted by groups on a social media platform by using their photographs for sleaze content. "I will ask the DGP to look into the matter," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a programme when asked for his reaction to the incident. Several journalists and women from various sectors, including the entertainment industry, have been targeted by groups on a social media platform, who use their photographs to trap users with the promise of getting them to meet



these women. Some of the victims have already filed complaints and police

Forum (AWJF) condemned such an act of targeting journalists and media personnel, terming it a "case of online abuse and a crime against women". "It is disturbing that some of our members have been targeted in this smear campaign by unknown users running the Facebook pages — 'Assamese Girls Online' and 'Assamese Beautiful Girls'," AWJF said in a statement. The AWJF demanded a thorough investigation into the matter and also urged the respective media organisations to support the affected journalists and provide them with the necessary legal and institutional backing required in such cases. (PTI)

CM expects to complete 3.5 km bridge by 2028 Palashbari-Sualkuchi bridge's 'bhumi puja' performed

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday performed the 'bhumi puja' of the Palashbari-Sualkuchi bridge over the Brahmaputra river, said an official statement. Sarma noted the subsequent actions taken, including the development of the project report, tendering processes, and land acquisitions, which culminated in today's Bhumi Pujan. "The bridge, spanning a total length of 3.6 kilometers, is expected to be completed by June 2028. It would feature a 5.3-kilometer four-lane road connecting Palashbari and a 2-kilometer route to Sualkuchi, alongside elevated roads to protect the wetlands north of Sualkuchi," the statement quoted Sarma as saying. The chief minister also posted that this bridge would catalyse a transformative shift in connectivity between the northern and southern banks of the Brahmaputra, easing access to prominent locations such

as Gauhati University, Tura in Meghalaya, and Goalpara. Later, he reiterated that government initiatives, previously impeded by logistical challenges in areas like Hajo, Ramdia, and Sualkuchi could now be implemented. Sarma also noted the imminent construction of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Palashbari, which would improve communication for students in North Assam once the bridge is completed. Reflecting on the progress made since Prime Minister Modi took office in 2014, Sarma highlighted the significance of the Dhola-Sadiya and Bogibeel bridges. "The ongoing construction of a bridge connecting Jorhat and Majuli, along with plans to initiate a major tunnel road project between Gohpur and Golaghat next year, with an investment of 12,000 crore rupees," he said. Furthermore, he announced plans for a 32-kilometer elevated corridor aimed at protecting Kaziranga's (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Wrestling going on within INDIA bloc': Naqvi

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Taking a swipe at the INDIA bloc, senior BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Sunday said "wrestling" is going on within the opposition alliance with competing ambitions leading to "chaos" within its ranks. The Congress, when it was in power, used to "get hit wicket" every day and now in opposition, it is "creating a record of bowling no balls", Naqvi told reporters in Uttar Pradesh's Rampur. Taking a jibe at those criticising Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath over his remarks that the DNA of what happened under Mughal rule Babur's rule in Sambhal and Ayodhya and what is happening in present-day Bangladesh is the same, Naqvi said Adityanath has always cracked down on rioters and ensured safety and prosperity of the society. Naqvi said the "Samajwadi Sultans and communal champions" will be knocked out in the 2027 state Assembly elections. The people will teach a lesson to them, he said. "Those who cry on the action against musclemen and rioters can never understand this DNA," Naqvi was quoted as saying in a statement from his office. Taking a potshot at the INDIA bloc, he claimed "wrestling is going



on in the Opposition alliance". Naqvi said the competing ambitions in the alliance are leading to "chaos" within its ranks. Targeting the Congress, Naqvi said the dynasty's deception to dominate the democracy is being defeated each and every time. Naqvi condemned the ongoing atrocities on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, saying that the system in the neighbouring country has been captured by "criminal, communal and cruel fanatics". "The ongoing barbarism against the Hindu minorities is not the culture of Bangladesh. The safety of

AAP accuses BJP of settling Rohingyas in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, the AAP on Sunday accused the BJP of settling Rohingya refugees in the city while publicly vilifying them. Reacting to the allegation, the BJP said the real issue is not the settlement of legal refugees but the presence of millions of illegally-residing Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis not only in Delhi but also in other states and accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of resorting to "baseless rhetoric". In a statement, senior AAP leaders, including chief minister Atishi, Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, pointed to a 2022 post on X by Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri as evidence of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) involvement in housing Rohingya Muslims in EWS (Economically Weaker Section) flats in Delhi's Bakkarwala area. "Hardeep Puri's tweet proves

that the BJP conspired to settle Rohingyas in Delhi while pretending to oppose them. They provided EWS flats, security and facilities to them but misled the public with their hate rhetoric. This is the BJP's dirty and deceitful politics," Sisodia said in a post in Hindi on X. Atishi echoed similar sentiments and said, "The BJP was so desperate to accuse Arvind Kejriwal that they forgot their own role in bringing and settling Rohingyas in Delhi. Hardeep Puri's tweet has exposed the truth to the people of Delhi." "On August 17, 2022, Union minister Hardeep Puri had tweeted that India has a tradition of welcoming refugees and announced plans to relocate Rohingyas to EWS flats in Delhi, ensuring them basic amenities, UNHCR IDs and security. This contradicts the BJP's public stance on the issue," the statement said. Singh said, "Delhites can now see who truly brought and settled (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



All BJP mandals to have offices by 2026: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: The ruling BJP is in the process of constructing permanent offices in all its mandals across Assam to bring the party further closer to the people, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday. He said most of these mandal offices will be completed before the 2026 Assembly elections. Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the office building of Sualkuchi Mandal in Kamrup (Rural) district, Sarma said, "Today is a joyous day for us as this office building, with all modern facilities, has been opened. We are aiming to build such offices in all the mandals of the state." He said that most of these buildings will be completed before the next state elections, due in 2026. "These permanent mandal offices will (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jubilation, gunfire as Syrians celebrate end of Assad family's half-century rule

DAMASCUS, Dec 8: Syrians poured into streets echoing with celebratory gunfire on Sunday after a stunning rebel advance reached the capital, putting an end to the Assad family's 50 years of iron rule but raising questions about the future of the country and the wider region. Joyful crowds gathered in central squares in Damascus, waving the Syrian revolutionary flag in scenes that recalled the early days of the Arab Spring uprising, before a brutal crackdown and the rise of an insurgency plunged the country into a nearly 14-year civil war. Others gleefully ransacked the presidential palace and the Assad family residence after President Bashar Assad and other top officials vanished, their whereabouts unknown. Russia, a close ally, said Assad led the country after negotiations with rebel groups and had given instructions to transfer power peacefully. Abu Mohammed al-Golani, a former al-Qaida commander who cut ties with the group years ago and says he embraces pluralism and religious tolerance, leads the biggest rebel faction and is poised to chart the country's future direction. The end of Assad's rule deals a major blow to Iran and its allies, already weakened by over a year of con-



flict with Israel. The rebels now face the daunting task of healing bitter divides in a country ravaged by war and still split among different armed factions. Turkey-backed opposition fighters are battling US-allied Kurdish forces in the north, and the Islamic State group is still active in some remote areas. Syrian state television aired a video statement early Sunday by a group of rebels saying that Assad had been overthrown and all prisoners had been set free. They called on people to preserve the institutions of "the free Syrian state." The rebels later announced a curfew in Damascus (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Congress demands discussion in Parl on India-China relations

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Criticising the government over its statement in Parliament on India-China ties, the Congress on Sunday claimed that the Modi government has agreed to a "new normal" over the "old normal" prevailing before April 2020 which was unilaterally disturbed by China. It also demanded that Parliament be allowed to debate the full gamut of the relationship between the two countries. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said a discussion in Parliament on the India-China relationship should focus on both strategic and economic policy, especially since our dependence on China has increased economically, even as it unilaterally changed the status quo on our borders over four years back. In a statement, Ramesh said the Congress has studied the recent suo motu statement made by external affairs minister S Jaishankar in both Houses of Parliament titled "Recent Developments in India's Relations with China". It is unfortunate, but typical of the Modi government, that MPs



were not permitted to seek any clarifications, he said. While "fully appreciating" the sensitive nature of many aspects of India-China border relations, he said the Congress has four pointed questions on the statement issued by the Modi government. Ramesh noted that the statement claims that "the House is well aware of the circumstances leading up to the violent clashes in Galwan Valley in June 2020", and pointed out that it is an unfortunate reminder that the very first official communication to the nation on this crisis came on June 19, 2020, when the PM provided a clean chit publicly to China and falsely stated "Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai". "Not only (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Heroin worth ₹ 1.4 crore seized in Guwahati, 3 arrested

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Heroin worth nearly Rs 1.4 crore has been seized and three peddlers have been arrested from Guwahati, police said on Sunday. Acting on a tip-off, the Special Task Force (STF) conducted a raid in Balughat in Basistha police station area on Saturday evening and arrested a drug peddler, Assam Police chief public relations officer Pranabjyoti Goswami said in a statement. A total of 27 vials containing 36.05 gm of heroin, a mobile phone, a scooter and some cash were seized from his possession, he added. "Upon being led by the arrested person, police searched a rented house in Beltola Bazar, Garokuchi Path in Dispur police station area and nabbed two more drug peddlers," Goswami said. From the duo, police seized 102 vials containing heroin weighing 138 gm, and two mobile phones, he added. Further investigation is underway, the CPRO said. Another senior official said that the total value of the seized drugs will be around ₹ 1.4 crore as per Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) standards. (PTI)

The policy also aims to promote clean and gender-segregated sanitation facilities States asked to submit action plans for implementation of national menstrual hygiene policy

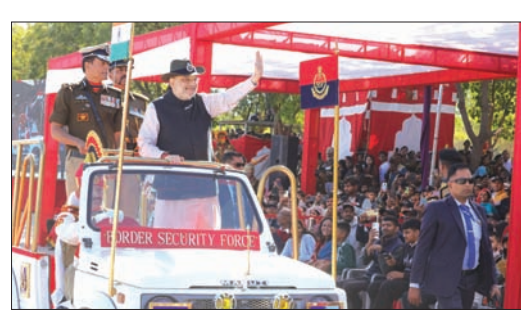
NEW DELHI, Dec 8: The Centre has urged states to submit action plans for effective implementation of the menstrual hygiene policy for school girls to ensure their access to low-cost hygiene products and gender-responsive sanitation facilities in public and government-aided schools. The Union Health Ministry's letter to all states comes after the Supreme Court on November 12 stated that the effective roll-out of the policy would require comprehensive action plans tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each state and UT. The Centre had last month informed the Supreme Court about the 'Menstrual Hygiene Policy for School Going Girls', which was approved by the Union Health Ministry on November 2.



The policy aims to mainstream menstrual hygiene within the school system of the government to bolster change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour among schoolgirls, overcoming the barriers of low awareness that often restrict their freedom, mobility and participation in daily activities. It advocates for streamlining mechanisms to provide for continuous and timely availability of menstrual hygiene products in schools. For government and government-

aided schools, the policy says that states/UTs should assess and estimate the actual requirement of menstrual hygiene products to enable efficient use of resources. To enable coverage, assessment through appropriate levels of survey mechanisms can be undertaken by states or UTs followed by gap filling, so that girls in government and government aided schools have regular access to menstrual hygiene products. Additionally, the policy seeks to dissipate harmful social norms, promote safe menstrual hygiene practices, and enable environment friendly management of menstrual waste. The health ministry has asked states to develop and submit a detailed state and UT action plan that incorporates all aspects of the policy, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India to set up anti-drone unit for border security: Amit Shah



JODHPUR, Dec 8: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said India will soon create a comprehensive anti-drone unit to secure its borders as the "menace" of unmanned aerial vehicles is going to get serious in the coming days. Addressing BSF troops at the 60th Raising Day event of the force here at its training camp, about 300 km from

the India-Pakistan border, Shah said the initial results of a "laser equipped anti-drone gun-mounted" mechanism have been encouraging. This has led to an increase in drone neutralisation and detection cases, up from 3 per cent to 55 per cent, along the India-Pakistan border in Punjab, he said. "The drone menace is going to get more serious in the coming days... We are tackling this issue in a 'whole of government' approach with the border guarding forces, defence and research organisations and the DRDO joining hands. "We are going to create a comprehensive anti-drone unit for the country in the coming time," Shah said. According to official data, more than 260 drones have been downed or recovered from India's border with Pakistan this year as compared to about 110 in 2023. The maximum number of such interdictions of drones carrying arms and drugs have taken place in Punjab and very few in Rajasthan and Jammu. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The proposed amendments primarily focus on promoting policyholders' interests

Insurance Amendment Bill proposing 100% FDI unlikely in winter session

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Insurance Amendment Bill, which proposes 100 per cent FDI in the insurance sector, may not be introduced in Parliament in the ongoing session, sources said.

Some finetuning may be required in the draft Bill after receiving comments from stakeholders, sources said.

Given the paucity of time, it is difficult to present the Bill in the ongoing session, sources said, adding it may, however, come in the Budget session.

The finance ministry has proposed to amend various provisions of the Insurance Act, of 1938, including raising foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector to 100 per cent, reduction in paid-up capital, and provision for composite licence.

The Department of Financial Services (DFS) has sought public comments on the proposed amendments by December 10.

As per the proposal, the FDI limit in Indian insurance companies will be raised from 74 per cent to 100 per cent.

This is the second public consultation that the DFS has sought on the proposed amendments to the Insurance Act 1938, the Life Insurance Corporation Act 1956, and the Insurance Regulatory and De-



velopment Authority Act, 1999.

The finance ministry in December 2022 invited comments on the proposed amendments to the Insurance Act, 1938, and the Insurance Regulatory Development Act, 1999.

According to a recent office memorandum, it is proposed to amend certain provisions of insurance laws to ensure accessibility and affordability of insurance to citizens, foster expansion and development of the insurance industry, and streamline business processes.

In this regard, a comprehensive review of the legislative framework governing the sector has

been done in consultation with the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and the industry, it said.

The proposed amendments primarily focus on promoting policyholders' interests, enhancing their financial security, and facilitating the entry of more players into the insurance market leading to economic growth and employment generation, the memorandum stated.

Such changes will help enhance efficiencies of the insurance industry, enabling ease of doing business and enhancing insurance penetration to achieve the goal of 'Insurance for All by 2047', it said.

"The proposal includes raising the FDI limit in Indian Insurance Companies from 74 per cent to 100 per cent and enabling an insurer to carry on one or more classes of insurance business and activities related/incidental to insurance," it said.

Further, it said, the requirement of net-owned funds for foreign reinsurers is also proposed to be reduced from ₹ 5,000 crore to ₹ 1,000 crore. "Also, IRDAI is being empowered to specify lower entry capital (not be less than ₹ 50 crore), for under-served or un-served segments on a special case basis," it said.

The Insurance Act, of 1938, serves as the principal Act to provide the legislative framework for insurance in India. It provides the framework for the functioning of insurance businesses and regulates the relationship between an insurer, its policyholders, shareholders and the regulator IRDAI.

The entry of more players in the sector would not only push penetration but result in greater job creation across the country.

Currently, there are 25 life insurance companies and 34 non-life or general insurance firms in India. These include companies like Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd and ECGC Ltd. (PTI)

FPIs return to Indian equities with ₹ 24,454 crore inflow in Dec first week

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: After heavy selling in the past two months, foreign investors have staged a strong comeback to Indian equities with a net investment of ₹ 24,454 crore in the first week of December amid stabilising global conditions and expectations of potential US Federal Reserve rate cuts.

This revival follows significant outflows in the preceding months, with foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pulling out a net ₹ 21,612 crore in November and a massive ₹ 94,017 crore in October - the worst monthly outflow on record.

Interestingly, September had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows, with a net investment of ₹ 57,724 crore, highlighting the volatility in foreign investment trends.

With the latest inflow, FPI investments have reached ₹ 9,435 crore in 2024 so far, data with the depositories showed.

Looking ahead, the flow of foreign investments into Indian equity markets will hinge on several key factors. These include the policies implemented under Donald Trump's presidency, the prevailing inflation and interest rate environment, and the evolving geopolitical landscape, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Additionally, the third-quarter earnings performance of Indian companies and the country's progress on the economic growth front will play a crucial role in shaping investor sentiment and influencing foreign inflows, he added.

According to the data with the depositories, FPIs have made a net investment of ₹ 24,454 crore this month (till December 6).

Trivesh D. COO, Tradejini, a stock trading platform, attributed the latest inflow to improving global conditions and the possibility of US Fed rate cuts.

Also, the recent correction in the market could have prompted FPIs to build some exposure, Srivastava said.

Additionally, uncertainty over Chinese equities on the back of proposed tariffs by US President-elect Donald Trump on China and other several nations could have prompted FPIs to look back at Indian equities, which offer much clearer long-term growth prospects, despite relatively high valuations, he added. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said the shift in FPI strategy is evident in stock price movements, especially in large-cap banking stocks, where FPIs have been selling.

This segment still has upside potential as it remains fairly valued and continues to grow at a steady pace, with more domestic institutional and retail investments expected to flow in, he added.

Additionally, the IT sector is poised to perform well and attract increased FDI interest.

On the other hand, FPIs pulled out ₹ 142 crore in the debt general limit and invested ₹ 355 crore in the debt Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) during the period under review.

So far this year, FPIs invested ₹ 1.07 lakh crore in the debt market. (PTI)

Bimal Cars celebrates EV Day

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 8: As part of Tata's 'Festival of Cars' celebrations, its Electric mobility developer TATA.ev, on Sunday announced its revised prices on bestselling models such as Tiago.ev, Punch.ev and Nexon.ev, at Bimal Cars, Sarusajai.

Tata focuses on making EVs more accessible to mainstream customers to Drive EV cars at a price of petrol/

diesel cars with benefits upto 4 lacs on EV cars, an official statement said.

According to the statement, TATA.ev has been passing on the benefits of localisation and technology improvements to customers, and has been able to bring Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) price parity with Curvv.ev launched last month. With this special offer, TATA.ev is

bringing the prices of the best-selling Nexon.ev on par with ICE models as well for a limited time. Moreover, festive offers on Punch.ev and Tiago.ev have also brought their prices similar to that of their ICE counterparts, it added.

Siddharth Sharma, RM; Anurag Sarangi, CMD Bimal Cars and Dipankar Das, GM Bimal Cars were present on the occasion, it stated.

CII urges govt to stick to fiscal deficit target of 4.9% of GDP for 2024-25

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Industry body CII has suggested the government to stick to the fiscal deficit target of 4.9 per cent of GDP for 2024-25 and 4.5 per cent for 2025-26, cautioning that "overly aggressive targets" beyond these could adversely affect India's economic growth.

"India has been growing rapidly amidst a slowing global economy. Prudent fiscal management for macroeconomic stability has been pivotal to this growth," said Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, CII, elaborating on suggestions for the forthcoming Union Budget. CII also highlighted the announcement in the Union Budget 2024-25 to keep the fiscal deficit at levels that help reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio.

In preparation for this, the forthcoming budget could lay out a glide path to bring the central government's debt to below 50 per cent of GDP in the medium term (by 2030-31), and below 40 per cent of GDP in the long term, CII has suggested. Such an explicit target will have a positive impact on India's sovereign credit rating and further on the interest rates in the economy, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) stated. "To aid longer-term fiscal planning, the government should consider instituting Fiscal Stability Reporting. This could include issuing annual reports on fiscal risks under different stress scenarios and the outlook for fiscal stability. The exercise will help forecast potential economic headwinds or tailwinds and assess their impact on the fiscal path," it said. (PTI)

Cars set to get expensive from January as OEMs announce increase in price

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Prices of various car models - ranging from entry-level hatchbacks to high-end luxury offerings - are set to rise as automakers have announced price hikes with effect from January.

Carmakers cite an increase in input costs and operational expenses as the main reason to implement price increases from the next month.

Industry experts, however, note that the exercise is also undertaken by automakers every year in December to shore up sales volume in the last month of the year, as customers postpone buyouts to later months to get the new year manufactured units.

"We have seen a few cycles of price increase in India. It happens at the beginning of the calendar year and financial year, but few OEMs pick the timing based on their planned launches as well," Deloitte India Partner Rajat Mahajan said. While there could be multiple factors for the price increase, the key one is due to a decline in profitability of a few large auto OEMs in the second quarter, he added. "Due to the festive season, the price revisions were not done. Hence, this is expected at the beginning of Q4."

"Rising input costs of few materials, shifting consumer preferences on advanced features but a low willingness to pay, clubbed with the pressure of supporting dealers to offset high inventory



carrying costs despite high festive discounts are putting a burden on profitability," Mahajan stated.

Ira Vice President & Sector Head - Corporate Ratings Rohan Kanwar Gupta said automakers generally take a price increase at the start of the calendar year to help offset factors like the increase in operational costs on account of inflationary pressures and commodity prices etc.

"The recent price hikes announced by various car makers are for the same reason. It must be noted that there are already healthy discounts on offer across a variety of models in the passenger vehicle industry, with the industry focused on bringing down inventory levels," he added.

The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India plans to hike vehicle prices by up to 4 per cent from January.

The company, which sells models ranging from entry-level Alto K10 to multi-utility vehicle Invicto, said it is taking a price hike in light of rising input costs and operational expenses.

"While the company continuously strives to optimise costs and minimise the impact on its customers, some portion of the increased cost may need to be passed on to the market," it stated.

Rival Hyundai Motor India is also looking to increase the prices of its model range by up to Rs 25,000 from January 1, 2025.

The price increase has been necessitated due to an increase in input costs, adverse exchange rate and increase in logistics costs, the maker of Verna and Creta said.

Mahindra & Mahindra will hike prices of its SUVs and commercial vehicles by up to 3 per cent from January. The adjustment is in re-

sponse to the rising costs due to inflation and increased commodity prices, Mahindra & Mahindra said.

Similarly, JSW MG Motor India said it will increase prices of its entire model range by up to 3 per cent from next month.

The price increase is a result of continuously rising input costs and other external factors, the automaker stated.

Honda Cars India is also considering a price increase but is yet to decide on the quantum. Luxury car market leader Mercedes-Benz India plans to increase prices by up to 3 per cent from January.

Increased commodity prices and higher logistics expenses driven by persistent inflationary pressures are putting a significant strain on the company's overall operational costs, Mercedes-Benz India stated.

Prices of Mercedes-Benz cars will be revised in the range of Rs 2 lakh for the GLC to Rs 9 lakh for the top-end Mercedes-Maybach S 680 luxury limousine.

Audi India will increase prices by up to 3 per cent across the model range due to an increase in input and transportation costs.

"This correction is essential for Audi India and our dealer partners to ensure sustainable growth," Audi India Head Balbir Singh Dhillon said.

Similarly, BMW India is looking to increase prices of its model range by up to 3 per cent from January next year. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Sonia linked to organisation

as a separate entity," the party said. "This association between Sonia Gandhi and an organisation that has backed the idea of Kashmir as an independent nation expresses the influence of foreign entities on India's internal affairs and the political impact of such connections," it said. The BJP further claimed that Sonia Gandhi's chairmanship of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation led to a partnership with the George Soros Foundation, "displaying the influence of foreign funding on Indian organisations".

"Rahul Gandhi's press conference on Adani was live telecast by George Soros-funded OCCRP, which Gandhi used as a source to criticise Adani. It shows nothing but their strong and dangerous relationship and highlights their attempts to derail the Indian economy. "Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has publicly acknowledged George Soros as an 'old friend'. It's something truly noteworthy," it said.

