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● Russian forces edge closer to key eastern Ukraine city

● South Korea's Yoon defends martial law as act of governance

8 **NATION**

● Opposition raises concerns over simultaneous polls

● Rahul Gandhi meets family of 2020 Hathras rape-murder victim



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THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXV

Issue No. 331

RNI-ASSEN/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2024 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8



Government of Assam

Driving growth and progress in every district of Assam, through the initiatives of the Education, Industry, Finance and Revenue Departments

12 Days of Development

From 11 December 2024 onwards

The Assam Government remains steadfast in its commitment to the state's comprehensive development and the enhancement of its people's quality of life. As part of its relentless pursuit of progress, the '12 Days of Development' initiative stands as a testament to this dedication. This endeavor will usher in a new era of growth, redefining Assam's future."

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam



Programme for 13 December 2024



Kamrup District

Integrated District Office Campus, Amingaon, Kamrup 11:00 AM

Chief Guest

Shri Chandra Mohan Patowary
Minister, Environment and Forest etc., Assam

Ceremonial Distribution of 'No Dues Certificate' under Assam Microfinance Incentive and Relief Scheme to Category-III Phase-II Borrowers

2,133 (Total Borrowers)

Seed Capital under Pradhan Mantri Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme

395

Financial assistance to beneficiaries affected by disasters

4



Jorhat District

Jorhat