The BJP's allegations come after it claimed on Thursday that the US "deep state" colluded with OCCRP and Rahul Gandhi to damage India's image. The US on Saturday rejected BJP's allegations that organisations funded by its 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. Reacting to the US embassy's statement, BJP MP Dubey said, "Yesterday I read the statement of the US embassy officials again and again. They admitted that the US government funds OCCRP and Soros' foundation also funds it."

The job of OCCRP and Soros is to ruin India's economy and defame the Modi government in connivance with opposition leaders, he said in his post on X in Hindi. "After yesterday's statement, I will have to ask Rahul Gandhi my 10 questions in the Lok Sabha. The opposition is trying to suppress my voice in Parliament. Lok Sabha Rule 357 gives me the right to ask questions. Waiting for tomorrow," the MP said. (PTI)

CM expects to complete 3.5 km

wildlife during floods, with an estimated cost of 8,000 crores.

He stated that construction on the Palashbari-Sualkuchi bridge would start in full swing immediately, alongside the rapid progress of the Phulbari bridge, adding, "Plans for the proposed construction/on-going construction of six new bridges in Barak Valley".

Sarma anticipated that with land constraints no longer an obstacle, projects that had languished near Guwahati could now progress in Hajo, Barkhetri, Palashbari, Boko, and Chaygaon. "This Palashbari-Sualkuchi bridge marks a significant leap in the government's initiative toward social development, which the chief minister characterised as a collective achievement," the statement said.

Union minister Pabitra Margherita, minister for Environment & Forests Chandra Mohan Patowary, MP Bhubaneswar Kalita, and MLAs Diganta Kalita, Hemanga Thakuria, Nandita Das, special commissioner & special secretary of Public Works (Roads) Department Chandan Sarma, Kamrup district commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra, and other dignitaries.

AAP accuses BJP of settling

Rohingyas in the city. The BJP's duplicity stands exposed." Other AAP leaders, including Sandeep Pathak, Raghav Chadha and Gopal Rai, also took to social media to slam the BJP, accusing it of indulging in divisive politics. Reacting to the allegation, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said ever since his party launched a campaign to disenfranchise illegally-residing Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis and expel them from the country, Kejriwal and other AAP leaders have been resorting to a baseless rhetoric to divert the attention of people from the core issues affecting Delhi.

"The real issue is not the settlement of legal refugees but the presence of millions of illegally-residing Rohingyas and Bangladeshis, not just in Delhi but also in states like Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand," Sachdeva was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the BJP. The AAP had raised the issue of Rohingya infiltrators even in 2022, the BJP leader said, adding, "Back then, we had said, and we reiterate now, that refugees are a separate matter, but infiltrators should be kept in detention camps, not in flats."

The controversy comes as political tensions rise ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls due in February, with both the AAP and the BJP accusing each other of misleading the public. (PTI)

Jubilation, gunfire as Syrians

from 4 pm to 5 am. The rebels said they freed people held at the notorious Saydnaya prison, where rights groups say thousands were tortured and killed. A video circulating online purported to show rebels breaking open cell doors and freeing dozens of female prisoners, many of whom appeared shocked and confused. At least one small child could be seen among them.

Rebel commander Anas Salkhadi, who appeared on State TV later in the day, sought to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic minorities, saying: "Syria is for everyone, no exceptions. Syria is for Druze, Sunnis, Alawites, and all sects." "We will not deal with people the way the Assad family did," he added. (AP)

All BJP mandals to have

enable us to learn of issues facing the people better and we can act more closely with them in the future," Sarma added. Union minister Pabitra Margherita and party's North Kamrup president Subal Pal, among others, were present on the occasion. (PTI)

Congress demands discussion

was this an insult to our fallen soldiers but it also weakened India's position in subsequent negotiations. Whatever prompted the PM to make this assertion?" Ramesh said. "On October 22, 2024, Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi restated India's longstanding position: 'As far as we are concerned, we want to go back to the status quo of April 2020... thereafter we will be looking at disengagement, de-escalation and normal management of the LAC'."

"However, the Ministry of External Affairs statement following the 32nd meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) on 5 December 2024 stated that 'the two sides positively affirmed the implementation of the most recent disengagement agreement which completed the resolution of the issues that emerged in 2020'," Ramesh pointed out.

Does this not reveal a shift in our official position, he asked. "The EAM's statement in Parliament stated that in a few other places where friction occurred in 2020, steps of a temporary and limited nature were worked out, based on local conditions, to obviate the possibility of further friction", he noted. Ramesh claimed that this clearly refers to the so-called "buffer zones" to which our troops and livestock herders are "denied access" that they previously had. "These statements taken together suggest that the MEA is accepting a settlement that does not return the LAC to the April 2020 status quo as desired by the Army and the nation. "Is it not clear now that the Modi government has agreed to a new status quo and agreed to live with the 'new normal' after the 'old normal' prevailing prior to April 2020 was unilaterally disturbed by China?" Ramesh said.

Why has the Chinese government yet to corroborate any details about the disengagement in Depsang and Demchok, he asked. "Have traditional grazing rights for Indian livestock herders been restored? Will there be unfettered access to our traditional patrolling points? Have the buffer zones ceded during previous negotiations been taken back by India?" he said.

The Congress reiterates the demand it has been making for the past few years -- Parliament must, to reflect a collective national resolve, be given an opportunity to debate the full gamut of the India-China relationship, he asserted. "This discussion should focus on both strategic and economic policy, especially since our dependence on China has increased economically, even as it unilaterally changed the status quo on our borders over four years back," Ramesh said. His remarks come days after Jaishankar said India is committed to remaining engaged with China to find a fair and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary issue. (PTI)

States asked to submit action

ensuring coverage of government and government-aided schools. They have been asked to ensure inter-departmental coordination with relevant stakeholders to address challenges in infrastructure, supply chain, and awareness besides prioritising sensitisation and awareness activities to promote safe menstrual hygiene practices and foster behavioural change among adolescents, parents and educators.

They have also been urged to include specific timelines, monitoring mechanisms and key performance indicators in the action plans. The policy also aims to promote clean and gender-segregated sanitation facilities as per standards in all government and government-aided schools and incorporate menstrual hygiene education into the school curriculum to raise awareness and reduce stigma related to menstruation in all schools.

The objective is also to promote social and behaviour change by disseminating scientific information about menstrual hygiene practices among all stakeholders, including teachers, parents and the community, for creating a menstrual friendly environment for all school girls. (PTI)

India to set up anti-drone unit

The minister reviewed the ceremonial parade, took salute and awarded medals to gallantry award winners and gave away some other decorations. The Border Security Force (BSF), which has a strength of about 2.65 lakh personnel, was raised on December 1, 1965. It is primarily tasked with guarding more than 6,300 kms of Indian frontiers with Pakistan and Bangladesh apart from rendering a variety of duties in the internal security domain of the country. Shah said the ongoing Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) for securing India's borders with Pakistan (2,289 km) and Bangladesh (4,096 km) is a work in progress. "We have had an encouraging response from the CIBMS deployed along the riverine border in Assam's Dhubri (India-Bangladesh international border) but some improvements are required," he said. The minister also said that the Modi government's Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) for developing and bringing into the mainstream the population of northern borders will be implemented for all the frontier villages of the country in the future. This is Modi government's "biggest achievement" vis-a-vis enhancing border security and working for the population living in these remote areas with a fund allocation of ₹ 4,800 crore. It is being run on an "experimental basis" currently in around 3,000 villages, he said.

Shah said the Union government has sanctioned a "big" budget for strengthening India's borders -- fencing, frontier infrastructure, roads and other logistics. "Securing global recognition and the number one place for India by 2047 is not possible without our security personnel... the jawans who guard our borders with dedication," he said. Speaking about securing India's frontiers, Shah said for many years, India's border security policy "lacked clarity". "During prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure, an integrated approach to border management and the "One Border, One Force" policy was introduced, which became even more defined after Shri Narendra Modi became Prime Minister," he said. Shah said fencing has been completed along 591 kms of the India-Bangladesh border.

Floodlights have been "installed" along 1,159 kilometers of the border apart from the construction of 579 observation posts, he said. Additionally, 685 locations have been provided with electricity connections, 575 places with water connections, and 570 solar plants have been installed to ensure power supply, he stated. Shah said about 573 new border posts have been created by the Modi government apart from 1,812 km of roads in remote frontier areas. BSF director general (DG) Daljit Singh Chawdhary said 13,226 newly trained personnel have been posted in various battalions and this will add to the "operational strength" of the force. (PTI)

Hails the role of DGPs in guiding Assam to peace

CM attends reunion seminar of chiefs of Assam Police



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attended the first ever reunion seminar of the chiefs of Assam Police at the office of Director-General of Police (DGP) office in city's Ulubari area. The seminar was held on Saturday.

It may be noted that the reunion seminar of IPS officers of Assam segment is an opportunity for the police officers who have worked as DGP, Assam, DGP Meghalaya, head of CAPFs.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma said that the first ever reunion seminar of Assam Police Chiefs is a unique opportunity for serving the police personnel to learn from the invaluable experiences of those who served and built a world class police force for a secured Assam.

He said that the seminar is not just a formal gathering; it is a profound tribute to the invaluable contributions, which have not only shaped the identity and achievements of the Assam Police but also contributed immensely to the security and unity of India.

The chief minister said that the seminar is an extraordinary platform where serving officers, currently carrying the mantle of law enforcement, can engage with and learn from the vanguards, which have walked this challenging path before them. He said that the former chiefs faced immense odds, dealt with multifaceted crises, and upheld the dignity of their profession with unmatched integrity and grit.

"As we stand together today, we celebrate not only the illustrious legacy of the former chiefs but also their continuing influence on the law enforcement and security fabric of our state and country. This gathering is a timely moment to reflect on our past achievements, draw lessons from the experiences of our stalwarts, and collectively chart a roadmap for the future. This platform is an opportunity to renew our commitment to uphold the rule of law, protect our borders, and secure a brighter and safer tomorrow for generations to come," Sarma added.

Appreciating the role of the former DGPs, Sarma said that the DGPs, who led the force during some of the most turbulent periods in the history, cannot be overstated. Their vision, leadership, and resilience have been instrumental in guiding the Assam Police through times of uncertainty and crisis. The former chiefs of Assam Police laid the foundation for a robust law enforcement apparatus that could withstand and overcome the adversities it faced, the CM added.

CM Sarma said that the impact of militancy have left a deep imprint on the brave police personnel who also bore the brunt, often facing life-threatening situations while striving to restore peace and order. Despite these adversities, the Assam Police displayed unparalleled resilience and unwavering commitment to their duties. They remained steadfast against anti-social elements, safeguarding the state from all crises.

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Man arrested with bones, nails, claws of leopard

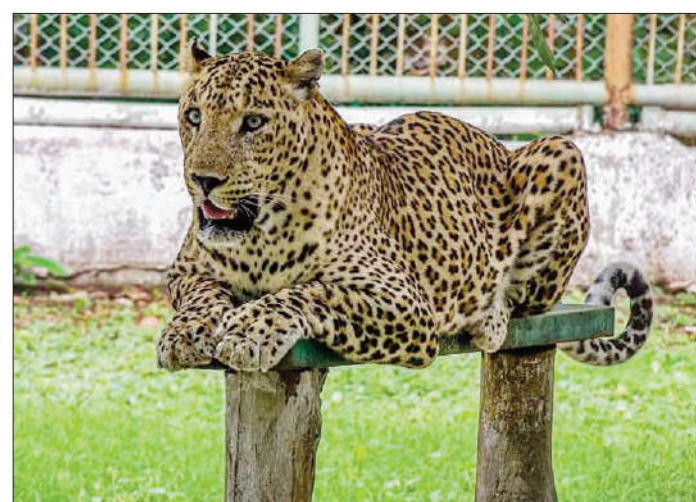
GUWAHATI, Dec 8: A 64-year-old man was arrested from Assam's Chirang district with bones, nails and claws suspected to be of a leopard, a senior official said on Sunday.

According to Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve Field Director C Ramesh, a specialised team led by the Range Officer of Bansbari Barin Boro apprehended the man from Jhar Bispani village in the Panbari police station area on Saturday night.

"Acting on a credible tip-off, the team discovered the accused at his residence. He was found in possession of bones, nails and claws from a cat species that are suspected to belong to a leopard," he said in a statement.

The items had been confiscated and sent for forensic analysis, he said.

"Authorities are continuing their investigation and are actively searching for another individual, believed to be involved in this crime. Further arrests are expected shortly," he added.



Ramesh stressed that this operation underscores the unwavering commitment to combat wildlife crime and protect endangered species in Manas National Park, a UNESCO natural world heritage site.

"We urge the community to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities to safeguard our natural heritage," he said.

Spread across 850 sq km, the Manas National Park with four ranges is located in the Baksa and Chirang districts in western Assam at the foothills of the eastern Himalayas. (PTI)

The camp provided free medical treatment and medicines to the people of the area who were largely affected by poverty. Many dignitaries including Indian Red Cross Society vice president Pradeep Das, retired bank officer Paran Jyoti Bhuyan, All Assam Bhojpuri Parishad Central Committee president Kailash Kumar Gupta, Green Project (Rotary Club) Digoiboi Directors Arup Goswami and Shantanu Roy also attended the camp.

The event was a significant step towards addressing the healthcare needs of the rural population who are often plagued by various health issues due to lack of access to quality medical care.

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3rd South East Asia Cultural Conference enthralled crowd

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 8: The 3rd South East Asia Cultural Conference under the aegis of Northeast Asirbad Foundation was held in Guwahati recently aiming to connect with the South East Asian countries through culture, tourism, mutual trust, brotherhood and tradition.

Politicians, cultural icons, educationists along with cultural troops from 5 countries and artists from Assam took part in the conference that was held at Shilpagram.

The Cultural team from Mahasarkham University in Thailand, the team representing Assam, Tai cultural troop from Cotton University, team from Bhutan, Nepal, Thailand and Nepal enthralled the audience towards the evening. Alongside Bharatnatyam's rendition from a team led by Anu Basumatary, Sangita Kakaty's vocals and Gayatri Konwar's cultural troupe showcased South East Asia's rich cultural richness. The cultural evening was directed by artist Jina Rajkumari.

The programme was inaugurated by Padmashree Jatin Goswami and dramatist Dulal Roy. Former Assam chief secretary Kumar Sanjay Krishna, Nitul Gogoi and cultural affairs director Rahul Das were also present on the occasion.

Distinguished personalities like Nilima Khatun, Aparna Bujarbaruah, Samar Hazarika, Jiten Basumatary, Surjya Das, and Dwipen Baruah were felicitated in memory of late singer Pankaj Kalita.

Journalists Anupama Deka, Devajit Nandan, Ranjita Rabha and Snigdha Bora were also felicitated on the occasion.

Pulse Polio Immunisation drive launched



HT Bureau
DIPHU, Dec 8: In line with the rest of other places of the country Pulse Polio Immunisation (PPI) programme under Sub-National Immunisation Day (SNID) was also started in Karbi Anglong district from Sunday.

The primary objective of the Pulse Polio Immunisation is to ensure comprehensive protection against poliomyelitis for all children within the age group of 0-5 years.

In this Polio immunisation campaign, polio drops have been provided in the entire district by ANM, ASHA, field workers, health workers and others in different polio booths covering all the parts of the district including model hospitals, Community Health Centres, Urban Health Centre, Primary Health Centres, Mini Primary Health Centres, MPHC (SD), SHC, Sub Centres and in transit locations like railway stations and bus stands etc.

Our Kokrajhar correspondent adds: Along with the rest of the state, the pulse Polio immunisation drive was carried out on Sunday across Kokrajhar town and the entire district to immunise children below five years of age and protect them from polio.

Our Morigaon correspondent adds: The Sub-National Immunisation Day (Polio) campaign was launched on Sunday at the office of the Joint Director of Health Services, Morigaon.

After launching the Sub-National Immunisation Day, the Joint Director of Health Office, Morigaon has started a campaign to vaccinate over 149606 children below five years against polio in the district.

The additional district commissioner Anusuya Sharma (Health) inaugurated the campaign in the presence of Joint Director of Health Dr Arun Nath, Addl CM & HO Dr Tapan Kr Saikia, District Immunisation Officer Dr Niranjan Konwar, DFPC-Baharul Ulum Chowdhary.

The health department has organised 905 polio booths across the district. The programme will be staffed by a total of 3585 booth workers to conduct the campaigns.

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Governor attends valedictory session of Assam Police Chiefs' Reunion Seminar



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the valedictory session of Assam Police Chiefs' Reunion Seminar held at the Assam Police HQ at Ulubari on Sunday.

It may be mentioned that Assam Police has organised the Reunion Seminar of IPS officers of Assam segment who have worked as DGP, Assam/ DGP, Meghalaya/ Head of CAPFs/CPO.

Speaking on the occasion Governor Acharya extended his warm wishes to all the former DGPs and said that the event brought together the former DGPs, who have graced the highest position and enriched Assam Police with their exemplary services. Their dedication, leadership, and unwavering commitment to the service have inspired every police personnel to strive for excellence in their duties and become a steadfast to take their service for the betterment of the society.

Acharya said, "On this special occasion, we pay tribute to all the brave police personnel and officers who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty. Their valor has gifted Assam the well deserved peace, and their sacrifice presented the state an ideal platform for future generations. We extend our gratitude to their families, who supported their loved ones to dedicate themselves to the service of the nation and the state."

Acharya also said that the role of police forces is continuously evolving in the modern era. He said that in view of the threats like cybercrime, terrorism, human trafficking, and drug peddling, the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is making elaborate efforts to empower and modernize the police forces. The budget allocation for police modernization has been increased, with a focus on technical training and infrastructure development.

Acharya further said that the Prime Minister has honored North-east India and addresses the region as 'Ashlakashmi'. The Prime Minister, therefore, ensured launching of several special schemes for the development of this region. The Governor stated that the 'Act East Policy' is a significant step toward making Assam the gateway to Southeast Asia. Acharya further said, "The success of this policy is possible only when we maintain peace, security, and harmony in the state. Assam Police plays a vital role in this direction".

The Governor also said, "The legacy of Assam Police lies not only in its medals and achievements but also in the values it upholds that is justice, equality, and service. It is our collective responsibility to preserve these values and instill confidence in every individual of the society on the fact that Assam Police is dedicated to the safety and welfare of all".

Synchronising with the occasion, the Governor also released two books 'Unforgettable Chapters' by Prakash Singh and 'From Sylhet to Shillong' by Bijoya Sawian. Both the books are based on the heroic tales of the police.

The reunion seminar aims to highlight the invaluable contributions of the Ex- Police Chiefs and their continuing role in strengthening the law enforcement system and in ensuring National Security. This is the first of its kind initiative in India and seeks to provide an opportunity for interaction of the serving generation of police officers in Assam with the former police officers.

Wait till Feb to turn saffron, CM tells Cong MLAs

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 8: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday asked MLAs from Congress party, who are willing to switch sides to join BJP, should wait for a few months as the assembly election is due in Assam in 2026.

"The Congress MLAs who are keen to join the BJP are asked to wait for a few months because it will unnecessarily initiate another by-election in the state. But the assembly poll is due in Assam in the next one and half year and this is time to do some development work. Therefore, I advised those legislators to wait at least till February next year," Sarma told reporters.

The chief minister also said, "We will see how the situation will unfold but yes the MLAs who desire to join our party will be welcomed."

Pharmacy owner accused of withholding employee's salary

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, Dec 8: A shocking case of alleged exploitation has emerged from Demow Barua Changmai, where Purna Kanta Gogoi, a long-time employee of Kamakhya Medical Store on Demow Nitai Road, claims he has not been paid his monthly salary since 2019.

Gogoi, who has been working at the pharmacy for 16 years, alleged that when he approached the owner on Saturday to request his overdue salary, he was forcibly removed from the premises. In response to the incident, Gogoi lodged a complaint with the Demow Labour Union.

On Sunday morning, the situation escalated when leaders from the Demow Labour Union, Demow Regional Students Union, Demow Regional Tai Ahom Students Union, and Asomiya Yuva Mancha temporarily shut down the pharmacy.

The student union leaders warned that the pharmacy would remain closed if the owner failed to pay Gogoi his outstanding wages promptly.

Medical awareness meeting and free medical camp held

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Dec 8: A medical awareness meeting and free medical camp was successfully organised at Lama Gaon Primary School under Margherita Co-District on Sunday under the Collective Responsibility Scheme of Oil Corporation of India (Assam Oil Division) Digoiboi, in collaboration with Indian Red Cross Society Margherita Branch.

The event commenced with an awareness meeting chaired by Dilip Das, the village pradhan of Lama Gaon. Pabitra Borgohain secretary of Indian Red Cross Society Margherita branch delivered the welcome speech and outlined the objectives of the camp.

The medical camp was attended by a team of senior doctors from Oil Corporation of India (Assam Oil Division) Digoiboi Hospital, including Dr Bhuti Ranjan Bhatnagar, Dr Sthalekha Karmakar, Dr Rahul Goswami, Dr Rituraj Kaushik, Dr Hashid German and Rotary Club doctor Dr Mirza Shaiki.

9th edition of Brahmaputra Valley Film Festival concludes in Guwahati

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 8: The curtains have gracefully fallen on the 9th Brahmaputra Valley Film Festival (BVFF), marking the end of four unforgettable days dedicated to the magic of storytelling, vibrant conversations, and a heartfelt celebration of cinema in all its forms, an official statement said on Sunday.

From December 5 to 8, BVFF brought together a diverse tapestry of narratives, emerging talents, and established voices, offering a platform where creativity thrived, connections blossomed, and meaningful exchanges unfolded.

The festival concluded with a dazzling closing ceremony, celebrating the remarkable talents of filmmakers and storytellers.

The Best Feature Film award was presented to Bibo Binanao (My Three Sisters) directed by Kenny Deori Basumatary. Binoranjan Oinam received the Best Director honor for his Manipuri feature Langdai Ama (The Juncture). Chanchisoa (Expectation) was recognised as Best Short Film. (Garo Film). Samiran Deka's Teens of 1942 was awarded Best Documentary. Lifetime Achievement Award was bestowed upon Pranjal Saikia, a luminary of Assamese cinema whose enduring contributions continue to inspire generations of filmmakers and cinephiles.

Kicking off the final day's lineup was an insightful masterclass by the acclaimed editor Nitin Baid, celebrated for his work on Masaan, Gully Boy, Raazi, and 83. His session on The Art of Storytelling through Editing in Films delved into the pivotal editor-director relationship, offering filmmakers valuable insights

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Veteran Assamese actor Pranjal Saikia awarded 'Lifetime Achievement Award'

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and practical tips to elevate their craft and create compelling narratives.

Continuing the series of engaging sessions, renowned cinematographer Shreya Dev Dube presented a thought-provoking discussion on Future Trends in Cinematography, offering a visionary perspective on how artistry and technology are shaping the visual language of cinema.

Adding to the day's engaging lineup, celebrated filmmaker Sandeep Modi, the writer-director of the Emmy-nominated thriller series Aarya and the

showrunner and director of The Night Manager, shared his expertise in a session titled The Art of Making Content Across Platforms. He explored the nuances of crafting stories that resonate with diverse audiences and mediums, offering aspiring filmmakers and content creators an in-depth look into the creative and technical aspects of storytelling.

Aspiring filmmakers and cinephiles from Northeast India embraced a golden opportunity to refine their skills and deepen their understanding of the art of filmmaking through a series of interactive workshops

and masterclasses. From the basics of filmmaking and scriptwriting to the intricacies of long-format storytelling, these sessions, led by esteemed industry professionals, fostered an inspiring environment for learning and exchange, nurturing the next generation of cinematic talent.

In a compelling panel discussion titled Theatre to OTT: The Assamese Perspective, Assamese actor and heartthrob Ravi Sarma and Akshata Narain delved into the evolving entertainment landscape, exploring the transition from traditional theatrical experiences to the dynamic world of OTT platforms. Adding a personal touch, filmmaker Sandeep Modi shared his inspiring journey of Making the First Film, offering invaluable insights for aspiring storytellers.

The day began with the timeless French classic The Umbrellas of Cherbourg, followed by the poignant Angamam. The cinematic lineup continued with a selection of compelling short films, each evoking deep emotions and thoughtful reflection. One of the standout moments, Village Rockstars 2 by Rima Das, touched the hearts of the audience with its sincere storytelling, while the closing feature, All We Imagine as Light by Payal Kapadia, left viewers deeply moved with its evocative narrative.

As the curtains fall on this year's festival, BVFF carries forward its promise to return for its next edition, bigger, bolder, and even more extraordinary. With its unwavering commitment to amplifying diverse voices and championing fresh talent, BVFF continues to shine as a beacon for cinephiles and storytellers.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

I've never dropped anyone I believed in.
-Marilyn Monroe

Importance of Fadnavis in BJP

The swearing-in of Devendra Fadnavis as Maharashtra Chief Minister for a third term underscores the man's importance to the Bharatiya Janata Party. But why is Fadnavis a greater pick than several others who could have staked claim for the top post? The answer must lie in the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was very pleased, Fadnavis got his due. In 2019, Fadnavis had agreed to play second fiddle to Eknath Shinde for the BJP's sake and here was Shinde refusing to let go till the last few hours left. It was Fadnavis' composure versus Shinde's suppressed impatience. Fadnavis had done a favour to the BJP, not to Eknath Shinde. Since then, Fadnavis was marked for renewed glory! Soon after Fadnavis was crowned Maharashtra Chief Minister, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was heard saying, "Narendra in Delhi, Devendra in Mumbai!" So, what separates Devendra Fadnavis from Shinde? Fadnavis is focused and there's a drive in him which has taken him places, very high places. At 22, he was a corporator in Nagpur. His "strategic genius" and "leadership", even at that young age, is a thing of lore. He reads politics like the astrologer the palm. Coming to a conclusion on what the future holds is his specialty! For, more often than not, Fadnavis' guesses come true. Fadnavis is a trained lawyer; armed with excellent debating skills and he took to politics like to the manor born. He won six consecutive elections from the Nagpur South West assembly constituency.

And because he guarantees victories in India's richest state, he is priceless for the BJP. As a schoolboy, he quit 'Indira Convent' because Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had put his father in jail. Fadnavis is a both present and future investment for the BJP. And the RSS has nothing against Fadnavis. If anything, Fadnavis is steeped in RSS lore. He also has the knack to recognize the 'enemy' quicker than most others. Like going for Maulana Sajjad Nomani's jugular even before 'vote jihad' slipped out of the Maulana's lips. This apart, Fadnavis has a "very approachable style of leadership", say people who have interacted with him. And he has a finger on the Maharashtra voter's pulse, knows their concerns and plays to their likes and dislikes. Fadnavis has dealt with Maratha reservation and other contentious issues with flair and without favour. The Nagpur-born politician is said to be the one who "initiated police reforms and who exposed the irrigation scam." In fact, like Modi, Fadnavis also comes with corruption-free credentials. So, every time 'Adani' is thrown Prime Minister Narendra Modi's way, there will always be Fadnavis to lift sagging spirits. Incorruptible, articulate, armed with both guts and guile, an irreconcilable foe, and confident like only somebody who has gone from being Chief Minister to Deputy Chief Minister and back to Chief Minister again! A role model for both Uddhav Thackeray and Eknath Shinde.

The BJP values Fadnavis for the glow of content he brings to the party right at its core: of good governance and the political victories he ensures when the party is down and out. Fadnavis' "resilience, adaptability and strategic insight" are all valued; as is also his "ability to adapt and willingness to begin all over again, again and again. Fadnavis gives BJP the hope that rebirth is not empty talk!

Value education: A path to responsible citizenship

The role of education has evolved significantly over the years, moving beyond the traditional aim of imparting academic knowledge to students. Today, there is an increasing need for education systems to address broader social, moral, and ethical goals, thereby nurturing responsible and compassionate citizens. Value education plays an indispensable role in this expanded mission, offering students a foundational understanding of principles like empathy, respect, integrity, and responsibility. In the context of modern society, where technological advancement and globalization continuously shift cultural landscapes, value education serves as a compass that guides young people towards becoming responsible citizens who can contribute positively to their communities. By incorporating value education into school curricula, societies can help shape individuals who are not only academically capable but also morally grounded, fostering a culture of mutual respect, empathy, and social responsibility.

Value education involves teaching students values and ethics that extend beyond academic disciplines. This form of education often includes lessons on kindness, honesty, respect for others, accountability, tolerance, and understanding. These values foster a sense of responsibility in students and lay the foundation for them to become empathetic and conscientious members of society. Unlike conventional academic subjects, value education seeks to instill these principles through real-life examples, discussions, reflections, and role-playing activities. This approach helps students internalize values, enabling them to act in alignment with ethical standards as they grow. Moreover, the integration of value education within the school curriculum ensures that students learn to respect diverse perspectives, an essential quality in increasingly multicultural societies.

A significant aspect of value education is its role in helping students develop emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Emotional intelligence, which encompasses empathy, self-regulation, and social skills, is a critical component of responsible citizenship. Students who can understand and manage their emotions are better equipped to make ethical decisions and build positive relationships with others. In a world where interpersonal skills are often overshadowed by academic achievements, value education reminds students of the importance of emotional and social well-being. By learning to identify and express their emotions constructively, students become more empathetic towards others, which in turn fosters a cooperative and inclusive atmosphere both within and outside the school environment.

In many societies, young people face considerable peer pressure and societal expectations that may lead them toward unethical choices. Value education serves as a preventive mechanism, equipping students with the resilience to handle these pressures constructively. For example, when faced with difficult choices, a student who has been taught the importance of honesty and integrity

through value education is more likely to act responsibly, even if it goes against the prevailing social norms. Furthermore, value education promotes critical thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze situations through an ethical lens. This reflective process empowers them to make informed and morally sound decisions, which is vital for responsible citizenship.

Another critical contribution of value education lies in its role in fostering inclusivity and respect for diversity. In multicultural societies, students interact with peers from various cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Value education teaches students to respect and appreciate these differences, helping to reduce prejudice and build a more inclusive community. Lessons on tolerance and acceptance help students understand the value of diversity and learn to collaborate effectively with people from different backgrounds. This mindset of inclusivity and respect for all individuals is essential for building harmonious communities and creating a society where everyone feels valued and respected. Moreover, when students appreciate cultural diversity, they are better prepared to navigate the complexities of a globalized world, making value education essential for nurturing responsible, global citizens.

Value education also has a profound impact on students' sense of civic responsibility. Responsible citizenship involves an understanding of one's rights and duties, as well as a commitment to upholding societal values. Through value education, students learn the significance of concepts such as justice, fairness, and social responsibility.

For example, by engaging in discussions about civic issues, environmental protection, or community service, students can develop a strong sense of duty towards their communities. This awareness is critical as it motivates students to participate actively in community affairs, whether by volunteering, engaging in activism, or simply being informed about societal issues. When young people are aware of their social obligations, they are more likely to contribute meaningfully to society and advocate for justice and fairness.

A robust value education program also helps to address issues such as bullying, discrimination, and violence within school environments. By fostering a culture of empathy and respect, value education reduces instances of harmful behavior among

students. When students understand the consequences of their actions on others, they are less likely to engage in behaviors that harm or alienate their peers. Furthermore, value education empowers students to speak out against injustices, creating an environment where everyone feels safe and respected. This positive atmosphere extends beyond the school, as students carry these values into their interactions within their families, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Consequently, value education contributes to the overall well-being of communities, promoting harmony and reducing societal conflicts.

Incorporating value education into the school curriculum also prepares students for the ethical challenges they may face in their professional lives. Many professions require individuals to make decisions that have significant ethical implications, such as medicine, law, journalism, and business. A solid foundation in value education equips students with a moral compass that guides them through these challenges, enabling them to make decisions that are not only beneficial to their careers but also to society. Ethical behaviour in professional settings builds trust and integrity, qualities that are essential for personal and professional success. By instilling these values early, schools play a vital role in developing professionals who are committed to ethical principles and capable of contributing positively to their fields.

Moreover, value education fosters a sense of environmental responsibility among students. In today's world, environmental degradation and climate change are pressing issues that demand collective action. Value education includes lessons on environmental ethics, emphasizing the importance of conserving natural resources and protecting the planet. When students are taught to respect the environment from an early age, they are more likely to adopt sustainable practices and advocate for environmental protection. This awareness is crucial for building a generation that recognizes its responsibility to the planet and is committed to creating a sustainable future. As responsible citizens, students who have received value education understand the importance of preserving the environment for future generations.

The benefits of value education extend to personal development, as well. By learning values such as self-discipline, perseverance, and responsibility, students build character traits that contribute to their overall well-being. For instance, value education encour-

ages students to take responsibility for their actions, fostering a sense of accountability that is essential for personal growth. Additionally, values like perseverance teach students to work hard and overcome challenges, equipping them with the resilience needed to succeed in life. As students grow into adulthood, these qualities help them navigate life's complexities, building a foundation for fulfilling and purposeful lives. Therefore, value education not only prepares students to be responsible citizens but also contributes to their personal happiness and fulfillment.

One of the challenges in implementing value education is the need for well-trained educators who can effectively teach these concepts. Unlike traditional subjects, value education requires teachers who can model the values they teach and create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. Educators play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of values, as they serve as role models and guides throughout the learning process. Schools must invest in training programs that equip teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to integrate value education into their lessons effectively. Additionally, value education should be a collaborative effort involving parents, communities, and educational institutions. When all stakeholders work together to reinforce these values, students receive a consistent message that emphasizes the importance of responsible citizenship.

The importance of value education cannot be overstated, especially in a world where social and ethical standards are constantly evolving. As students face new and complex societal issues, value education provides them with the tools to navigate these challenges with integrity and compassion. By prioritizing value education, schools can cultivate a generation of individuals who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded, socially responsible, and committed to contributing positively to their communities. This approach not only benefits individual students but also strengthens the social fabric, fostering a culture of respect, empathy, and shared responsibility.

In conclusion, value education is a vital component of the modern education system, offering a pathway to responsible citizenship that is grounded in ethical principles and social responsibility. By instilling values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility, value education prepares students to navigate the complexities of modern life and contribute meaningfully to society. In an increasingly interconnected and diverse world, the role of value education in shaping responsible citizens is more important than ever. As schools strive to equip students with the skills needed for the future, they must also prioritize the moral and ethical development of their students. Through value education, schools can nurture individuals who are not only successful in their careers but also dedicated to creating a better, more just, and compassionate world. (The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK and can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

is not just a politician for the masses, but a leader who understands the pulse of the people and strives to address their real needs. His leadership style is rooted in effective governance, his ability to deliver results, and his unyielding commitment to the state's development. And now, with the blessings of the people, the question on everyone's mind is: what can DevaBhau do next?

The expectations placed on Fadnavis are undoubtedly enormous. With his return to the helm of Maharashtra's government, there is renewed hope for balanced development across the state, particularly in regions like Vidarbha, which has long struggled with infrastructural deficits. Though significant progress has been made since 2014 in addressing these gaps — particularly in basic amenities like electricity, water, and roads — the work is far from complete. Vidarbha, despite the progress, continues to grapple with challenges. The people of this region, however, believe in Fadnavis' commitment to their development. Through initiatives like the JalShivarYojana, which successfully revived thousands of dried-up ponds, Fadnavis has proven that he is not merely a politician who promises, but one who delivers. The Samruddhi Expressway, which serves as a testament to his grand vision, will no doubt serve as a catalyst for further development, but the true test lies in replicating such initiatives in other parts of the state.

The state's development goals are not just about big-ticket projects; they are also about addressing the ground-level issues that affect ordinary people. One of the most pressing concerns for farmers in Maharashtra, especially in rural areas, is the inadequate price they receive for their produce due to poor infrastructure and lack of access to efficient markets. The hope is that Fadnavis, with his pragmatic approach, will focus on building better road networks that will connect rural areas with larger markets, ensuring that farmers can get fair prices for their crops. A strategic development of local markets and transportation networks will also ensure that farmers' goods reach cities without delays, boosting their income and benefiting the state's economy.

The expectations of DevendraFadnavis are not just confined to infrastructure or economic development; they also align with the vision of India's former President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. In his book Vision 2020, Dr. Kalam envisioned a scenario where rural India was empowered, where small-scale industries were established in villages, and where migration to cities was minimized. Fadnavis, with his forward-thinking approach, has the potential to bring this vision to life. By creating opportuni-

ties for the youth in rural areas and empowering women economically, he can help reverse the tide of urban migration and transform Maharashtra's villages into vibrant economic hubs.

Another issue that demands urgent attention is the welfare of women, particularly under the LadkiBahinYojana. Empowering women economically while ensuring their safety is critical to the state's future progress. Women are the backbone of society, and providing them with opportunities for growth will lead to broader societal changes. Ensuring that the state's women feel safe, valued, and empowered is a cornerstone of sustainable development. This will be a true test for Fadnavis — to ensure that his governance remains inclusive, and that the promise of a safer, more equitable Maharashtra is realized.

In the midst of these expectations, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of EknathShinde, the former chief minister, whose leadership laid the foundation for the Mahayuti's success. Shinde will be remembered as the people's chief minister, particularly for his commitment to prioritizing the welfare of marginalized communities. His exceptional work in healthcare, especially for the underprivileged, stands out as a model of governance that puts the common man first. His leadership ensured that development funds were utilized efficiently, benefiting those who needed it most.

The relationship between Fadnavis and Shinde is critical in the current political landscape of Maharashtra. Their collaborative leadership style, blending Fadnavis' strategic vision with Shinde's commitment to grassroots welfare, has the potential to take Maharashtra to new heights. But the challenge remains: the success of this alliance will depend on how well they balance the aspirations of urban and rural populations, how effectively they handle the demands of development, and how they continue to empower the people of Maharashtra, especially its marginalized and underdeveloped regions.

As DevendraFadnavis steps into his role as chief minister once again, Maharashtra watches with bated breath. With a mandate from the people and the support of his allies, he now has the opportunity to transform the state into a beacon of progress, inclusivity, and sustainability. The road ahead is fraught with challenges, but with the trust of the people and his own commitment to service, Fadnavis has the potential to make Maharashtra a model of governance for the entire nation. The people's expectations are high, and now, as DevaBhau, it is his turn to turn those expectations into reality. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Conspiracies against India on the soil of Bangladesh and Devendra Fadnavis: A leader with vision, and the hope for Maharashtra's future

By: Priyanka Saurabh

There is a growing wave of concern at the global level against the ongoing violence against Hindus in Bangladesh. This issue has been raised even in the British Parliament. Now in America too, preparations are being made to hold a big demonstration against it near the White House, the President's House. Despite this, the interim government of Mohammad Yunus in Bangladesh is not ready to give up its anti-India agenda under pressure from fundamentalists to China-Pakistan. Now the Yunus government has taken another step, which is going to give a big shock to India. The Yunus government has canceled an agreement related to mobile internet connectivity made with India during the tenure of Sheikh Hasina. Through this agreement, India was trying to increase the speed and coverage of the Internet in its Northeast states, but now this hope has been shattered. Amidst the attacks on ISKCON temples in Bangladesh, such reports are also coming out that the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI is engaged in preparing terrorists against India from among the Rohingya refugees present in Bangladesh.

Ethnic cleansing of Hindus is going on in Bangladesh. After 53 years, Pakistan is sending arms to Bangladesh. Meetings are also taking place between Khalida Zia and Pakistani officials. The same thing is happening in Bangladesh as first Babur did and then happened with Hindus in Kashmir. Actually, Pakistan is targeting India using Bangladesh. That too from three sides. The first victim of Pakistan is Bangladeshi Hindus, who are being tortured so much that every definition falls short. The second part is helping the Bangladeshi army, through which Pakistan wants to open another front against India, and the third is a boycott of Indian goods...so that India gets hurt economically. Bangladesh has called back its top diplomats in Kolkata (West Bengal) and Tripura (Agartala) for 'consultation.' At the same time, the photo of Bangladesh's founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has also been removed from the currency notes.

Mobile internet connectivity is not very good in many states of India's North-East region. For this reason, India had signed an agreement with Bangladesh during the government of Sheikh Hasina. Under this agreement, Bangladesh was to be used as a regional digital hub, in which 'bandwidth transit' facility was to be provided for data transmission in the North East states by establishing internet circuits on the Bangladeshi border. Bharti Airtel was to do this work in collaboration with Bangladeshi companies Summit Communications and Fiber at Home. This proposal was presented by these companies before the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, which got in-principle approval.

The Yunus government has now withdrawn the in-principle approval of this agreement. While issuing the order to cancel it, it has argued that Bangladesh will not get any economic benefit from this. However, this decision is not only anti-India. In fact, Mohammad Farid Khan, chairman of Summit Communications, a company associated with Airtel to create this transit link, also has ties with Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. He is the younger brother of Awami League MP Fariq Khan. This is also believed to be the reason behind the decision of the Yunus government.

In Bangladesh, a mob of extremists has once again targeted the ISKCON temple. Radharaman Das, Vice President of ISKCON Kolkata, said that a mob of extremists has attacked the ISKCON temple in Namhatta, Dhaka. He said that after attacking the Namhatta temple on Friday-Saturday night, extremist Muslims sprinkled oil on all the idols and set them on fire. The entire temple has been burnt. This temple is located in Dhaur village under the Turag police station of the Dhaka district. Attacks on people belonging to the Vaishnav sect are increasing. ISKCON is constantly informing the interim government of Bangladesh about these incidents, but the police administration is not stopping them.

Concern has also been raised in the US against the violence against Hindus in Bangladesh. Indian Americans have announced they will hold peaceful demonstrations against it near the White House in Washington and in Chicago in the next two days. This protest march will be organized by the Hindu Action Organization near the White House on Monday under the name 'Genocide of Hindus in Bangladesh,' while on Sunday it will be held in Chicago under the name 'Stop Genocide: Save the Lives of Hindus in Bangladesh.' Prominent Indian leaders of America will be present in these.

The Muhammad Yunus government, trapped under the pressure of fundamentalists on the soil of Bangladesh, has now given Pakistan the freedom to do as it pleases. Due to this, the Pakistani intelligence agency has become active there. According to a report, Pakistan is turning Rohingya refugees into terrorists in Bangladesh. These Rohingya terrorists are being prepared to attack India. 53 years ago, lakhs of Bangladeshis sacrificed their lives for freedom from the cruel rule of Pakistan. But those sacrifices have now been buried in the grave...and the Bangladeshis fundamentalists have started considering Pakistan as their leader.

Bangladeshis are shouting Pakistan's name. But if they had read a little history, they would have seen Afghanistan, where Pakistan interfered. They created the Taliban and destroyed Afghanistan. If Bangladesh still does not understand this conspiracy...then perhaps Bangladesh will be called another Afghanistan.

By: Dipak Kurmi

Maharashtra, a state that has long been a bellwether for political trends and governance in India, has witnessed a remarkable transformation in its political landscape. The latest developments in the state, particularly the resounding victory of the Mahayuti alliance in recent elections, have sparked a new wave of optimism and expectations. Among the key architects of this success is none other than DevendraFadnavis, a leader whose rise has been as meteoric as it has been impressive. With the BJP securing a staggering 132 seats and the Mahayuti alliance solidifying its dominance, the role of Fadnavis in this triumph cannot be overstated. It is a testament to his political acumen, leadership qualities, and unwavering commitment to the people of Maharashtra.

DevendraFadnavis, once a relatively unknown political figure, has come to epitomize the ideal blend of pragmatism, dedication, and vision in Indian politics. His journey from the humble beginnings of a corporator to the highest office in the state — first as the chief minister and later as the deputy chief minister — has been nothing short of extraordinary. His return as chief minister, under the banner of the Mahayuti alliance, has been met with widespread hope, as Maharashtra pins its expectations on his leadership to usher in a new era of growth and prosperity. One of the key initiatives that has been instrumental in securing the alliance's victory is the LadkiBahinYojana. This flagship initiative, which focused on empowering women and providing them with economic opportunities, resonated deeply with the electorate. The Yojana not only helped the Mahayuti win the election but also elevated Fadnavis to the status of a beloved leader. In a remarkable turn of events, people have started calling him "DevaBhau" — a term that signifies both reverence and affection. While "DevaBhau" can be interpreted as "DevendraBhai" (Devendra brother) in a general sense, the reverence attached to this title goes beyond the simple formality of addressing a political leader. Some even refer to him as a "divine elder brother," highlighting the profound respect they hold for him. It is a rare honor bestowed upon a leader, and it reflects the deep connection Fadnavis has fostered with the people of Maharashtra.

As a journalist and someone with long-standing experience in parliamentary politics, I have had the privilege of observing Fadnavis' growth from a close vantage point. I can say, with confidence, that leaders like him — straightforward, genuine, and dedicated to the common man — are rare to find in today's political arena. Fadnavis has consistently shown that he



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

What does the liver do?

By: Tim Newman

A person's liver is in the upper right section of the abdomen and sits below the diaphragm. It typically weighs around 3 pounds, but this can vary between people. The skin is the only organ heavier and larger than the liver.

The liver is roughly triangular and consists of two lobes: a larger right lobe and a smaller left lobe. The falciform ligament separates the lobes. This ligament is a band of tissue that keeps the liver anchored to the diaphragm.

A layer of fibrous tissue called Glisson's capsule covers the outside of the liver. The peritoneum, a membrane that forms the lining of the abdominal cavity, then covers this.

This helps hold the liver in place and protects it from physical damage.

Blood vessels

Unlike most organs, the liver has two major sources of blood. The portal vein brings in nutrient-rich blood from the digestive system, and the hepatic artery carries oxygenated blood from the heart.

The blood vessels divide into small capillaries, with each ending in a lobule. Lobules are the functional units of the liver and consist of millions of cells called hepatocytes.

Three hepatic veins remove blood from the liver.

Functions

The liver is a gland that has many functions in the body. It is difficult to give a precise number, but it may have more than 500 distinct roles.

The major functions of the liver include:

• **Bile production:** Bile helps the small intestine break down and absorb fats, cholesterol, and some vitamins. Bile consists of bile salts, cholesterol, bilirubin, electrolytes, and water.

• **Absorbing and metabolizing bilirubin:** The breakdown of hemoglobin forms bilirubin. The liver or bone marrow stores iron released from hemoglobin, which makes the next generation of blood cells.

• **Supporting blood clots:** Vitamin K is necessary to create coagulants that help clot the blood. Bile is essential for vitamin K absorption and forms in the liver. The liver must produce enough bile to make clotting factors.

• **Fat metabolism:** Bile breaks down fats and makes them easier to digest.

• **Metabolizing carbohydrates:** The liver stores carbohydrates. The body can break down stored carbohydrates in the liver, known as glycogen, into glucose. Glucose, or sugar, is released into the bloodstream to regulate blood sugar levels and for a quick burst of energy.

• **Vitamin and mineral storage:** The liver stores fat-soluble vitamins, known as vitamins A, D, E, K, and B12. It keeps significant amounts of these vitamins stored. The liver stores iron from hemoglobin in the form of ferritin, ready to make new red blood cells. The liver also stores and releases copper.

• **Helps metabolize proteins:** Bile helps break down proteins for digestion.

• **Filters the blood:** The liver filters and removes compounds from the body, including hormones, such as estrogen and aldosterone, and compounds from outside the body, including alcohol and other drugs.

• **Immunological function:** The liver is part of the mononuclear phagocyte system. Cells involved in immune activity, Kupffer cells, are found in high numbers in the liver. These cells destroy disease-causing viruses, bacteria, or other microorganisms that might enter the liver through the gut.

• **Production of albumin:** Albumin is the most common protein in blood serum. It transports fatty acids and steroid hormones to help support the correct pressure and prevent the leaking of blood vessels.

• **Synthesis of angiotensinogen:** This hormone raises blood pressure by narrowing the blood vessels when alerted by production of an enzyme called renin in the kidneys.

Regeneration

Because of the importance of the liver and its functions, evolution has ensured that it can regrow rapidly as long as it is kept healthy. All vertebrates, from fish to humans, have the ability to regrow the liver.

The liver is the only visceral organ that can regenerate. It can regenerate completely, as long as a minimum of about 25% of the tissue remains. The liver can regrow to its previous size and ability without any loss of function during the growth process.

Removal of two-thirds of the liver in mice causes the remaining liver tissue to regrow to its original size and restore function within 7–10 days. In humans, the process takes slightly longer, but regeneration can still occur

in 8–15 days. Researchers suggest surgical removal of the right or left lobe of the liver results in complete restoration of the liver mass after 3 months, while maximum cellular activity happens 7 to 10 days after the procedure.

Over the following few weeks, the new liver tissue becomes indistinguishable from the original tissue.

A number of compounds are responsible for liver regeneration, including growth factors and cytokines. Some of the most important compounds in the process appear to be but are not limited to:

- Hepatocyte growth factor
- Insulin
- Transforming growth factor-alpha
- Epidermal growth factor
- Interleukin-6
- Norepinephrine

Diseases

An organ as complex as the liver can experience a range of problems. A healthy liver functions very efficiently. However, the consequences can be dangerous or even fatal in a diseased or malfunctioning liver.

Examples of liver disease include:

• **Fascioliasis:** The parasitic invasion of a worm, known as a liver fluke, causes this condition. The liver fluke can lie dormant in the liver for months or even years. Fascioliasis is a tropical disease.

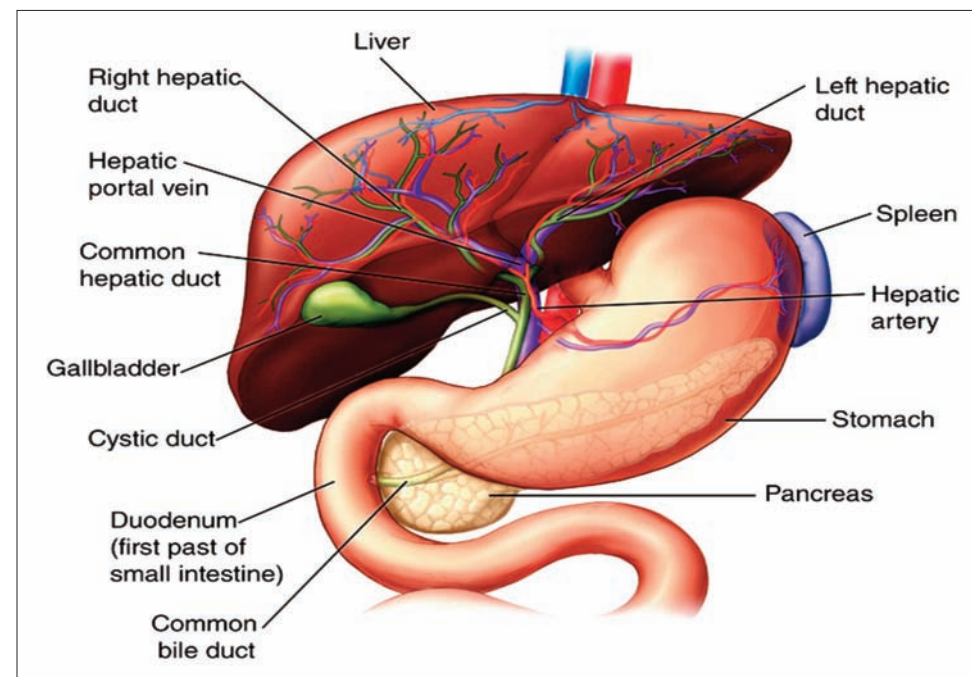
• **Cirrhosis:** This sees scar tissue replace liver cells in a process known as fibrosis. Toxins, alcohol, and hepatitis are some of the many factors that cause this condition. Eventually, fibrosis can lead to liver failure because the functionality of liver cells becomes destroyed.

• **Hepatitis:** Hepatitis is the name given to a general infection of the liver, and viruses, toxins, or an autoimmune response can cause it. An inflamed liver characterizes this condition. In many cases, the liver can heal itself, but liver failure can occur in serious cases.

• **Alcoholic liver disease:** Drinking too much alcohol over long periods can cause liver damage.

• **Primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC):** PSC is a serious inflammatory disease of the bile ducts that results in their destruction. There is currently no cure, and the cause is unknown.

• **Fatty liver disease:** This usually occurs alongside obesity or the harmful use of alco-



hol. In fatty liver disease, vacuoles of fat build up in the liver cells. Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease occurs when alcohol use is not the cause.

• **Gilbert's syndrome:** This is a genetic disorder affecting 4–16% of the population. In Gilbert's syndrome, the body does not fully break down bilirubin. Mild jaundice can occur, but the disorder is harmless.

• **Liver cancer:** The most common types of liver cancer are hepatocellular carcinoma and cholangiocarcinoma. The leading causes are alcohol and hepatitis. It is the sixth most common form of cancer globally and the third most frequent cause of cancer death around the world.

Health

Below are some recommendations from the American Liver Foundation to help keep the liver working as it should:

• **Diet:** As the liver is responsible for digesting fats, consuming too many can overwork the organ and disturb it from other tasks. This also has links to fatty liver disease.

• **Moderate alcohol ingestion:** Avoid consuming more than two drinks at a time. Drinking too much alcohol causes cirrhosis of the liver over time.

• **Avoiding illicit substances:** Illicit substances can overload the liver with toxins. Avoiding these substances can allow the liver to perform its necessary functions without im-

pediment.

• **Caution when mixing medications:** Some prescription drugs and natural remedies can interact negatively. Mixing drugs with alcohol puts significant pressure on the liver.

• **Protection against airborne chemicals:** Airborne chemicals can cause liver damage. When painting or using strong cleaning or gardening chemicals, the area should be well ventilated, and people should wear a mask.

• **Travel and vaccinations:** Vaccination is essential if a person travels to an area where hepatitis A or B might be a concern. Malaria grows and multiplies in the liver, and yellow fever can lead to liver failure.

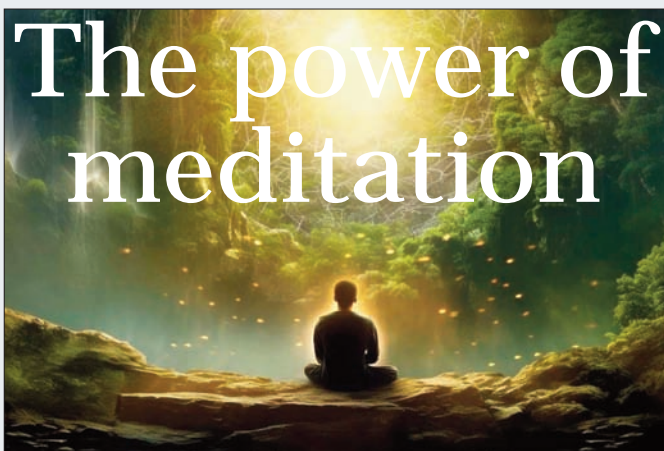
• **Safe sex:** There is no vaccination for hepatitis C. Safe sex practices can help prevent the disease.

• **Avoid exposure to blood and germs:** Receive medical attention if exposed to the blood of another person.

Despite its ability to regenerate, the liver depends on being healthy to do so. Lifestyle choices and dietary measures, the liver can help protect the liver in most cases.

Summary

The liver is the largest solid organ in the human body. It is part of the digestive system and plays an essential role in removing toxins from the blood, metabolizing nutrients, and immune function. (Courtesy: *Medical News Today*)



By: Satyabrata Borah

Meditation is a simple practice that can change our lives in many ways. It is about sitting in a quiet place and calming the mind. In today's busy world, we often feel overwhelmed by work, school, or other problems. Our minds are always filled with thoughts, and sometimes it feels like there is no escape. But meditation offers a way to find peace and quiet. It is like taking a break from the noise and stress of everyday life.

Meditation helps to reduce stress. Every day we deal with many situations that make us feel tense. Whether it is pressure from school, work, or personal problems, stress builds up over time. If we do not find a way to deal with it, it can harm our health. Meditation teaches us how to let go of these stressful thoughts. When we sit quietly and focus on our breathing or a positive thought, the mind becomes clear. We feel relaxed, and the stress starts to fade away. Over time, this helps to make us more peaceful in our daily lives.

Another benefit of meditation is that it improves our focus. In today's world, there are many distractions. We often find it hard to concentrate on one thing for long. Our minds jump from one thought to another. This can make it difficult to complete tasks or stay focused on what we are doing. Meditation helps to train the mind to stay in the present moment. When we practice meditation regularly, we learn to focus on one thing at a time. This can help in many areas of life, whether it is studying, working, or even spending time with loved ones.

Meditation is also good for our health. Many people who meditate regularly find that their physical health improves. One reason is that meditation helps to lower blood pressure. When we meditate, our breathing slows down, and our heart rate becomes steady. This can lead to better heart health over time. Meditation also improves sleep. Many people struggle with sleepless nights because their minds are full of worries. By calming the mind before bed, meditation helps us fall asleep more easily and enjoy deeper, more restful sleep.

In addition to physical health, meditation can also improve mental health. It helps to make us feel happier and more positive. When we meditate, we become more aware of our thoughts and feelings. This allows us to understand and manage our emotions better. Instead of reacting to negative situations with anger or frustration, meditation teaches us to respond calmly. This emotional balance helps us feel more in control of our lives.

Meditation is a practice that anyone can do. It does not require any special skills or equipment. All it takes is a few minutes each day. You can meditate in the morning to start your day with peace and focus. You can also meditate at night to relax before going to bed. Some people like to meditate outdoors in nature, while others prefer a quiet room at home. The key is to find a comfortable place where you can sit quietly and focus on your breath or a peaceful thought. Many people around the world have been practicing meditation for thousands of years. It has been used in different cultures and religions as a way to connect with inner peace and wisdom. In recent years, more people have started to see the benefits of meditation in everyday life. Even scientists have studied it and found that meditation has many positive effects on the brain and body.

In schools, some teachers are now teaching students how to meditate to help them stay focused and calm. In workplaces, meditation is used to reduce stress and increase productivity. It is a practice that can benefit people of all ages, from children to the elderly. It is never too late or too early to start meditating.

In conclusion, meditation is a powerful tool that can bring peace, focus, and better health into our lives. It is a simple practice, yet its effects can be life-changing. By taking just a few minutes each day to meditate, we can improve our well-being, manage stress, and find a deeper sense of happiness. Whether you are new to meditation or have been practicing for a long time, it is a skill that can continue to benefit you throughout your life.

Covid-19 lockdowns may have sped up age-related effects on the brain

By: James Goodwin

A recent study reported the somewhat alarming observation that the social disruptions of Covid-19 lockdowns caused significant changes in teenagers' brains.

Using MRI data, researchers at the University of Washington in Seattle showed that the usual, age-related thinning of the cortex – the folded surface – of the adolescent brain accelerated after the lockdowns and the effect was greater in the female brain than the male. What are we to make of these findings?

Science shows the critical importance of adolescence for the brain. The notoriously different behaviour of teenagers is due to a large degree to the immaturity of their brain cortex. During adolescence, substantial changes take place to enable the brain to reach maturity. One of these very important changes is the thinning of the cortex.

A breakthrough paper in 2022 delivered the first evidence that, in adolescence, there is a critical period of brain "plasticity" (malleability) in the frontal brain region – the area of the brain responsible for thinking, decision-making, short-term memory and control of social behaviour.

Given the evidence of this sensitivity of brain devel-

opment in adolescence, is it possible that the pandemic lockdowns really did accelerate harmful brain ageing in teenagers? And how strong is the evidence that it was due to the lockdowns and not something else?

To answer the first question, we have to realise that ageing and development are two sides of the same coin. They are inextricably linked. On the one hand, biological ageing is the progressive decline in the function of the body's cells, tissues and systems. On the other, development is the process by which we reach maturity.

Adverse conditions at critical periods of our life, especially adolescence, are very likely to influence our ageing trajectory. It is therefore plausible that the "accelerated maturation" of the teenage brain cortex is an age-related change that will affect the rate of brain ageing throughout life.

So it seems there is an unpalatable and much more serious conclusion: the reported accelerated maturation – though serious enough – is not a one-off detriment. It may well set a trajectory of adverse brain ageing way beyond adolescence.

Now to the second question: the role, if any, of the lockdowns. One of the central pillars of brain health is "social cognition": the capacity of the brain to interact socially with others. It has been embedded in our brains for 1.5 million years. It is not an optional add-on. It is

fundamentally important. Interfere with it and potentially devastating health consequences result, particularly in adolescents who depend on social interaction for normal cognitive development.

At the same time, adolescence is also a period of the emergence of many neuropsychiatric disorders, including anxiety and depression, with younger females at a higher risk of developing anxiety and mood disorders than males.

Devastating consequences

The socially restrictive lockdown measures appear to have had a substantial negative effect on the mental health of teenagers, especially girls, and the new study provides a potential underlying cause.

There is little doubt that the pandemic lockdowns resulted in devastating health consequences for many people. To the litany of evidence, we may now add a particularly grim finding – that the developmental brain biology of our precious teenage population has been damaged by these measures.

But perhaps the main message is that the wider effects of single-issue health policies should be considered more carefully. In the case of the known damaging effects of social isolation and loneliness on brain health, it's not as if the evidence wasn't there. (Courtesy: *Scroll.in*)

How did the human brain evolve to be so large? The answer may be in our guts

By: Rohini Krishnamurthy

Our gut microbes may hold the key to understanding the evolution of the human brain. Researchers have proposed that these tiny organisms could have provided the essential energy boost that allowed our brains to grow to such extraordinary sizes. With the largest relative brain size of all primates, humans spend more total energy than expected based on their body size, the study published in the journal *Microbial Genomics* noted.

"Variation in the gut microbiota represents an unexplored mechanism through which primate metabolism could facilitate different brain energetic requirements," the researchers wrote in their study.

Gut microbes use fibre and amino acids to produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFA), acetate, butyrate and propionate, all of which serve as energy sources for their human hosts. The energy is produced through metabolic processes such as appetite and satiety, carbohydrate conversion to fatty acids, cholesterol and triglyceride production and glucose-insulin metabolism. SCFAs also interact with host metabolic processes, increasing glucose production to meet the high energy demands of large brains. The energy could also have an impact on other bodily functions like growth, maintenance and fat deposition.

Another role played by SCFAs is facilitating communication between the gut and brain, making them an important target for understanding brain evolution. To learn more, the researchers implanted gut microbes from two large-brained primate species (humans and squirrel monkeys) and one small-brained primate (macaque) into mice. The experiment revealed that mice with gut microbes from large-sized brains produced and used more energy, while those from the small-brain species

stored more energy as fat. "We know the community of microbes living in the large intestine can produce compounds that affect aspects of human biology - for example, causing changes to metabolism that can lead to insulin resistance and weight gain," first author of the paper Katherine Amato, associate professor of anthropology at Northwestern University, said in a statement.

The researchers also found that mice with microbes from humans and squirrel monkeys exhibited similar biological characteristics, which could be driven by their shared trait of large brains.

The two larger-brained primate species are not close evolutionary relatives of one another. But they share two common features — they exhibit rapid brain growth after birth and have a relatively large brain for their body size. This means the two species require more energy to support the brain across the lifecycle.

Larger-brained primates tend to have higher blood glucose levels and lower body fat. The scientists found that mice given gut microbes from large-brained mammals exhibited reduced growth and body fat, suggesting that gut microbes may influence energy allocation, diverting resources away from body growth and fat storage toward the brain.

However, humans differ from other large-brained primates. While they exhibit increased glucose levels for brain energy, they also have higher body fat. While the former provides energy to the brain, the extra body fat could serve as a backup energy source for the brain, especially during periods of low food availability or increased energy demand.

Although the mice with human gut microbes did not show an increase in body fat typical of humans, the researchers speculate that this could be because of the restricted energy budgets of mice compared to humans. (Courtesy: *Down to Earth*)

Lethal Smog: How pollution surge fuels stroke cases

By: Dr. Amit Shrivastav

Air pollution has long been recognized as a significant contributor to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. However, growing evidence now highlights its alarming connection to stroke, one of the leading causes of death and disability worldwide. The recent surge in pollution levels across North India has underscored this link, with deteriorating air quality posing severe risks to public health, including an increased incidence of strokes.

How Pollution Contributes to Stroke
Stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted due to a clot or bleeding, leading to brain cell damage. While lifestyle factors like poor diet and sedentary habits are well-established stroke risk factors, air pollution has emerged as a silent yet potent contributor.

Fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and other pollutants can infiltrate the bloodstream, causing inflammation and oxidative stress. These processes damage blood vessels, accelerate atherosclerosis (narrowing of arteries), and raise blood pressure, all of which heighten the risk of ischemic and haemorrhagic strokes. Studies suggest that even short-term exposure to high pollution levels can trigger strokes in vulnerable individuals, while prolonged exposure significantly increases the lifetime risk.

The Situation in North India

North India, particularly during the winter months, experiences hazardous pollution levels due to a combination of factors such as stubble burning, vehicular emissions, and industrial discharge. Cities like New Delhi and its surrounding regions frequently record

air quality indices (AQIs) in the "severe" category.

This toxic air is not only affecting the lungs but is also contributing to a marked rise in stroke cases. Neurology departments across hospitals in North India report a surge in stroke-related admissions during high pollution periods. Patients with pre-existing conditions, such as hypertension or diabetes, are particularly susceptible to pollution-induced strokes.

Vulnerable Groups and Immediate Impact

Children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing cardiovascular conditions are most vulnerable to the effects of pollution. Pregnant women exposed to high pollution levels may also face increased risks of complications that could affect both maternal and foetal health, including the likelihood of strokes.

In urban areas with poor air quality, people are often unknowingly inhaling pollutants that compromise their cardiovascular systems over time. Short-term spikes in pollution levels, such as during festive seasons or crop residue burning, can act as immediate triggers for strokes, leading to emergency situations in hospitals.

Mitigating the Risks

Tackling the pollution-stroke connection requires both individual and collective action. At a policy level, stricter regulations on emissions, better public transport systems, and promoting cleaner energy sources are critical. On an individual level, people can minimize exposure by wearing masks, using air purifiers, and avoiding outdoor activities during high-pollution days. (The author is the Director and Head of Department, Neurology, Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida)

- 'NOT OUR FIGHT' -

US should stay out of fighting in Syria as oppn forces gain ground: Trump

WASHINGTON, Dec 8: President-elect Donald Trump said on Saturday that the US military should stay out of the escalating conflict in Syria as a shock opposition offensive closes in on the capital, declaring in a social media post, "THIS IS NOT OUR FIGHT."

With world leaders watching the rapid rebel advance against Syria's Russian-and Iranian-backed president, Bashar Assad, President Joe Biden's national security adviser separately stressed that the Biden administration had no intention of intervening.

"The United States is not going to... militarily dive into the middle of a Syrian civil war," Jake Sullivan told an audience in California.

He said the US would keep acting as necessary to keep the Islamic State — a violently anti-Western extremist group not known to be involved in the offensive but with sleeper cells in Syria's deserts — from exploiting openings presented by the fighting.

Insurgents' stunning march across Syria sped faster Saturday, reaching the gates of Damascus and government forces abandoning the central city of Homs. The government was forced to deny rumours that Assad had fled the country.

Trump's comments on the dramatic rebel push were his first since Syrian rebels launched their advance late last month. They came while he was in Paris for the



reopening of the Notre Dame cathedral.

In his post, Trump said Assad did not deserve US support to stay in power.

Assad's government has been propped up by the Russian and Iranian military, along with Hezbollah and other Iranian-allied militias, in a now 13-year-old war against opposition groups seeking his overthrow. The war, which began as a mostly peaceful uprising in 2011 against the Assad family's rule, has killed a half-million people, fractured Syria and drawn in a more than a half-dozen foreign militaries and militias.

The insurgents are led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which the US has designated as a terrorist group and says has links to al-Qaida, although the group has since broken ties with al-Qaida.

The insurgents have met little

resistance so far from the Syrian army, the Russian and Iranian militaries or allied militias in the country.

The Biden administration says Syrian opposition forces' capture of government-held cities demonstrates just how diminished those countries are by wars in Ukraine, Gaza and Lebanon.

"Assad's backers — Iran, Russia and Hezbollah — have all been weakened and distracted," Sullivan said on Saturday at an annual gathering of national security officials, defence companies and lawmakers at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley.

"None of them are prepared to provide the kind of support to Assad that they provided in the past," he later added.

The US has about 900 troops in Syria, including US forces working with Kurdish allies in the op-

position-held northeast to prevent any resurgence of the Islamic State group.

Gen. Bryan Fenton, head of US Special Operations Command, said he would not want to speculate on how the upheaval in Syria would affect the US military's footprint in the country. "It's still too early to tell," he said.

What would not change is the focus on disrupting IS operations in Syria and protecting US troops, Fenton said during a panel at the Reagan event.

Syrian opposition activists and regional officials have been watching closely for any indication from the incoming Trump administration, in particular on how the US would respond to the rebel advances against Assad.

Robert Wilkie, Trump's defence transition chief and a former secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, said during the same panel that the collapse of the "murderous Assad regime" would be a major blow to Iran's power.

The United Nations' special envoy for Syria called Saturday for urgent talks in Geneva to ensure an "orderly political transition" in Syria.

In his post, Trump said Russia "is so tied up in Ukraine" that it "seems incapable of stopping this literal march through Syria, a country they have protected for years". He said rebels could possibly force Assad from power.

The president-elect condemned

the overall US handling of the war but said the routing of Assad and Russian forces might be for the best.

"Syria is a mess, but is not our friend. THE UNITED STATES SHOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. THIS IS NOT OUR FIGHT. LET IT PLAY OUT. DO NOT GET INVOLVED!" he wrote in Saturday's post.

An influential Syrian opposition activist in Washington, Mouaz Moustafa, interrupted a briefing to reporters to read Trump's post and appeared to choke up. He said Trump's declaration that the US should stay out of the fight was the best outcome that the the Syrians aligned against Assad could hope for.

Rebels have been freeing political detainees of the Assad government from prisons as they advance across Syria, taking cities. Moustafa pledged to reporters Saturday that opposition forces would be alert for any US detainees among them and do their utmost to protect them.

Moustafa said that includes Austin Tice, an American journalist missing for more than a decade and suspected to be held by Assad.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham renounced al-Qaida in 2016 and has worked to rebrand itself, including cracking down on some Islamic extremist groups and fighters in its territory and portraying itself as a protector of Christians and other religious minorities. (AP)

Imran Khan's party to launch more protests, says Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CM

PESHAWAR, Dec 8: Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Ali Amin Gandapur, the firebrand leader of Imran Khan's party, has warned of launching more protests against the federal government to secure the release of the jailed former premier.

"We will continue launching attacks like the battle of Panipat. We will conquer if demands are not met," Gandapur told reporters on Saturday, referring to a historic battle in the subcontinent. "We have launched just five attacks and will continue to launch the rest," he said while referring to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party's march on November 24 in Islamabad to demand the release of Khan.

Khan's party launched a protest on November 24 after he issued a "final call", demanding the restoration of his party's electoral mandate, the release of detained party members, and the reversal of the 26th Amendment which he said had strengthened a

"dictatorial regime". During the "do-or-die" protest in Islamabad, PTI leadership, including Gandapur and Khan's wife Bushra Bibi, vanished from the scene when the law enforcers launched an operation to clear Islamabad's Red Zone of protesters on the night between November 26-27. Gandapur's statement came two days after Khan Friday warned the government of launching a "civil disobedience" movement if his demands, including the judicial probe into the crackdown on party supporters, were not met. Gandapur accused the government of killing his party's supporters after imposing Section 245. "Twelve of our supporters have been killed while 107 others are still missing." He expressed concerns about his party's missing supporters.

The Chief Minister said he saw the role of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League N (PML-N) in the crackdown against PTI supporters last month. (PTI)

Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser optimistic about resolving standoff in ties with India

DHAKA, Dec 8: Bangladesh and India will be able to overcome the stalemate in the relationship witnessed in recent months, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain said here on Sunday.

His comments came ahead of Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Bangladesh on Monday during which he is likely to raise with Dhaka India's concerns over attacks on Hindus after a massive uprising ended deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule in August.

This will be the first visit to be made by a senior Indian government official to Bangladesh since the interim government came to power on August 8.

"We expect that we will be able to overcome this impasse. Establishing mutual communication and meeting each other is very important to overcome any such stalemate," Hossain told a seminar titled "SAARC - People of South Asia Crave" at the National Press Club.

"I hope they (foreign secretaries) will have a

fruitful discussion," he said. He noted that it is important to acknowledge that there is a problem if they want to solve any problem.

Hossain, a career diplomat, said it is also important to note that the relations between Bangladesh and India witnessed changes after August 5, and both sides need to try and take forward the relations and accept this changed reality.

The downturn that the two countries witnessed over the last few months in terms of bilateral business activities affected both sides, he said.

He also referred to the impacts on businesses in Kolkata and West Bengal.

Bangladesh's foreign office spokesperson Mohammad Rafiqul Alam said efforts were made to keep all the elements of the bilateral relations on the agenda during the Foreign Office Consultation with India. He described trade, border management, connectivity, and water issues as the key areas expected to be discussed.

The close ties between India and Bangladesh

South Korean prosecutors detain ex-defence chief over martial law imposition

SEOUL, Dec 8: South Korean prosecutors on Sunday detained a former defence minister who allegedly recommended last week's brief but stunning martial law imposition to President Yoon Suk Yeol, making him the first figure detained over the case.

The development came a day after Yoon avoided an opposition-led bid to impeach him in parliament, with most ruling party lawmakers boycotting a floor vote to prevent the two-thirds majority needed to suspend his presidential powers. The main opposition Democratic Party said it will prepare a new impeachment motion against Yoon.

On Sunday, ex-Defence Minister Kim Yong Hyun was taken into custody at a Seoul detention facility after undergoing an investigation by prosecutors, a law enforcement official said, requesting anonymity in line with privacy rules.

The official gave no further details. But South Korean media reported that Kim voluntarily appeared at a Seoul prosecutors' office, where he had his mobile phone confiscated and was detained. The reports said police searched Kim's former office and residence on Sunday.

Repeated calls to Seoul prosecutors' offices and police agency were unanswered.

Senior prosecutor Park Se-hyun said in a televised statement Sunday that authorities launched a 62-member special investigation team on the martial law case. Park, who will head the team, said the probe would "leave no suspicions".

Yoon accepted Kim's resignation offer on Thursday after opposition parties submitted a separate impeachment motion against him.

Kim is a central figure in Yoon's martial law enforcement, which led to special forces troops encircling the National Assembly building and army helicopters hovering over it. The military withdrew after the parliament unanimously voted to overturn Yoon's decree, forcing his Cabinet to lift it before daybreak Wednesday.

In Kim's impeachment motion document, the Democratic Party and other opposition parties accused him of proposing martial law to Yoon. Vice Defence Minister Kim Seon Ho told parliament that Kim Yong Hyun ordered the deployment of troops to the National Assembly.

The Democratic Party called Yoon's martial law imposition "unconstitutional, illegal rebellion or a coup". It has filed complaints with police against at least nine people, including Yoon and Kim, over the alleged rebellion.

In a statement Wednesday, Kim said that "all troops who performed duties related to martial law were acting on my instructions, and all responsibility lies with me".

Prosecutor General Shim Woo

Jung told reporters on Thursday the prosecution plans to investigate the rebellion charges against Yoon following complaints. While the president mostly has immunity from prosecution while in office, that does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason.

The Defence Ministry said it has suspended three top military commanders over their alleged involvement in the martial law imposition. They were among those facing the opposition-raised rebellion allegations.

On Saturday, Yoon issued an apology over the martial law decree, saying he won't shirk legal or political responsibility for the declaration. He said he would leave it to his party to chart a course through the country's political turmoil, "including matters related to my term in office".

Since taking office in 2022 for a single five-year term, 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 declaration of martial law was the first of its kind in more than 40 years in South Korea. The turmoil has sparked alarm among key diplomatic partners like the US and Japan.

The scrapping of Yoon's impeachment motion is expected to intensify protests calling for his 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 the conservative ruling party, but it is determined to oppose Yoon's impeachment apparently because it fears losing the presidency to liberals.

Ruling People Power Party leader Han Dong-hun said Sunday the PPP will work with the government to determine Yoon's early and orderly exit from office in a way that minimises confusion, but he didn't say when that would happen. He also claimed Yoon will not be involved in state affairs, including foreign policy.

Yoon's presidential office didn't immediately respond. The Democratic Party criticised Han Dong-hun's comments, saying that the exclusion of an incumbent president from state affairs isn't supported by the constitution. The party said authorities should immediately arrest Yoon and all others implicated in the case. The presidential office said Sunday that Yoon accepted the resignation offer by Safety Minister Lee Sang-min, who has also faced an opposition-led impeachment motion over his alleged role in the martial law enforcement. (AP)

US announces nearly USD 1 billion more in longer-term weapons support for Ukraine



SIMI VALLEY, Dec 8: The United States will provide nearly USD 1 billion more in longer-term weapons support to Ukraine, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Saturday as the Biden administration rushes to spend all the congressionally approved money it has left to bolster Kyiv before President-elect Donald Trump takes office next month.

The latest package will include more drones and munitions for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, that the US has provided. While these weapons are critically needed now, they will be funded through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which pays for longer-term systems to be put on contract.

The weapon systems purchased are often intended to support Ukraine's future military capabilities, not make an immediate difference on the battlefield.

The USD 988 million package is on top of an additional USD 725 million in US military assistance, including counter-drone systems and HIMARS munitions, announced Monday that would be drawn from the Pentagon's stockpiles to more quickly get to the front lines.

The US has provided Ukraine with more than USD 62 billion in military aid since Russia's invasion in February 2022.

"The baton will soon be passed," Austin said. "Others will decide the course ahead. And I hope that they will build on the strength that we have forged over the past four years."

Ukraine is facing an intensified onslaught by Russia, which is now using thousands of North Korean troops to augment its fight to take back the Kursk region. Moscow also has launched an intermediate-range ballistic missile and regularly strikes Kyiv's civilian infrastructure.

With questions about whether Trump will maintain military support to Ukraine, the Biden administration has been trying to spend every dollar remaining from a massive foreign aid bill passed earlier this year to put Ukraine in the strongest position possible.

"This administration has made its choice. So has a bipartisan coalition in Congress. The next administration must make its own choice," Austin said in a speech at an annual gathering of national security officials, defence firms and lawmakers at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California.

Trump had a hastily arranged meeting Saturday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and France's Emmanuel Macron while in Paris for the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral. Macron and other European leaders are trying to persuade Trump to maintain support for Ukraine.

Trump, a longtime admirer of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has criticised US aid for Ukraine and called for bringing a quick end to the war, raising concerns in Ukraine about what terms may be laid out for any future negotiations.

Austin said he was "confident that President Reagan would have stood on the side of Ukraine, American security and human freedom".

It was one of Austin's last major speeches as President Joe Biden's defence secretary and a cap to his more than 41 years serving as a soldier and general.

Under Austin's watch, the Pentagon in 2022 launched a regular meeting that now counts more than 50 countries to figure out how to get the tens of millions of rounds of ammunition and billions of dollars in advanced weaponry to Ukraine. Without that flow of support, it's possible the country would have fallen to Russia after it invaded. "Together, we have helped Ukraine survive an all-out assault by the largest military in Europe," Austin said.

Austin and Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell, the longtime Republican leader, were honored at the conference for their lifetime of service, and they used the opportunity to press for the US to continue to build and support its alliances, a sharp contrast to Trump's "America First" policy.

Austin called the Ukraine Defence Contact Group "the most consequential global coalition since the time of President George H.W. Bush and Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait", showing that "America and our friends have become the arsenal of Ukrainian democracy".

Before Saturday's announcement, there was roughly USD 8 billion left to use to pull existing weapons out of US stockpiles and to put additional weapons on contract to help Ukraine.

"We're not going to stop Putin by telling Ukraine we aren't going to give you anything more," Rep. Adam Smith of Washington state, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, said at a panel at the Reagan National Defense Forum. (AP)

Madagascar boat tragedy survivors back in Somalia

MOGADISHU (SOMALIA), Dec 8: Nearly 50 survivors of a migrant boat tragedy last month that left 25 people dead in the Indian Ocean off Madagascar arrived back in Somalia on Saturday and were received by government officials.

The survivors aged 17 to 50 wore outfits made of fabric with the Somali national flag colours as they disembarked from a plane in the capital, Mogadishu, visibly relieved to return to safety.

Many young Somalis embark every year on dangerous journeys in search of better opportunities abroad. The UN agency has previously raised concerns over the rise in irregular migration from Horn of Africa countries as people flee from conflict and drought.

The survivors told The Associated Press that they were stranded in the ocean for 13 days after their boat's engines failed.

Ahmed Hussein, who was travelling with his now-deceased cousin, said they were heading to Europe hoping for a better life. Two vessels carrying the migrants departed Somalia early last month.

"We were split into two small boats. The engine broke down, and we drifted at sea for 13 days with no functioning engine. We had no food or water, and the (few) dates we had ran out during those 13 days. We survived by catching some fish," he said.

Officials in Madagascar and Somalia had earlier said the boats capsized but offered no further explanation. The authorities had also put the number of survivors at 48 but only 47 arrived in Somalia and the whereabouts of one survivor remained unclear as officials who received the 47 did not comment. (AP)

2 Pearl Harbour survivors, ages 104 and 102, return to Hawaii to honour those killed in 1941 attack

PEARL HARBOUR (HAWAII), Dec 8: Ira "Ike" Schab, a 104-year-old Pearl Harbour attack survivor, spent six weeks in physical therapy to build the strength to stand and salute during a remembrance ceremony honouring those killed in the Japanese bombing that thrust the US into World War II some 83 years ago.

On Saturday, Schab gingerly rose from his wheelchair and raised his right hand, returning a salute delivered by sailors standing on a destroyer and a submarine passing by in the harbour.

"He's been working hard because this is his goal," said his daughter, Kimberlee Heinrichs, who travelled to Hawaii with Schab from their Beaverton, Oregon, home so they could attend the ceremony. "He wanted to be able to stand for that."

Schab is one of only two servicemen who lived through the attack who made it to an annual remembrance ceremony hosted by the US Navy and National Park Service on a grass field overlooking the harbour.

A third survivor had been planning to join them but had to cancel because of health issues.



The December 7, 1941 bombing killed more than 2,300 US service

men. Nearly half, or 1,177, were sailors and Marines on board the USS Arizona, which sank during the battle. The remains of more than 900 Arizona crew members are still entombed on the submerged vessel.

Dozens of survivors once joined the event but their attendance has declined as survivors have aged. Today there are only 16 still living, according to a list maintained by Kathleen Farley, the California state chair of the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbour Survivors.

Military historian J. Michael Wenger has estimated there were some 87,000 military personnel on Oahu on the day of the attack.

Schab agreed when ceremony organizers asked him earlier this year to salute on behalf of all survivors and World War II veterans.

"I was honoured to do it. I'm glad to be able of standing up. I'm getting old, you know," he said.

Schab was a sailor on the USS Dobbin at the time of the attack, the tuba player in the ship's band. He had

showered and put on a clean uniform when he heard the call for a fire rescue party.

He hurried topside to see Japanese planes flying overhead and the USS Utah capsizing. He quickly went back below deck to join a daisy chain of sailors feeding shells to an anti-aircraft gun topside.

Ken Stevens, 102, who served on the USS Whitney, joined Schab at the ceremony. USS Curtiss sailor Bob Fernandez, 100, had planned to attend but had to cancel due to health issues.

Ceremony attendees observed a moment of silence at 7:54 a.m., the same time the attack began eight decades ago. F-22 jets in missing man formation flew overhead shortly after.

Fernandez, speaking before the ceremony, recalled feeling shocked and surprised as the attack began.

"When those things go off like that, we didn't know what's what," said Fernandez. "We didn't even know we were in a war."

Fernandez was a mess cook on the Curtiss and his job that morning was to bring sailors coffee and food as he waited tables during breakfast. Then they heard an alarm sound. Through a porthole, Fernandez saw a plane with the red ball insignia painted on Japan-

ese aircraft fly by.

Fernandez rushed down three decks to a magazine room where he and other sailors waited for someone to unlock a door storing 5-inch (12.7-centimeter), 38-caliber shells so they could begin passing them to the ship's guns. He has told interviewers over the years that some of his fellow sailors were praying and crying as they heard gunfire up above.

"I felt kind of scared because I didn't know what the hell was going on," Fernandez said.

The ship's guns hit a Japanese plane that crashed into one of its cranes. Shortly after, its guns hit a dive bomber that then slammed into the ship and exploded below deck, setting the hangar and main decks on fire, according to the Navy History and Heritage Command.

Fernandez's ship, the Curtiss, lost 21 men and nearly 60 of its sailors were injured. Many had Pearl Harbour survivors as heroes, but Fernandez doesn't view himself that way.

"I'm not a hero," he told The Associated Press in a phone interview from California, where he now lives with his nephew in Lodi.

"I'm just nothing but an ammunition passer." (AP)

Leaders of CPI(M), Trinamool Congress, AAP and NCP from Manipur would join the protest in the national capital

Manipur INDIA bloc leaders plan to protest in Delhi today



IMPHAL, Dec 8: The Congress on Sunday said that leaders of INDIA bloc parties from violence-hit Manipur would go ahead with their protest against the BJP-led NDA governments in the state and at the Centre at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on December 9.

State Congress chief spokesperson Hareeshwar Goswami told reporters here that INDIA bloc leaders from Manipur would

hold the demonstration on Monday in the national capital, irrespective of whether the permission for the proposed programme is granted or not.

Manipur Congress president Keisham Meghachandra has been making all arrangements in Delhi for the protest since November 25, he said.

Several leaders and office bearers of the

INDIA bloc, including five MLAs of Manipur Congress, are already in the national capital for the protest, Goswami said.

Leaders of CPI(M), Trinamool Congress, AAP and NCP from Manipur would join the protest in the national capital, he said.

"We had planned for a protest on December 6 in Delhi but had to be postponed due to certain inconveniences. Now, whether we

are given permission or not by the Centre, we will go ahead with the protest on Monday. It could be a sit-in or any other form of protest. We have taken our stand to stage the demonstration," Goswami said here.

His comment comes after a delegation of leaders from 10 political parties, representing the INDIA bloc, held a press conference in New Delhi on December 6 and claimed that they were denied permission to hold a sit-in at Jantar Mantar.

"We have never seen that the Centre and the BJP government here have pushed its citizens to hardship in the history of independent India. They failed in Manipur. This is evident from what the people have said on various platforms, including social media," Goswami alleged.

The conflict between two warring communities has affected everyone, from small businessmen to transporters, he claimed.

"We demand peace and normalcy at the earliest and that internally displaced people be allowed to return to their homes. Is Manipur not a part of India?", the Congress spokesperson said.

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

Prolonged violence, internet shutdown, curfew affecting students in Manipur: Academics



IMPHAL, Dec 8: Prolonged violence in Manipur with frequent internet shutdowns, curfews and general strikes is affecting the academic and career pursuits of students pursuing higher education in the northeastern state, many educationists said.

With frequent internet shutdowns, students are facing problems in having access to online resources and many recruiters are hesitant to visit campuses in Manipur for placement drive due to curfews and general strikes, they said.

Head of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering and also in charge of placement of National Institute of Technology (NIT) Manipur, K H Johnson Singh told PTI "We have witnessed a decline in recruitment drives after violence broke out in the state. At least 40 companies (online mode) came and 70 students have been selected this year. This is much less than what we were used to before the outbreak of violence. We had expected selection of some 100 students and some 50 companies."

He said, "Recruiters who prefer offline mode of interviews are much reluctant to visit for campus interviews. Despite our consistent assurance that the NIT campus is safe and just 20 minutes from the airport, the media images of tyres burning in the streets, mob violence and gunfights at peripheral areas seemed to have affected their psychology."

Eighty per cent of our students stay in hostels within the campus and have access to broadband 24 hours a day, he added.

Assistant professor of mass communication at Manipur University, Natasha Elangbam told PTI "Our students in every department have limited access to online resources as the majority of them rely on mobile internet data. Curfews and general strikes have severely affected ongoing classes.

Timely completion of assignments given to students is also affected as many students do not have broadband at their homes."

Internet shutdown also has severely affected career counselling agencies with many senior counsellors unable to provide desired information flow to students seeking employment. Counsellors also said that submission of resumes to national companies has been affected.

Sapam Joychandra, director of SS Career Counselling told PTI, "We are unable to conduct psychometric assessment of students that would help chart out a career route for the concerned student. Counselling through zoom, online mock tests and other tools have been affected. Students are unable to submit their resumes on time to outside companies. Those having broadband is very limited and the majority of the students rely on mobile data internet services for every form of update related to their education and career. For my organisation alone, there is a drastic change of 90 per cent in student guiding activities before and after the violence."

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

The violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups, besides inflicting heavy casualties, rendered thousands of people homeless since May last year. It started after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribals -- Nagas and Kukis -- constitute little over 40 per cent and reside in the hill districts. (PTI)

Mizoram: Over 350 gm of heroin seized, 3 arrested

AIZAWL, Dec 8: A total of 350 gm of heroin has been seized in two separate incidents in Mizoram's Champhai district recently and three persons have been arrested, an official statement said.

Acting on a tip-off, officials of the Mizoram Excise and Narcotics Department and personnel of Assam Rifles launched a joint operation in the area between Zote village and Tiau River near the India-Myanmar border on Friday and seized 48 gm of heroin, it said.

Two persons, identified as Keddy Zosangliana (23) and Lalrinliana (21), both from Tachhip village in Aizawl district, were arrested for possessing the heroin, it said.

In another operation, the excise and narcotics department seized 303 gm of heroin at Zolrang village in Champhai district from the possession of Lalsangzuala (44), a resident of Champhai town, on Saturday, the statement said. The three accused were booked under sections of the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act 1985, it said. (PTI)

First advent Christmas service held during Hornbill Festival in Nagaland

KOHIMA, Dec 8: Alongside the cultural extravaganza, tourists and locals on Sunday received the blessings of Christmas with Nagaland Joint Christian Forum (NJCF) holding the Advent Christmas devotional service at the Hornbill festival in Naga Heritage Village Kisama.

This is the first-ever advent Christmas service held coinciding with the Hornbill Festival celebration, an annual tourism promotional event of the Nagaland government, which is currently in its 25th year.

Extending greetings on the occasion, Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio said, "This celebration is made even more special as it coincides with the 25th edition of the Hornbill Festival." Expressing his sincere gratitude to the forum for organising the special devotion service, Rio who attended the function, hoped that the spirit of love, unity, and understanding would guide the thoughts and actions of all.

He also urged everyone to embrace the values of tolerance, forgiveness, and goodwill during the festival season.

Rio also reminded the crowd of the true meaning of Christmas — the birth of Jesus Christ, who brought hope, peace, and salvation



to the world. The chief minister also spoke about the deeper connection between spirituality, indigenous heritage, and political identity, emphasising how the advent of Christmas represents a coming together of faith, culture, and history.

Rio reflected on Nagaland's political struggle, citing historical milestones such as the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) Act of 1873, which continues to protect the region's cultural heritage.

He maintained that the protections enshrined in the BEFR and the state's political agreement, incorporated into India's Constitution under Article 371A, play a vital role in sustaining Naga

identity. He stressed that these provisions help showcase the uniqueness of the Naga people while underscoring the importance of unity in the ongoing journey.

As the main speaker of the occasion, Advisor of NJCF, Rev Dr Zelhou Keyho while delivering the Christmas message, stressed that the true beauty of Christmas lies in worshipping the Lord.

Reminding the gathering of the true reason for the season — the birth of Jesus Christ, Rev Dr Keyho highlighted the challenges of modern life, where people often become so busy with their own concerns that they miss the deeper meaning of Christmas.

"Christmas is for all of us — the rich, the poor, the innocent, the

tourist, and the people of the soil," he said, emphasising that the celebration of Christmas calls everyone, regardless of their background, to open their hearts to its message.

"Christmas is not about Santa Claus; it is about God who came and dwelt among us," he said, calling on the crowd to live out their Christian faith by being a light and salt to the world.

The occasion was also marked by special Christmas carols by various churches and also special prayers for visitors and tourists visiting the Hornbill Festival and their safe journey back home.

The Advent Christmas Service concluded with the congregation singing the popular Christmas song "Joy to the World". (PTI)

TYCM hails pending ST scholarships demand

IMPHAL, Dec 8: The Tribal Youth Council, Manipur (TYCM), general headquarters, said recently that "fully endorses and extends its unwavering support" to the demand made by the All College Tribal Students' Union, Imphal, for the immediate release of the pending Scheduled Tribe (ST) scholarships.

The TYCM alleged that the Government of Manipur "continues" to neglect the tribal communities across various sectors, and the delay in disbursing ST scholarships is a clear violation of students' inherent rights.

"It is deeply concerning that key tribal institutions such as the Tribal Affairs & Hills Department, Manipur State Commission for Scheduled Tribes (MSCST), and Tribal Research Institute (TRI) are in a state of collapse," the TYCM stated, while adding, "With most staff retired and only a few remaining personnel struggling to maintain operations, these institutions are unable to address the needs of the tribal population effectively".

The TYCM then appealed to all tribal civil society organizations to unite and raise a collective voice to pressurize the Government of Manipur to address "our grievances and fulfill our charter of demands". It added, "Your solidarity and support are crucial to achieving justice and equality for the tribal communities of Manipur".

The TYCM then "strongly" urged the concerned authorities to resolve this issue without further delay and release the pending ST scholarships at the earliest. (INN)

Tourist from UK dies of cardiac arrest at Hornbill Festival

KOHIMA, Dec 8: A tourist from the UK attending the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland died of cardiac arrest, police said Sunday.

The 67-year-old man complained of severe chest pain on Saturday evening and was rushed to a health camp located at the festival venue, Naga Heritage Village Kisama, they said.

From there, he was referred to a hospital, following which he was taken to the state capital Kohima, around 12 km away. He was admitted to a private hospital where he breathed his last later in the night, they added.

The man was travelling alone with a tour guide, officials said. All arrangements were made by the state Tourism Department to send the body back to his home, they said. Over 1.22 lakh people have attended the 10-day festival since it began on December 1. Among them were 2,085 foreigners and 30,816 tourists from other states of India. (PTI)

Abduction attempt foiled in Imphal, militant nabbed

IMPHAL, Dec 8: An abduction attempt was foiled by Manipur Police in Imphal's Thangal Bazaar area and two persons were rescued, a police statement said on Sunday.

Tensubam Bangkim, a militant belonging to the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Taibangganba) outfit was nabbed from Imphal West district in connection with the incident on Saturday, it said. A 9 mm pistol along with seven cartridges, and a four-wheeler were also seized from the militant, it said. The police statement, however, did not provide any detail about the abduction attempt and how it was foiled.

Meanwhile, security forces conducted a search operation in L Jangnongphai area in Kangpokpi district on Saturday and seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition, which includes a sniper rifle, three pistols, a 303 bolt action rifle, five hand grenades, five Stardyne 90 explosives, four electric detonators, cartridges, five anti-riot shells and a radio set, the statement said. Also, four persons were arrested on Saturday for engaging in illegal poppy cultivation in Khamason range in Ukhrul district, it said. Around 30 acres of poppy plantation was detected, the statement said, adding an air gun and two knives were seized from possession of the arrested persons. (PTI)

Meghalaya government sanctions ₹ 950 crore to MeECL in 2023

SHILLONG, Dec 8: The Meghalaya state government has sanctioned grants of over ₹ 950 crore to the Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) during last year alone.

This was informed by the power minister AT Mondal while responding to a query on the recent decision of the Association of Power Engineers (AOPE) to protest if the MeECL fails to address the issue related to the diploma cadre.

"We feel that their grievances have to be addressed but at the same time we got to see that financial stability (of the MeECL) is also there. Both should go side by side. We are very much favourable to look into their grievances but MeECL's position has in-

creased," Mondal said.

He added that the issue is the affairs of the MeECL and "We hope the MeECL will tide over the situation".

Asserting the need to understand the financial condition of MeECL, the power minister said, "Every year till today the government is giving financial grants to MeECL to run the show."

"Almost ₹ 24 crore, we are paying for the salary component, ₹ 12 crore for pension component...on an average, you can say ₹ 40-50 crore is going every month. If you calculate, it is a huge amount. Last year, we had to grant ₹ 950 crore to MeECL," he added. (INN)

Muzzle loading shooting a big hit at Hornbill fest

Single-barrelled guns cost ₹ 8,500 while the double-barrelled guns are priced at ₹ 18,000

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 8: The muzzle loading shooting experience at the Hornbill Festival at Kisama is witnessing a growing interest among tourists from far and near.

This traditional activity, deeply rooted in local heritage has become a unique attraction during the festival.

Two Konyak gunsmiths from Changlangshu village in Mon district K Moba and Nyeiba, having experience of 35 years in gun-making, have put up a stall at Craftscape, Kisama, showcasing the traditional way of gun-making.

Their products, known for their quality and durability, are being sold across Nagaland and outside the state. They also take special orders on request and are also making guns at the site.

Single-barrelled guns cost ₹ 8,500 while the double-barrelled guns are priced at ₹ 18,000.

The Konyak Nagas are expert gunsmiths. Their origin of gun-making is obscure but the knowledge has existed within the com-



munity for a long time. Historically, these guns are handmade by blacksmiths in the villages using a combination of wood and metals often recycled from old materials.

The Konyak morung (a traditional youth dormitory or club) at the festival venue provides visitors with an experience of muzzle-loading gun shooting and is attracting many visitors to the ongoing

Hornbill Festival.

A fee of ₹ 200 per shot allows tourists to experience the thrill of firing historic muzzle loading guns under supervision. These guns, which date back to centuries-old traditions, were once a vital part of the region's hunting and defensive practices.

The use of muzzle guns demonstrates the tribe's historical proficiency in crafting weapons and their importance in ceremonial occasions. This feature provides insight into the state's cultural and historical past, as do other examples of traditional warfare.

Meanwhile, the eighth day of the 25th Hornbill Festival on Sunday celebrated the vibrant cultural heritage of Nagaland, with 18 cultural troupes presenting diverse traditional performances at the main arena in Kisama.

Union Minister for labour and employment and youth affairs and sports Mansukh Mandaviya graced the morning session of the event as the honoured guest to witness an array of performances that brought the rich traditions of Nagaland's tribes to life.

'Attack-dog' behaviour embarrassment to India: Tharoor slams BJP

'United States has long been a champion of media freedom around the world'

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Sunday slammed the BJP after the US rejected the ruling party's allegations that elements in the American "deep state" were behind attempts to destabilise India and said this "attack-dog" behaviour is an embarrassment to India.

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.

In a post on X, Tharoor said, "It's clear the BJP neither understands democracy nor diplomacy. They are so blinded by petty politics that they forget the value of a free press and vibrant independent civil society organisations in a democracy, and they are oblivious to a ruling party's responsibilities in maintaining good relations with key foreign countries."

"This attack-dog behaviour is an embarrassment to India," the former minister of state for external affairs said. 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 has 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 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 has 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. (PTI)

Stop misleading people about EVMs, accept poll mandate: Shinde tells oppn



MUMBAI, Dec 8: Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday hit out at the opposition, accusing it of misleading people about electronic voting machines and not accepting their mandate.

Talking to reporters, Shinde said the ruling Mahayuti alliance won the November 20 assembly polls because of its work, and the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi must accept the people's mandate and support the government in development works.

The Mahayuti combine of the BJP, Shiv Sena, and NCP swept the recently held polls, winning 230 out of 288 seats, while the opposition bloc of Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) managed just 46 seats. The opposition parties have alleged irregularities with EVMs for its poll losses and demanded the use of ballot papers.

Slamming the opposition, the Shiv Sena chief said, "When you win, there is no EVM scam, but the machine becomes bad when you lose. This is not the right approach."

He said the opposition must accept the people's mandate that they have been decisively defeated.

People have shown the opposition its place and proved that they don't vote for those who sit at home, the deputy chief minister said.

"In the Lok Sabha elections, 2.48 crore votes went to the Mahayuti, which is 43.55 per cent. The MVA polled 2.5 crore votes, which was 43.71 per cent. Still, the opposition got 31 seats, and Mahayuti won 17. Should we say there was an EVM scam?" he asked.

Shinde said creating confusion

about a democratically elected government was not good for democracy.

"People have given us the mandate for our work. Stop crying and accept the development work we have done. Accept the mandate," he said.

He further questioned how members of the opposition parties who boycotted the oath-taking ceremony on Saturday to protest the EVM issue took oath as MLAs on Sunday.

"Does this mean they have abandoned the issue?" he said.

Shinde pointed out that the opposition won the assembly election in Jharkhand and the bypolls in the Nanded (Maharashtra) and Wayanad (Kerala) Lok Sabha seats.

He said while the Mahayuti polled 49.30 per cent votes, getting 3.18 crore votes, MVA received 2.35 crore votes, which is a difference of 1 crore votes.

There will be no illegal work and no injustice to anyone, he said.

The government functions as per the Constitution, Shinde said on reports of the Waqf Board sending notice to farmers in Latur.

Shinde's statement about votes has come a day after NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar said a comparison between votes polled and seats won by political parties in the Maharashtra assembly polls was surprising.

Taking to X, chief minister Devendra Fadnis had said as a senior leader, Pawar shouldn't mislead the country.

"You will come out of this if you accept defeat. I expect you to give your colleagues advice on introspection," he stated in his post. (PTI)

Narwekar set to be elected unopposed as Maharashtra assembly speaker



MUMBAI, Dec 8: BJP's Rahul Narwekar is poised to be elected unopposed as the speaker of the Maharashtra legislative assembly, with the opposition alliance Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) deciding not to put up a contest.

Narwekar, who was the speaker in the 14th assembly for two and a half years and gave the key verdicts tied to the Shiv Sena and NCP, was re-elected from the Colaba assembly seat in Mumbai.

Accompanied by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and his deputies Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, Narwekar filed his nomination before the legislature secretary Jitendra Bhole on Sunday.

MVA leaders met Fadnis and urged him to follow the protocol of giving the deputy speaker's post to the opposition. They also sought the post of the leader of the opposition.

The speaker's election will be formally announced in the House on Monday. This will be followed by a floor test to prove the new government's strength. Governor CP Radhakrishnan will then address the joint session of both Houses of the state legislature.

During his tenure as Maharashtra assembly speaker, Narwekar had ruled that the party led by Eknath Shinde was the legitimate and "real Shiv Sena" after a split in the Bal Thackeray-founded party.

He also held that the faction under Ajit Pawar was the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which was founded by Sharad Pawar.

In the recently concluded Maharashtra assembly elections, the Mahayuti coalition piled up stunning numbers, winning over 230 of the 288 seats, while the MVA collectively got only 46 seats.

The party positions in the 15th assembly are:

Mahayuti - BJP 132 MLAs; Shiv Sena 57; NCP 41; Jan Surabaya Shakti Party 2; Rashtriya Yuva Swabhiman Party 1; Rashtriya Samaj Paksh 1; Independents 2; Rajarshi Shahu Vikas Aghadi 1

Opposition - Shiv Sena (UBT) 20 MLAs; Congress 16; NCP (SP) 10; CPM 1; PWP 1; AIMIM 1; Samajwadi Party 2. (PTI)

Cong poll promises, Musi rejuvenation among issues to figure in T'gana assembly session

HYDERABAD, Dec 8: Election promises of the ruling Congress, attack on government officials during public hearing for land acquisition and Musir river redevelopment are among the issues likely to figure prominently during the winter session of Telangana Assembly beginning on December 9.

The session assumes significance as it coincides with the first anniversary of the Congress government which assumed office on December 7 last year.

The session is expected to witness heated exchanges between the opposition and the treasury benches on various issues concerning the government's performance.

While the government would showcase its achievements, the opposition BRS and BJP plan to forcefully raise the alleged failures of the Revanth Reddy regime.

"During the first year, your government set a record in farm loan waiver, crop bonus, jobs creation, investments. Our women welfare

schemes, caste census, and environmental-centred urban development policies are being discussed for emulation by other governments," Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said in a post on social media platform X on Sunday.

However, the BRS released a 'chargesheet' against the Congress government on Sunday, while the BJP had issued its own 'chargesheet' on December 1.

BRS MLA T Harish Rao, a nephew of party president K Chandrasekhar Rao, who released the 'chargesheet' alleged that the Congress rule during the last one year is a 'saga of endless deceit'.

Union Coal Minister and state BJP president G Kishan Reddy, who announced the saffron party's 'chargesheet', had alleged that the Congress' promises, including ₹ 15,000 to farmers and tenant farmers, ₹ 12,000 to agriculture workers and bonus for 10 crops, have not been kept.

Meanwhile, the state government would un-

veil a statue of 'Telangana Thalli' (mother) in state Secretariat premises on December 9.

The government is expected to discuss the issue after the commencement of the assembly session.

BRS leader Rama Rao took exception to the government making a new design and portrait of 'Telangana Thalli'. The redesigned portrait fails to represent the ethos and cultural glory of the state, he alleged.

The government's grand plans for Musi river redevelopment here is also expected to be come up during the assembly session.

While the government asserted that Musi redevelopment would lead to economic growth and restore the city's glorious heritage, the BJP and BRS have opposed demolition of poor people's houses and alleged that the project smacks of corruption.

Gearing up for the session, BRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao held a meeting with MLAs on Sunday. (PTI)

Pawar visits Maharashtra village seeking repoll through ballots

SOLAPUR, Dec 8: NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Sunday expressed his support to the people of Markadwadi village in Maharashtra's Solapur district, who raised doubts about EVMs and announced plans to conduct a "repoll" using ballot papers.

Earlier this week, police registered a case against more than 200 persons from the village and nearby areas for allegedly trying to conduct a "re-election" using ballot papers in an unauthorised manner.

Pawar, accompanied by several NCP (SP) leaders, including Jayant Patil, met villagers.

Addressing a gathering, the senior politician said, "I would like to thank the villagers because you have shown the right direction to the whole country. You (villagers) were the ones who thought of conducting polls using ballot papers."

"We have collected some data about EVMs. People cast their votes, but in the end, the results were unexpected. You raised awareness about the issue, and the process needs to change," he added.

Pawar slammed the police action against villagers who sought to conduct a "re-election" using ballot papers.

"How can the police restrict the gathering of villagers in their vil-



lage? How can they even file police complaints against you (villagers)? Collect all such complaints and give them to me. I will take this up with the chief minister, state chief electoral officer, the prime minister, and even the Election Commission of India," he said.

A group of villagers had insisted on re-election with ballot papers while casting doubts on the votes counted through EVMs for a polling booth at Markadwadi in the November 20 state polls.

The village comes under the Malshiras assembly constituency, where NCP (SP) candidate Uttam Jankar defeated the BJP's Ram Satpute by 13,147 votes.

Though Jankar won the seat, Markadwadi residents claimed the quantum of votes polled by the NCP (SP) leader was lesser than Satpute, expressing doubt about the EVMs.

The NCP (SP) chief said the opposition does not wish to politicise

the issue of this village. "It is my request to Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnis that we do not want to politicise the matter. We want to resolve the doubts of these villagers," he said.

Pawar had on Saturday said a comparison between votes polled and seats won by political parties in the Maharashtra assembly polls was surprising.

"It is true that we have been defeated. We should not fret over it but go back to the people, as no enthusiasm is visible among the people about the election results. There is a lot of resentment," the senior politician had said during a press conference in Kolhapur.

The ruling BJP-NCP-Shiv Sena alliance won 230 of the 288 seats in the November 20 elections.

The Opposition's strength in the assembly is low but many young Opposition MLAs will show their mettle after a couple of sessions, Pawar said.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis stated that as a senior leader, Pawar should not mislead the country.

"You will come out of this if you accept defeat. I expect you to give your colleagues advice on introspection," he stated on X. (PTI)

Foreign Secretary Misri to visit Dhaka on Monday amid frosty India-Bangladesh ties

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri is expected to raise with Dhaka India's concerns over attacks on Hindus and other minorities as he embarks on a day-long visit to Bangladesh on Monday, in the first high-level trip from New Delhi after a massive uprising ended deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule in August.

Misri is scheduled to hold wide-ranging talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart Md. Jashim Uddin and meet the country's de-facto foreign minister Mohammad Touhid Hossain.

It is learnt that the Indian foreign secretary is also likely to call on Bangladesh's interim leader and Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus during his nearly 12-hour visit to Dhaka.

On its part, Bangladesh is likely to convey its concerns over India continuing to provide shelter to



Hasina. Last month, Yunus said his government will seek Hasina's extradition from India, people familiar with Misri's visit said.

The close ties between India and Bangladesh came under severe strain after Hasina was forced to leave the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest in August. Yunus came to power days after Hasina took shelter in India.

The relations deteriorated fur-

ther in recent weeks over attacks on Hindus and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das.

There have been spate of incidents of violence against Hindus and other minorities as well as attacks on temples in the neighbouring country in the last few weeks that triggered strong concerns in New Delhi.

"Our position on the matter is very clear -- the interim govern-

ment must live up to its responsibility of protecting all minorities," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on November 29.

"We are concerned at the surge of extremist rhetoric, increasing incidents of violence and provocation. These developments cannot be dismissed only as media exaggeration. We once again call upon Bangladesh to take all steps for the protection of minorities," he said.

India also hoped that the case relating to Bangladeshi monk Chinmoy Krishna Das, arrested on a charge of sedition, will be dealt with in a just, fair and transparent manner.

In the meetings, the Bangladeshi side is also likely to raise an incident of storming of its mission in Agartala on Monday by a group of protesters.

Subsequently, Bangladesh foreign ministry on Tuesday sum-

moned the Indian envoy to Dhaka Pranay Verma and lodged a protest over the incident.

West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura witnessed protests in the last few days over the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh and the arrest of Das.

Das was arrested at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport last month in connection with a sedition case.

India on Friday announced that Misri is travelling to Dhaka to attend a meeting under the framework of Foreign Office Consultations.

"The foreign secretary is scheduled to visit Bangladesh for Foreign Office Consultations on December 9. This is part of our structured interactions with the Bangladesh side," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in brief remarks. (PTI)

Farmers' march stopped at barricades, teargas shells fired

SHAMBHU, Dec 8: A 'jatha' (group) of 101 farmers resumed its foot march to Delhi Sunday afternoon from the Shambhu protest site on the Punjab-Haryana border, but was soon halted by a multilayered barricading erected by the Haryana security personnel.

Teargas shells were lobbed and water jets were shot through cannons to disperse the protesters after they reached the barricades.

Ambala police had earlier said the farmers' outfits may march to Delhi only after getting permission from the national capital administration.

The group, dubbed as 'marjeevas', (someone willing to die for a cause), was marching for a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price. They were stopped only a few metres away.

One of the Haryana security personnel was seen asking farmers to show permission to march to Delhi.

"First we will identify them to see whether they have any permission. We have got the list (of 101 farmers) but they are not those whose names are mentioned in the list. They are not giving their identities which means they are coming in the shape of a mob," he told reporters at the site.

A farmer said, "They are saying that our names were not on the list. We do not know which list they have. When we asked them whether they would allow us to move ahead after verifying our identities, they told us then we would have to show the permission."



As the confrontation escalated, the security forces lobbed tear gas shells.

The gas forced the farmers, many of whom had covered their faces and were wearing protective eyewear, to recede a few metres. Some tried to cover the shells with wet jute bags.

Farmers claimed that one of the protesters was injured in the attack and had to seek hospital care. Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said their protest reached 300 days on Sunday.

Farmers under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points be-

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

Farmer leader Tejveer Singh asked why farmers were stopped from moving ahead when they were peacefully going on foot. "What objection does Haryana have?"

He said the farmers would not have to march to the capital had the Centre accepted their demands.

"Earlier, the central ministers and BJP leaders raised an objection to farmers going to Delhi with their tractors and trolleys, but now what is their case when they are marching on foot," he said.

Haryana Police has written to its Punjab

counterpart asking it to ensure media personnel are stopped at a "safe distance" from the protest site for the sake of their safety.

It had earlier asked the farmers not to proceed with the march and cited a prohibitory order clamped by the Ambala administration under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) that bans unlawful assembly of five or more people in the district.

On Friday too, farmers had to suspend their march after some of them suffered injuries due to tear gas shells.

Pandher had on Saturday said farmers hadn't heard from the Centre on the matter.

Shortly before the farmers' march on Friday, the Haryana government suspended mobile internet and bulk SMS service in 11 villages of the Ambala district till December 9.

The farmers had earlier attempted to march towards Delhi on February 13 and February 21 but were stopped by security forces deployed at the border points.

Besides MSP, the farmers are demanding a farm debt waiver, pension for farmers and farm labourers, no hike in electricity tariff, withdrawal of police cases (against farmers), and "justice" for the victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

Reinstatement of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 and compensation to the families of farmers who died during the previous agitation in 2020-21 are also part of their demands. (PTI)

Pak's ISI pushes drug addicts as terror couriers in Indian jails, say officials

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI has reportedly resorted to infiltrating individuals under the influence of drugs or posing as mentally disturbed into India to utilise them to deliver critical messages to hardcore terrorists incarcerated in the country's prisons.

Officials said that more than 10 such cases have been reported since July this year in which Pakistani nationals have entered India from their country and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Many of them have been sent to prisons in Jammu, Punjab and Rajasthan.

The officials said security agencies suspect these individuals are Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) couriers tasked with relaying important communication to the jailed terrorists wherever possible. Interrogation of these individuals typically shows that they have been trained in resistance techniques to withstand questioning by security personnel.

The behaviour displayed by those apprehended has raised suspicions among officials, who suggest that their superficial details and evasive responses indicate a potentially larger agenda behind their infiltration, possibly stemming from the fear of repercussions from their handlers.

They explained that the use of mobile phones and the internet leaves behind electronic footprints that could expose the plans of both state and non-state actors operating across the border. As a result, the ISI has adopted this new modus operandi.

The infiltration strategy reportedly includes women and minors, who may also serve as couriers. In a notable incident in July, a minor from Pakistan's Attock was intercepted in Punjab.

During searches, security personnel discovered a damp paper containing Arabic writing though it was not legible, the officials said.

The ISI's infiltration tactics have been linked to drug smuggling operations. In one case from Bijour village in Rajasthan, a Pakistani national posing as a mentally disturbed finally spilled the beans during intense questioning that he had been hired by two drug lords in Pakistan

-- Sarfaraz Johiya and Nawaz -- to facilitate narcotics trafficking into India and gather information on the deployment of Border Security Force (BSF) troops.

In another recent incident, a Pakistani youth named Mohammed Asad from Lahore drove to the zero line on his motorcycle and seemingly awaited arrest by the BSF. During interrogation, he claimed to have had a family dispute over his girlfriend.

The officials noted that Asad, who was subsequently moved to prison, may have been acting as a courier. Security agencies have requested additional custody for extended interrogation.

In October, a 31-year-old man who identified himself as Shahid Imran entered India through the Jammu sector, claiming that he wanted to visit a Kali temple to get married.

The officials explained that such infiltrators are generally booked under the Foreigners Act and Passports Act, for which the punishment ranges from two years to eight years in prison and following this, they are deported.

They said that in the late-1990s and early-2000s, ISI exploited the Samjhauta Express, the rail link between India and Pakistan, for covert courier operations, employing individuals known as "sawari operators". This service continued until February 2019, when the train service was halted.

The "sawari operators" played a crucial role in smuggling drugs and transporting funds intended to finance terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as Punjab.

However, following a significant crackdown by authorities, these operations were effectively curtailed, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of numerous individuals involved in such activities.

Recent developments suggest that the ISI's current method of sending couriers mirrors these past tactics.

The officials said that the infiltration strategies being employed now are reminiscent of the past, as the agency seeks new ways to bypass law enforcement and deliver crucial communication and resources across the border. (PTI)

Tantrik dies in Gujarat police's custody; officials claim he committed 12 murders



AHMEDABAD, Dec 8: A 42-year-old tantrik arrested for allegedly conspiring to murder a businessman died in police custody in Gujarat's Ahmedabad on Sunday after admitting to killing 12 people by giving them drinks laced with a chemical, police said.

The Sarkhej police arrested Navalsinh Chavda around 1 am on December 3 when he was on his way to commit the crime after his partner for a taxi business with whom he shared the plan tipped off the police, an official said.

The police secured Chavda's remand till 3 pm on December 10 for further probe into his occult practices and possible involvement in human sacrifices, he said.

"Around 10 am on Sunday, Chavda fell ill and was rushed to the civil hospital in an ambulance, but the doctors declared him dead on arrival. The accused confessed to 12 murders during interrogation, and all deaths had occurred due to consumption of sodium nitrite," the official said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Shivam Verma said the accused confessed to having committed 12 murders by making his victims consume sodium nitrite dissolved in water during occult rituals.

Chavda admitted to having murdered a man in Ahmedabad, six in Surendranagar, including three members of his family, three in Rajkot, and one each in Wankaner (Morbi district) and Anjar (Kutch district), Verma said.

He said the accused confessed to having murdered a man whose body was found in the Aslali area of Ahmedabad in August 2021 in what appeared to be a road accident. A post-mortem later suggested it to be a case of death by poisoning. The probe has also revealed that the accused had similarly killed his grandmother around 14 years ago and his mother and uncle a year ago, Verma said.

According to the police, Chavda procured sodium nitrite, a chemical used for dry cleaning, from a laboratory in his hometown, Surendranagar.

Due to poisoning, several of his victims died of heart attacks, while the nature of the deaths of a few other victims was a matter of investigation, the official said.

Chavda had found out about the chemical from another tantrik. The substance would take effect 15 to 20 minutes after consumption and cause heart attack, etc., leading to death, he said. The accused called himself a "bhuvaji" and proclaimed that he had the power to perform magic and miracles. He also had an ashram at Padhwani in Surendranagar where he practised black magic, police said.

He would offer to multiply his victims' wealth or solve their problems, they said. The police had recovered incriminating evidence from Chavda's vehicle, including items used in rituals and white powder. (PTI)

Proba-3 mission would significantly advance understanding of Sun's Corona: Ex-ISRO scientist

CHENNAI, Dec 8: ISRO's successful launch of European Space Agency's (ESA) Proba-3 satellites onboard PSLV-C59 rocket is a 'groundbreaking mission' and would significantly advance the understanding of Sun's corona and solar wind, a former ISRO scientist said.

According to P V Venkitakrishnan, former director of Capacity Building Programme Office, ISRO headquarters, the "innovative design and advanced technologies" used in the mission would pave the way for future space weather forecasting and solar physics research.

"This mission is a collaborative effort between the European Space Agency (ESA) and the Indian Space Research Organisation. Proba-3 is a pioneering mission designed to explore the Sun's corona, the outer atmosphere of the Sun", he told PTI.

It aims to study the Corona, which is

hotter than the Sun's surface, and explore the solar wind which is a stream of charged particles emanating from the Sun, Venkitakrishnan said.

"The data from Proba-3 satellites would help scientists better understand and predict space weather events, which can impact the Earth's magnetic field and satellite operations."

He noted that the two satellites -- Coronagraph and Occulter-- would form a 'precise formation 150 metres apart after several orbital manoeuvres in the coming days.

The instrument in the Coronagraph spacecraft would capture high-resolution images of the Sun's corona. This setup will mimic a total solar eclipse which traditionally lasts only for a few minutes and does not occur frequently.

Proba 3 will provide 6 continuous hours of observation during each orbit,

equivalent to about 50 natural solar eclipses annually.

"The Proba-3 features an advanced propulsion system, enabling precise control and maneuvering of the spacecraft and is made by ESA.

With the Bengaluru-headquartered space agency providing the launch vehicle for the latest mission, Venkitakrishnan said the ESA collaborated with ISRO as it currently lacks an active launch vehicle to carry its payloads to orbit.

"This shows the success of our space diplomacy and our capacity to provide reliable and cost effective launches to our customers," he said.

ISRO had on Thursday successfully launched the Proba-3 mission onboard a PSLV-C59 rocket, a solar experiment undertaken by the European Space Agency. (PTI)

Gujarat court acquits ex-IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt in custodial torture case

PORBANDAR, Dec 8: A court in Gujarat's Porbandar has acquitted former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt in a 1997 custodial torture case, citing that the prosecution could not "prove the case beyond reasonable doubt".

Additional chief judicial magistrate Mukesh Pandya on Saturday acquitted Bhatt, the then superintendent of police (SP) of Porbandar, in a case registered against him under IPC sections pertaining to causing grievous hurt to obtain confession and other provisions by giving him the benefit of the doubt due to lack of evidence.

Bhatt was earlier sentenced to life imprisonment in a 1990 custodial death case in Jamnagar and 20 years in jail in a 1996 case relating to planting drugs to frame a Rajasthan-based lawyer in Palanpur. He is currently lodged in the Rajkot Central Jail.

The court held that the prosecution could not "prove the case beyond reasonable doubt" that the complainant was forced to confess to the crime and made to surrender by voluntarily causing pain using dangerous weapons and threats.

It also noted that the sanction required to prosecute the accused, who was then a public servant discharging his duty, had not been ob-

tained in the case.

Bhatt and constable Vajubhai Chau, against whom the case was abated after his death, were charged under sections 330 (causing hurt to extort confession) and 324 (causing hurt with dangerous weapons) of the Indian Penal Code on the complaint by one Naran Jadav for causing him physical and mental torture in police custody to extract confession in a Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and Arms Act case. A first information report was filed against Bhatt and Chau in a Porbandar city B-division police station on April 15, 2013, following the court's direction on Jadav's complaint before a magistrate court on July 6, 1997.

Jadav was one of the 22 accused in the 1994 arms landing case.

According to the prosecution, a team of Porbandar police had taken Jadav to Bhatt's residence in Porbandar on July 5, 1997, from the Sabarmati Central Jail in Ahmedabad on a transfer warrant.

Jadav was given electric shocks on different parts of his body, including his private parts. His son was also given electric shocks.

The complainant later informed the court of the judicial magistrate about the torture, following which an inquiry was ordered. Based on

the evidence, the court registered a case on December 31, 1998, and issued a summons to Bhatt and Chau. On April 15, 2013, the court ordered an FIR against Bhatt and Chau. Bhatt is undergoing life imprisonment in a 1990 Jamnagar custodial death case.

In March 2024, the former IPS officer was also sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by a court at Palanpur in Banaskantha district in a 1996 case related to planting drugs to frame a Rajasthan-based lawyer.

He is also an accused in a case of alleged fabrication of evidence in connection with the 2002 Gujarat riots cases along with activist Teesta Setalvad and former Gujarat director general of police R B Sreekumar. Bhatt, who was removed from police service by the Gujarat government over unauthorised absence, moved the Supreme Court challenging the Gujarat High Court's January 9, 2024 order dismissing his appeal.

The high court had upheld the conviction of Bhatt and co-accused Pravinshih Zala under sections 302 (murder), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC for murder by the sessions court in Jamnagar on June 20, 2019. (PTI)

AAI to celebrate 100 years of flight operations at Kolkata airport

KOLKATA, Dec 8: The Airports Authority Of India is all set to celebrate 100 years of flight operations at Kolkata airport, officials said on Sunday. Flight operations in Kolkata airport started in 1924.

"The Airports Authority of India proudly celebrates 100 Glorious Years of #KolkataAirport @aai Kolkata Airport, a gateway that has seamlessly bridged the world with the soul of #WestBengal. Originally known as #DumDumAirport, this Iconic Airport stands as a testament to Timeless Brilliance, where History Whispers, Culture Thrives & the Skies Unite." AAI Kolkata Airport said in a post on X.

"A Century of Excellence, welcoming the world to the City of Joy!" it said.

According to sources at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International (NSCBI) Airport, the celebrations will begin from the third week of December and will continue till March end next year.

There is a possibility that Union Civil Aviation minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu will be present at the inauguration of 100 years celebrations of the airport, sources said, adding that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee may also be present on the occasion.

"We have lined up a number of events for the celebrations." Director of NSCBI airport Dr Pravat Ranjan Beuria told PTI over phone. Historical exhibitions, cultural events, signature campaigns, and panel discussions will be some of the events to name a few.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport was founded in the early 1900s as the Calcutta Aerodrome.

The airport traditionally served as a strategic stopover on the air route from North America and Europe to Indochina and Australia. Dakota 3 was the first aircraft to land in the airport. In 1924, KLM began scheduled stops at Calcutta, as part of their Amsterdam to Batavia (Jakarta) route.

The same year, a Royal Air Force aircraft landed in Calcutta as part of the first round-the-world expedition by any air force. Research findings show that on May 2, 1924, Mr Doyce, a French Pilot, landed his flight at this airport.

On May 5, 1924 another Paris to Tokyo flight en route from Agra landed at Dum-dum Airport, which drew a massive crowd.

Similarly, on May 16, 1924 at 11:30 AM another flight from Allahabad landed at this Airport. Further findings show that on November 14, 1924 during night hours a flight from Amsterdam landed at this airport for which arrangements were made by lighting large numbers of 'MASHAAL' (torch) with fuel like cloths, grass, oil, etc.

Most probably, this was the first night landing by an aircraft at the airport.

According to information available at the airport, it began as an open ground next to the Royal Artillery Armoury in Dum Dum. Sir Stanley Jackson, Governor of Bengal, opened the Bengal Flying Club at Dum Dum/Calcutta aerodrome in February 1929. (PTI)

Drop in student numbers impact Kota's coaching, hostel industry

KOTA (RAJASTHAN), Dec 8: Business has slowed down for coaching centres and hostels in Kota following negative publicity over student suicides, new guidelines regulating coaching centres and the expansion of coaching brands to other cities, according to industry stakeholders.

The number of students in Kota has fallen to 85,000 to 1 lakh this year from the usual 2 to 2.5 lakh, reducing the annual revenue to ₹ 3,500 crore from ₹ 6,500 to 7,000 crore, they said.

Despite the setback, stakeholders remain optimistic about the credibility of the Kota coaching model and its environment, that is absent in other cities.

Kota's educational system and environment are unmatched and will attract students back next session, which will compensate for the decline, Govindram Mittal, Zonal Chairperson, United Council of Rajasthan Industries said.

He said that industrialists are also looking at alternative opportunities, with plans to establish In-

formation Technology (IT) hubs in the city, modelled after Bengaluru.

Earlier this year, the Karnataka government approved a Bill seeking to reserve 50 per cent of management positions and 75 per cent of non-management positions in private sector for locals, drawing criticism from across the industry.

Industrialists here have approached companies based in Bengaluru to shift base to Kota and after a nod from these companies, land for IT sectors have been earmarked under the direction of Lok Sabha speaker and Kota-Bundi MP Om Birla, Mittal said.

President of Kota Hostel Association Naveen Mittal said that the coaching centre and hostel industry here is certainly in crisis. Some owners who have built several hostels on loans are finding it difficult to pay back installments.

He said that the crisis has hit hostel owners hard, with occupancy down to 40 to 50 per cent in most of the city's 4,500 hostels. According to the National

Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Kota ranks behind 50 cities in terms of suicide rates, yet the city has been portrayed negatively, Naveen emphasised.

The room rents have dipped from ₹ 15,000 to ₹ 9,000 and many hostels remain vacant, Manik Sahani, a hostel manager in Coral Park said.

"The quality of teaching in Kota is far better than in other cities. The environment is excellent for studies," Priyadarshani Panna, a NEET aspirant from Odisha said. "Kota gives the best facilities and environment for education and accommodation. This was the reason I chose to prepare for NEET in Kota", another student from Jalore district said.

This is the first time in decades that the student hub here has seen a sharp drop of 30-40 per cent in the number of students coming in. Kota's annual average student strength was close to 1.5 lakh in 2023 and this year it's down to 85,000, the industry stakeholders claimed. (PTI)

Indigenous PM2.5 sensor to tackle air quality challenges under works at IIT-Kanpur

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: An indigenous PM2.5 sensor designed for affordability and scalability is being developed to address the Global South's air quality challenges, Professor S N Tripathi, Dean of the Kotak School of Sustainability at IIT-Kanpur, said.

The sensor is being developed by the Airawat Research Foundation at IIT-Kanpur, with a demonstration planned by mid-2025 and a market launch expected in early 2026, he said.

"This cost-effective solution encourages community participation, enabling the collection of real-time, granular air quality data. Such data can help government departments pinpoint pollution sources and implement localised, just-in-time interventions," Professor Tripathi told PTI.

He highlighted the stark disparity in air quality monitoring infrastructure, with many rural areas going unmonitored. He proposed a suite of technol-



gies, including portable air quality sensors, mobile Real-Time Source Apportionment (RTSA) labs, and drone-based vertical profiling, to address this gap.

The innovations aim to provide detailed, accurate data for decentralised policy actions tailored to local conditions, he said.

At the Kotak School of Sustainability, efforts are underway to integrate sustainability into

educational curricula and research initiatives, he said.

The professor said that the school draws on principles like 'Rta' (harmony with nature) and 'Aparigraha' (minimalist living) from ancient Indian texts, combining them with artificial intelligence and large language models.

"We aim to create transdisciplinary education essential for addressing complex challenges like

climate change. From revising school curricula to introducing an MTech programme in climate and sustainability, we're working to embed sustainability at every level of education," Tripathi said.

The school is also leveraging partnerships with AICTE and NCERT to make sustainability a central theme across the Indian educational framework.

"We've developed AI models to forecast CNG demand and optimise truck routing in cities like Ahmedabad and Rohtak. Such solutions are being adapted for government agencies and other urban contexts," Tripathi said.

A notable achievement is the use of 'Digital Twin' technology to create digital replicas of real-world systems, he said.

In Bengaluru, a traffic flow model, developed as a pilot project, is capable of forecasting congestion and optimising infrastructure planning, such as metro line routes, he said. (PTI)

Allu Arjun's 'Pushpa 2' hits ₹ 500 crore mark at global box office

NEW DELHI, Dec 8: Telugu star Allu Arjun's "Pushpa 2: The Rule" crossed ₹ 500 crore mark at the global box office, continuing its phenomenal blockbuster run in cinemas.

Production banner Mythri Movie Makers, which has bankrolled the project, shared the movie's latest box office figures on social media, claiming that "Pushpa 2" has now become the fastest Indian film to hit the milestone. "The biggest Indian film is a wildfire at the box office and is shattering records #Pushpa2TheRule is now the fastest Indian film to collect a gross of 500 crores worldwide," the studio posted on X on Saturday night. The Sukumar-directed movie is a sequel to 2021's Telugu blockbuster "Pushpa: The Rise".

The second part, which released across the globe on Thursday with dubbed versions in Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, and Malayalam, debuted with a historic box office score of ₹ 294 crore gross on day one.

It 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. (PTI)



KEIRA KNIGHTLEY ON CUE CARD SCENE IN 'LOVE ACTUALLY': HAD TO REDO IT

LOS ANGELES, Dec 8: British star Keira Knightley says she had to re-shoot her infamous cue card scene in "Love Actually" as she was making her co-star Andrew Lincoln appear creepy with her expressions.

Released in 2003, the Richard Curtis-directed romantic comedy featured Lincoln as Mark, who is obsessively in love with Juliet (Knightley), the wife of his friend Peter, who was portrayed by Chiwetel Ejiofor.

People have come to consider Mark's character to be problematic, with some labelling his behaviour as that of a stalker and a creep over the time.

In the scene, Lincoln's character expresses his feelings for Juliet with cue cards, showing up at her place while her husband is inside.

Knightley, who was 17 when she shot the movie, the director of the film told her that she was making her co-star appear as a creep in the scene.

"The slightly stalker-ish aspect of it, I do remember that. My memory is of Richard, who is now a very dear friend of me, doing the scene, and him going, 'No, you're looking at (Lincoln) like he's creepy,' and I'm like, 'But it is quite creepy.' And then having to redo it to fix my face to make him seem not creepy," she told Los Angeles Times in an interview. (PTI)



Alan Ritchson's 'Reacher' season three to debut on Prime Video in February 2025

LOS ANGELES, Dec 8: The third season of Prime Video's popular series "Reacher" will premiere on the streaming service on February 20, 2025.

Starring Alan Ritchson in the titular role, the third season is based on "Persuader", the 7th book in author Lee Child's global best-selling novel series.

Prime Video shared the news at the CCXP (Comic Con Experience), held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and also unveiled a teaser of the new season.

Ritchson attended the event along with actor Maria Sten, who returns in season three as Reacher's comrade Frances Neagley.

The third chapter will see Reacher hurtle into the dark heart of a vast criminal enterprise while trying to rescue an undercover DEA informant whose time is running out, according to the official logline.

"There he finds a world of secrecy and violence—and confronts some unfinished business from his own past," it said.

The third season will also feature newcomers Anthony Michael Hall, Sonya Cassidy, Brian Tee, Johnny Berchtold, Robert Montesinos, Daniel David Stewart, and Olivier Richters. (PTI)



Bollywood largely offers stereotypical roles to me, lucky to have got diverse roles: Sanjay Mishra

MUMBAI, Dec 8: Actor Sanjay Mishra says he is grateful to directors who gave him the opportunities to play diverse characters, especially in an industry that is fixated on casting him in comedic roles.

The actor has established a name for himself, primarily through comedic roles in films like "Golmaal: Fun Unlimited", "Dhamaal", "All the Best: Fun Begins", "Bunty Aur Babli", and "Bhool Bhulaiyaa" two and three, among others.

At the same, Mishra has also showcased his range as an actor with performance-driven parts in films such as "Ankhon Dekhi", "Masana", "Vadh", and "Bhakshak". "Rajat Kapoor and Subhash Kapoor allowed me to be part of movies like 'Ankhon Dekhi' and 'Phas Gaye Re Obama' respectively. But here in the industry, they offer similar roles to an actor.

"For instance, they need Johnny Lever, and Sanjay Mishra for a particular scene in a movie, and cast them in those parts," Mishra told PTI in an interview.

Citing the example of late Hindi

cinema icon Mehmood, the actor said people knew him mostly for comedic roles but he also made "Kunwara Baap", a film with a serious message about polio vaccination. "If you don't take a chance, then how will things change?" he asked.

Mishra believes that it is the fear of losing money that prevents filmmakers from casting actors like him in more unconventional roles.

"A lot of money goes into making a movie. For instance, if I would've got the role of Bhoot in 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa', then the film would be minus ₹. 400 crores.

"In the industry, it is fixed that this kind of role is made for so-and-so actors because it is about math (return on investment). That's why content-driven films are being made and you can do what you wish to do (with them)," he said.

Mishra, however, is committed to exploring diverse roles.

He is set to appear in the upcoming feature "Jaaiye Aap Kahan Jaayenge", a fictional tale where a man named Kishan attempts to do

good for society, especially women, by innovating a mobile toilet rickshaw to overcome this challenge.

The film stars Karan Aanand as Kishan, also known as Sadhu, Mishra as the father, Adrija as the daughter, and Monal Gajjar as the wife, alongside Ishtiyak Khan, Neeraj Sood, Subrat Dutta, and Hrishita Bhatt in pivotal roles.

Mishra recounts his collaborative journey with director Nikhil Raj Singh and said the film developed during their road trips across India.

"We should do some films that other people will talk about and say to you, 'I'll watch the film too...'

When you are a part of a story since its development stage, then you've to do it. I'm sure people in the future will say, 'You did a good film'."

Aanand expressed gratitude to the director for entrusting him with the role of Kishan.

"I liked the relationships shown in the film-between father-son, father-daughter, and husband-wife. There's a social message in the movie, which I believe will touch everyone. The film talks about a problem and

provides a solution to it," he said. Gajjar admits having reservations about portraying a woman from a village yet again.

Having taken on a similar role in her previous film "Kaagaz" (2021), she expressed concern about being typecast. "When this film came up, I was like if I do this film, then I'll get stereotyped. It will be like, I do this kind of work only. Generally, makers tend to look at you in a similar zone. However, I felt the story was beautiful with a cause, and I wanted to be part of something challenging," Gajjar said.

Both Aanand and Gajjar said "Jaaiye Aap Kahan Jaayenge" is different from Akshay Kumar's "Toilet: Ek Prem Katha". The 2017 movie, also starring Bhumi Pednekar, is a story of a man, who tries to win back his wife by building a toilet at his home.

"When you hear the one-liner you think, 'This film talks about toilet' but when you understand the whole story you will realise that the film is not just about the toilets," Gajjar said. (PTI)



Voll, Perry shine as Australia register series-clinching 122-run win over India in 2nd ODI



BRISBANE, Dec 8: Opener Georgia Voll (101) and Ellyse Perry (105) smashed commanding centuries as Australia secured a series-clinching 122-run win over India in the second women's ODI here on Sunday.

After electing to bat, Australia displayed ruthless intent, posting a mammoth 371 for 8,

the highest score against India in an ODI match.

The hosts then bowled out India for 249 in 44.5 overs, wrapping up the match with ease. "We got some partnership in between, we had a positive mindset, but we were short by few runs," Harmanpreet said after the match.

"We created few opportuni-

ties but couldn't take them, we should give credit to them for how they batted. We need to think about our plans how we will be bowling in next game. We need to bat full 50 overs, we have to come up with better plans."

Australia never looked in trouble as Phoebe Litchfield (60) and Voll combined for a

130-run opening partnership that set the tone.

Voll then joined forces with Perry for a 92-run stand, before Perry teamed up with Beth Mooney (56) for a 98-run alliance, leaving the Indian bowling attack in disarray.

Voll, playing only her second ODI, smashed 12 boundaries during her 87-ball knock,

while Perry clobbered six maximums and seven hits to the fence during her 75-ball innings.

Leg-spinner Priya Mishra (1/88) and off-spinner Minnu Mani (2/71) were hammered, with runs flowing freely during the opening wicket partnership.

India made a brief recovery in the final five overs, claiming a few wickets, but it was too little, too late.

Among the Indian bowlers, Saima Thakor (3/62) was the most successful, snapping up three wickets. Renuka Singh (1/78) and Deepti Sharma (1/59) also picked up one wicket each.

Chasing the improbable target, opener Richa Ghosh made a 72-ball 54 at the top, but India never looked in contention.

Smriti Mandhana (9) and Harleen Deol (12) fell cheaply, leaving India at 45 for 2 in the 11th over.

Things seemed to improve when Ghosh and skipper Harmanpreet (38) added 66 runs off 69 balls, but Ghosh was cleaned up by Alana King in the 22nd over.

A few overs later, Harmanpreet was dismissed by Megan Schutt, while Deepti Sharma (10) fell to Ashleigh Gardner and Jemimah Rodrigues was removed by Sophie Molineux.

Mani also scored a 45-ball 46 with four boundaries.

Annabel Sutherland was the pick of the bowlers for Australia with figures of 4/40.

India had lost the opening ODI by five wickets. The third and final ODI will be held on Wednesday in Perth. (PTI)

Musiala strikes twice to help Bayern end mini-skid without the injured Kane



BERLIN, Dec 8: Jamal Musiala came off the bench and scored twice to help a Bayern Munich side without the injured Harry Kane beat Heidenheim 4-2 in the Bundesliga.

Bayern was playing its second full game without the top-scoring Kane since he strained his right hamstring in Bayern's 1-1 draw with Borussia Dortmund last weekend. Bayern then lost in the German Cup to Bayer Leverkusen 1-0 without the England striker on Tuesday.

"We've had a difficult week," Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said. "We created a lot of chances, but Heidenheim stayed in the game. It was a very good game for us, also considering the other results."

Dayot Upamecano put Bayern ahead in the 18th minute with a goal from a corner kick, but the Bayern center back also helped the visitors level in the 50th when Mathias Honsak pounced on his bad pass with only goalkeeper Daniel Peretz to beat.

Kompany sent on Musiala for Thomas Mueller moments after Heidenheim made it 1-1 against the flow of play.

The Germany international put Bayern back in front in the 56th when he rifled a shot from just inside the area under goalkeeper Kevin Mueller.

Bayern looked ready to close out the relatively easy win when Leon Goretzka made it 3-1 in the 83rd. But Niklas Dorsch scored a second goal for Heidenheim in the

85th to keep the result in doubt until Musiala struck again in injury time.

Musiala's eight goals make him the top scoring midfielder in the competition. His goals were also his first at home this campaign.

"I've finally scored here in the (Allianz) Arena again. It feels good to celebrate with the fans," he said.

Gittens vows with another goal Jamie Gittens scored a superb goal in Borussia Dortmund's 1-1 draw at Moenchengladbach.

The 20-year-old English forward used some fancy dribbling — including four stepover moves — to cut back past a group of defenders before lashing in off the underside of the crossbar. It was his ninth goal of the season overall.

Kevin Stoger leveled in the 71st from the penalty spot to split the points.

Frankfurt falls further behind Eintracht Frankfurt dropped six points behind Bayern after a howler by goalkeeper Kevin Trapp, who fumbled the ball and gifted a go-head goal to Augsburg's Samuel Essende.

Can Uzun went off the bench to score the equalizer for Frankfurt in the 2-2 draw.

Xavi Alonso's Leverkusen followed its elimination of Bayern from the cup with a 2-1 win over St. Pauli.

Florian Wirtz and Jonathan Tah scored early for Leverkusen and Morgan Guilavogui pulled one back late for the visitors. (AP)

Thomas, Scheffler, Kim battle at Hero World Challenge; Theegala, Bhatia on tied 5th

ALBANY (BAHAMAS), Dec 8: Justin Thomas carded an incredible six-under 66 to waltz past defending champion Scottie Scheffler and moved to the top spot on the third day of the Hero World Challenge here.

With rounds of 66, 67 and 66, a bogey-free Thomas is 17-under, a stroke ahead of overnight leader Scheffler, who is now 16-under after a modest third round of three-under 69 on Saturday.

However, the star of the day was Tom Kim as the South Korean who fired a remarkable 10-under 62 to leap to the sole third slot, making it an interesting three-way tie going to the fourth and final day.

Kim began the week with a 74, which placed him tied-18th in a field of 20.

Kim, six-under for the front nine, was eight-under through 10 and then three birdies in a row put him on a 59-watch at 11-under.

But then Kim erred and gave away a double bogey on the 17th but finished with a birdie on 18th.

"I felt like I did a lot of smart things. Obviously, I chipped it really good. Again, I putted really well. "I had a few long putts where you're not really expecting to make and those go in. I did a lot of good things just to keep my momentum going," said Kim.

Thomas began the third day two shots behind the halfway leader Scheffler. The American, who had top-five finishes during his last

four visits here, drove and putted well and it included a 47-footer on the 14th.

Thomas was delighted to hit the front despite heavy wind lashing across the green.

"It was a lot more difficult, quite a bit more wind. I mean, the greens, they get a little crusty and I feel like with the wind, you know, the ball can really move a lot.

"You really have to kind of honestly guess or time it right on a lot of putts because of how much the ball can move on the greens," he said.

Scheffler birdied on the fourth, seventh and the 11th. Then came with the bogey on the 13th, his first since the eighth hole on the first day. Over the last five holes the World No. 1 had his chances but managed only one more birdie on the 18th.

But this round paled in front of his masterly 7-under 29 on the front nine on the second day.

The Indian-origin duo of Sahith Theegala (66) and Akshay Bhatia (71) are at tied-fifth at 12-under.

Theegala had a fine start to the day, sinking five birdies in his first seven holes before coughing off with a bogey on the eighth.

The 27-year-old came back with birdies on the 17th and the 18th.

Bhatia, who was consistent on the first two days, was unable to get his putting going and his first birdie came on the ninth hole. (PTI)



Joint Secretary of ACA, General Secretary of Assam Sepak Takraw Association and veteran sports organiser Dr Bishnu Ram Nunisa congratulates Advocate General to the Government of Assam, Devajit Lon Saikia on being appointed as the acting secretary of the BCCI and elected as the Board Director of the ICC. Saikia becomes the first Assamese to hold these prestigious positions.

Man United sporting director Dan Ashworth leaves club after less than six months

MANCHESTER (ENGLAND), Dec 8: Manchester United sporting director Dan Ashworth is leaving the club by mutual agreement, less than six months after taking over the role as part of an overhaul by minority owner Jim Ratcliffe.

United announced his departure on Sunday — the morning after a 3-2 loss to Nottingham Forest left the club 13th in the Premier League standings and eight points adrift of the top four.

"We would like to thank Dan for his work and support during a transitional period for the club and wish him well for the future," United said in a statement.

It did not disclose plans to replace Ashworth, who was one of the big hires under Ratcliffe after the British billionaire paid \$1.3 billion for a 27.7% stake in the storied club in February.

Ashworth, one of the most highly regarded sporting directors in soccer, was hired from Premier League rival Newcastle

and had to serve a period of gardening leave during months of negotiations before taking up his new role in July.

Along with new chief executive Omar Berrada and Jason Wilcox as technical director, he was one three appointments seen as key to Ratcliffe's overhaul.

But on-field progress has been slow, with manager Erik ten Hag fired in October after the club made its worst start to a season in the Premier League era. (AP)

Send-off row: Cummins defends team behaviour, terms Head 'a big boy' who can speak for himself

ADELAIDE, Dec 8: Pat Cummins felt his intervention was not required in the Travis Head-Mohammed Siraj send-off row since the Australia vice captain is a "big boy" who can talk for himself as the skipper hailed his team's behaviour in the ongoing series against India.

Head smashed a match-winning 140 from 141 balls in the pink ball Test as Australia bounced back from the humiliating defeat at Perth to win by 10 wickets and level the five-match series one-all.

After Head was cleaned up by Siraj, the two were seen exchanging words as the batter later suggested he had only said "well bowled".

Following Head's claim that Siraj's send-off was uncalled for, and that he had only praised the India pacer's delivery after being bowled, Siraj swiftly denied the accusation, calling it a "lie".

"Travis Head is vice-captain of the team, so he's a big boy. He can talk for himself," Cummins said during the post-match media interaction.

Siraj denied the Head claim and said, "I didn't say anything to him. In the press conference, he said the wrong thing. He lied. No way he said 'well-bowled'."

Addressing the matter, Cummins further said: "As a general rule, you normally let the boys be themselves. If you ever need to step in to intervene as captain, I

would, but as I said, for our group, I've never really felt like I've needed to do that."

Acknowledging the high stakes of the series with packed crowds every day, Cummins said: "It's a big series so there's a lot riding on it. The umpire stepped in pretty quickly, and that was the end of it."

"To be honest, they can do whatever they want. I'm more worried about our boys. Like always, I thought our boys' behaviour was excellent this week, like it seems to be every week."

Cummins went on to praise Head's match-turning innings and said he has the ability to put pressure on the opposition and take control of the game across



formats. "When Trav walked out to the crease yesterday, that was a turning point. Every time he walks out, the game's kind of in the bal-

ance, can go one of two ways and within the space of a session or so, he really took the game out of their hands.

"He just puts the pressure right

back on to the opposition, hits into weird areas. Whenever he feels like there's a small opportunity, he'll up the ante and take the game away from the opposition. So, amazing. He's done it time and again for us in many different formats, he's super impressive." The 295-run defeat at the hands of Jasprit Bumrah-led India in the opening Test drew heavy criticism from the media, and Cummins said it only motivated his team further.

"I was pretty pumped up. It probably felt like some big wickets in the context of the match. Especially, you know, with the pink ball, it feels like the bar is just a bit smaller. So, maybe, yeah, just really excited more so

than usual."

"Great week, great to level the series. We were back to our best. That's the kind of team I remember, and how we want to play our cricket. So, it's been really satisfying." "It was hot — close to 40 degrees out there, humid. Basically, we just kept rotating the bowlers and bowling all day. So, a huge effort from those guys Mitchell Starc and Scott Boland, they showed their class. I feel very lucky as a captain to have those guys."

Cummins also gave an update on injured front-line pacer Josh Hazlewood and said he's on track to be fit for the third Test at the Gabba from December 14. (PTI)

Rohit, Kohli cut sorry figure; India crash to 10-wicket defeat in Adelaide

ADELAIDE, Dec 8: Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli's never-ending technical problems against both pace and spin has set the alarm bells ringing as Indian batters capitulated twice in just 81 overs to lose the 'pink ball' Test against Australia by a comprehensive 10-wicket margin on the third day, here.

Australia maintained their tremendous record in day/night Tests and levelled the five-match series 1-1, bouncing back in style after their Perth debacle. They have now won 12 of the 13 day/night games they have played, losing only one pink ball Test in their history -- against the West Indies.

It was shortest-ever Test between India and Australia in terms of balls bowled. Only 1031 balls were bowled out of a possible 2700 legal deliveries.

Starting the day at 128 for 5, Nitish Kumar Reddy's (42) cavalier approach prevented a second successive innings defeat under lights at Adelaide as India were bowled out for 175.

Australia needed to score just 19 runs and they completed the formalities in just 3.2 overs.

India's second innings lasted only 36.5 overs, with skipper Pat Cummins using the short ball effectively to claim 5 for 57. Scott Boland (3/51) inflicted early damage, while Mitchell Starc (2/60) chipped in with crucial wickets.

Such was the dominance of the three premier Australian quicks that Cummins didn't even need Mitchell Marsh and Nathan Lyon to roll their arms in the second innings.

In fact, the specialist spinner and all-rounder bowled just five overs between them in the entire game.

After a facile 295-run win in Perth, Indian batting unit won't be too amused to learn that they survived a total of 81 overs across both innings, which isn't even a whole day of Test match batting.



It was a tale of two shoddy batting efforts with the two senior-most players Rohit and Kohli looking well past their best. Jasprit Bumrah gave it all but lacked a potent bowling partner at the other end.

For Rohit, things are getting increasingly difficult as he now has lost the last four Tests that he has captained.

In his last six Test matches, he has batted in 12 innings with just one half-century in Bengaluru. The only other innings where he crossed 20-run mark is the 11-ball-23 cameo in Kanpur against Bangladesh.

If one looks at the pattern of 37-year-old Rohit's dismissals, it is very similar to Krishnamachari Srikkanth and Virender Sehwag's way of getting out at the end of their careers.

These three were gifted with exceptional hand-eye co-ordination where they picked length at ease during their prime and reacted accordingly.

Now with reflexes slowing down, the reaction to the length is a split second slower and the way Nahid Rana, Taskin Ahmed, Tim Southee and now Pat Cummins have squared him, it speaks volumes about where he is going wrong.

He is still trying to cover the line of his deliveries but wrong judgement of length means is causing trouble. Number six wouldn't solve his issues and he needs to again bat in top three.

For Kohli, the hundred at Perth now seems like "buffet runs" which came easily after KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal added 201 runs and by the time, he came in, India

were ahead by 300 runs and the contest was as good as dead. To his credit, he hung in there for a 100 but it was tired attack that he belted to signal end of a prolonged lean patch.

His problems with the fourth stump line has persisted since James Anderson exposed it in 2014.

The 26-year-old Kohli, back then, worked hard and managed around his technical deficiency of edging behind stumps. He would stand closer to off-stump to cover the line but at 36, the movements have slowed and the effects are showing.

If India need to be competitive in the remainder of the series, the two veterans need to figure out how to get over the slump or it might just be too late.

If India had to pull off a coup, it needed Rishabh Pant's (28) excellence but Starc, the undisputed 'OG' of 'pink ball' Tests with 74 victims, bowled a delivery on length which the Indian batter jabbed at without pressing forward fully.

The regulation catch was duly accepted by Steve Smith stationed at second slip.

Reddy, who is time and again showing that positive attitude and big heart at times trumps technique, continued to defy the Australians.

In the first two Tests, Reddy's commitment and ability to fight it out has been exemplary.

He hasn't yet got a fifty but scores of 41, 37 not out, 42 and 42 show a lot of promise for the future. His seam-up wicket-to-wicket bowling can only improve if he stays around the national team.

It was difficult to survive the pink Kookaburra as Ravichandran Ashwin perished trying to hook Pat Cummins. The Australian skipper then ended Harshit Rana's misery with a short ball that could have knocked his head off and it didn't take much time to polish off the tail. (PTT)

England beat New Zealand by 323 runs in 2nd test to take unassailable 2-0 series lead



WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND), Dec 8: England conquered the Wellington gale Sunday to seal a 323 run win over New Zealand on the third day of the second test and to take a 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Joe Root completed his 36th century as England batted for less than 30 minutes in the morning before declaring with a lead of 582 runs and New Zealand crumbled under the weight of the deficit and was all out for 259 in its second innings.

England's win followed its comprehensive eight wicket win in the first test at Christchurch, capping its first series victory in New Zealand since 2008 ahead of the final test in Hamilton which begins on Saturday.

The third day differed from the first two in Wellington which were warm and windy. It was cool, gloomy and windy but otherwise England's thorough command of the series continued.

Root resumed on 73 with England already 533 ahead. He sped to his century from 127 balls with 10 boundaries and then was out for 106 at which point Ben Stokes declared England's second innings at 427-6.

Stokes left himself high and dry at 49 not out, just short of his 49th half century.

Chris Woakes had the job at first of bowling into the Wellington wind and he was rewarded with the wickets of Devon Conway (0) and Kane Williamson (4) as New Zealand slumped to 59-4 by lunch.

Brydon Carse removed captain Tom Latham (24) and Rachin Ravindra (6) before the break to lift his tally of wickets for the series to 16 at an average of 12.8.

New Zealand showed more resistance in the afternoon and evening as wicketkeeper Tom Blundell, under pressure to hold his place, compiled his fifth test century from 96 balls.

Blundell put on 94-run partnership with Nathan Smith which saw England having to chase leather for the first extended period in the series. He was out for 115 which included 13 fours and five sixes and Smith followed for a career-bet 42 just before the end.

Carse and Harry Brook have been in the engine room for Eng-

land throughout the series. Brook's 171 at Hagley Oval in the first test and Carse's 10-106 — his 4-64 in the first innings and 6-42 in the second — propelled England's to its emphatic win.

Brook then scored 123 from only 115 balls in the first innings at Wellington to lead England's recovery from 43-4 to 280.

"It's amazing to be stood here winning the series and particularly after being 40-4 on day one and I think looking back to the start of this game I think that's a huge reason why we have (won)," Stokes said.

"Harry Brook and Ollie Pope were just amazing on day one to play like that. That wicket in cricket terms was what we call a snake pit. Especially on day one it was doing plenty and providing in a way of assistance for the bowlers."

"To have the bravery and the backing of your own ability and to also have the skill to go out and play like that was just absolutely phenomenal."

Carse took 4-46 and Gus Atkinson took 4-31 including a hat-trick as New Zealand was bowled out for 125, giving England a lead of 155.

Atkinson took the last three New Zealand wickets to become the first England bowler since Moeen Ali in 2017 to compete a test hat-trick.

England's second innings of 427-6 in the second innings included contributions of 96 by Jacob Bethell — out just short of a maiden century — 92 by Ben Duckett, 55 by Brook and then Root's 106. Brook has scored 349 runs in the series so far at an average of 116 and now has three centuries and three half centuries in four tests against New Zealand.

After a stunning 3-0 series win away in India last month, New Zealand has slumped in this series, particularly with the bat and changes may be considered before the final test.

"We're obviously hurting," Latham said. "It's disappointing to lose in that fashion."

"I think after the first innings, putting them under pressure, Harry Brook played a fantastic innings there. Obviously when you only score 125 in the first innings you're on the back foot. It hurts and it's not our best." (AP)

Khel Maharan 2.0: IAC-level games begin in Morigaon

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Dec 8: The Morigaon district administration, in collaboration with the Morigaon District Sports Office, organised the constituency-level games of Khel Maharan 2.0 at the Rajiv Gandhi Sports Complex in Tinsukia, Mahmara, on Sunday. Following the successful completion of Khel Maharan 2.0 at the Gram Panchayat (GP) level, the constituency-level games commenced on Sunday. The Circle Officer of Laharighat, Pranjal Barua, inaugurated Khel Maharan 2.0 in the presence of Assistant Commissioner of Laharighat Namrata Sahu, national player Wahidur Rahman, District Sports Officer (DSO) Chandan Talukdar, Physical Instructor Simanta Baisya, sports organisers, distinguished guests, students, and teachers from various schools in the Laharighat block.

The major sporting events included athletics, volleyball, kabaddi, football, chess, and cycle racing for the participants.

Three from Assam selected for U-20 women's national team trials

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 8: It's been a proud moment for football fraternity of Assam as three girls from the state have been selected by All India Football Federation (AIFF) for the trial camp for U-20 women's national team to be held at The Sports School, 92, Vadehalli, 19th Mile, Kanakapura Road, Harohalli Bangalore- Karnataka from December 10 to 16.

The selected players are Doshmie Rowia playing as defensive midfielder and Arti Munda as forward both for Assam Rhino Football Club and Serbrika Terangpi as forward of Karbi Anglong Sports Association Girls Football Club. Horen Ingti Kathar, KASA football secretary and coach of KASA Girls Football Club, expressed joy as one of the players from his club Serbrika Terangpi has been selected in national trial camp and will get a chance to represent the country. She is the daughter of Rajen Terang of Desai Rongpi village.

"I am happy that one woman player Serbrika Terangpi representing Karbi Anglong has been selected to participate in the national trial camp to scout for U-20 women's national team. I wish her all success and get selected in the trial camp," Engti said.

Karbi Anglong athletics meet: GDSA Athletic Academy emerge champions

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 8: The 26th All Karbi Anglong Inter Sub-Association Athletics Meet, 2024, a three-day event that began on December 6, concluded at the Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) stadium on Saturday evening. The Greater Diphu Sports Association (GDSA) Athletic Academy emerged as the overall champions, securing 57 medals, while the Hanjlangso Sports Association came second with a total of 52 medals.

The event was organised by KASA and hosted by GDSA. Executive Member (EM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Surjya Rongphar, supported the meet in memory of his late father, Tung-eh Longkamar Rongphar, by donating the winning trophies.

A total of 250 athletes from various sub-associations under KASA participated in events across multiple age categories. The competitions included races such as the 1000m, 500m, 3000m, 800m,



400m, 200m, and 100m for senior and under-20 boys and girls. For under-18 and under-16 boys and girls, races like the 1000m, 200m, 600m, and 100m were held, while under-14 boys and girls competed in the 600m and 60m races.

Other athletic events featured in the meet included long jump, shot put (weights of 1 kg, 3 kg, 4 kg, and 6 kg), javelin throw, medley relay, walk race, discus throw, and relay races.

The prize-giving ceremony took

place on the concluding evening, where medals and certificates were awarded to individual winners, and trophies were distributed to the top-performing teams. The ceremony was graced by Elina Ronghangpi, the mother of EM KAAC Surjya Rongphar and wife of the late Tung-eh Longkamar Rongphar, as well as Chesongkiri Rongphar and Nirala Beypi, the son and wife, respectively, of EM Rongphar. Other dignitaries present included Philip Teron, chairman of Food & Civil

Supplies, KAAC; Pankaj Teron, KASA general secretary; Horen Ingti Kathar, KASA football secretary; and Rajen Rongpi, KASA athletic secretary.

Athletic secretary Rajen Rongpi announced that 26 standout performers from among the medal winners will be selected to represent Karbi Anglong in the forthcoming Inter-District Athletics Meet, scheduled to take place at Sarasajai Stadium, Guwahati, from December 27.

We left Perth in Perth and shut outside noise: Starc after Adelaide success

ADELAIDE, Dec 8: Mitchell Starc, one of the architects of Australia's comeback win in Adelaide, said the hosts had left the Perth debacle behind by shutting the "outside noise" following their heavy defeat in the series-opener. A 295-run embarrassing defeat despite bowling India out for just 150 in the first innings invited criticism for the hosts from all quarters.

Living up to his reputation with the pink ball, left-arm quick Starc handed Australia a dream start by dismissing Perth centurion Yashasvi Jaiswal in the very first ball of the second Test en route to finishing with an impressive match haul of 8/108.

"There was a lot of outside noise after the game but we left Perth in Perth. Cannot really put my finger on it," Starc said after the end of the match.

About his approach with the pink ball, he said: "Nothing changes in my approach. Probably slightly fuller lengths. It (pink ball) is more like the white ball than the red ball."

"We were really positive with bat and ball and got the rewards. It's nice when the ball hits the stumps."

He further credited his skipper Pat Cummins for helping in his growth and highlighted improvements in his bowling, including mastering deliveries that move away and those that swing back. He also talked about enhancement in his accuracy with the wobble seam technique.

"I have been learning a lot from Pat Cummins over the last seven years or so. So I have added to my bow the one that goes away and still able to bring one back." (PTT)

Bumrah can't bowl from both ends, others need to take responsibility: Rohit

ADELAIDE, Dec 8: Jasprit Bumrah is only human and cannot always shoulder the responsibility of bowling opposition out all by himself, skipper Rohit Sharma said on Sunday, urging others to share the load with the premier fast bowler.

India lost to Australia by 10 wickets in the second Test and during the home team's first innings, only Bumrah stood out with a four-wicket haul.

"We are not just playing with one bowler. There are other bowlers also who will have to take responsibility and get the job done for the team, be it (Mohammed) Siraj, Harshit Rana, Nitish Reddy, Akash Deep or Prasadhi (Krishna)," skipper Rohit had a loud and clear message for his bowling unit.

The captain understands that there is a bit of inexperience in the line-up and they will grow in confidence with time.

"These bowlers have just arrived in Test cricket, it's important to give them confidence. Whenever they play a match, it's important to give them confidence. We keep planning and discussing. But

you can't expect Bumrah to bowl from both the ends and from morning to evening," Rohit said.

"It's very important to manage (all) bowlers. We discuss all this with each other. We talk to the bowler and then we make the decisions."

Rohit said that he takes workload management of bowlers very seriously.

"I speak with him (Bumrah) whenever he finishes a spell. I enquire about how his body is feeling, is he (feeling) fresh or not? It's a five-match series, we want Bumrah to play all the matches and remain fresh." Rohit knows what his lethal weapon means in the larger context of the series.

Young Harshit Rana was clobbered for 86 in just 16 overs but the skipper was against making a two-Test youngster the fall guy for a comprehensive defeat in Adelaide.

"Rana didn't do anything wrong in the first Test. He did very well. He gave the team crucial breakthroughs when they were needed. I believe that if



someone hasn't done anything wrong, he cannot be left out without a reason because then what confidence does the team get?"

"It happens, sometimes the team doesn't get what it wants. He came up against a good batsman who put pressure on him.

But he has a heart and a passion so we should back such (qualities in a player)," Rohit said.

"The player might think that you give me one match but leave me out in the next. This is not good for any player or any team, that's what I think. We should

assess what the situation is and how helpful the conditions are," he elaborated.

While he doesn't want to judge Rana on the basis of one game but if change is warranted it would be done for benefit of the team.

"But judging someone after one match is not the right thing. We always keep (all) options open for any player to play since we have to win a Test match. If we must make such changes to win a Test, we will do that." The Indian skipper feels that one doesn't need to read too much into the verbal altercation between Travis Head and pacer Siraj after the latter gave the left-hander angry send-off after a brilliant century.

While Head insisted that he acknowledged Siraj, saying "well bowled" after his dismissal, the Indian pacer countered by alleging that the Aussie batter was lying.

"There is a thin line between getting aggressive and over-aggressive. It is my job as captain to see that no one crosses the line. But a few words can be ex-

changed. Siraj knows what he needs to do for the team and he will do everything required," Rohit defended his teammate.

Probed further by the Australian media, Rohit said: "When India and Australia play, these things happen. My job is not to look at one incident but at bigger picture." Not even being able to score 200 across both innings is certainly disappointing, and the skipper made no bones about it.

"When you come to Australia, I feel the best chance of winning a Test match is by putting runs on the board. We knew that there would be challenges with that ball."

"But in the past, we've done that many times where the conditions have been a little challenging, and we've batted really well to put runs on the board, and then try and put pressure on the opposition," Rohit said.

"Like I said, that is the disappointing part, that we didn't bat well enough. We probably were 30-40 runs short with the bat in the first innings." (PTT)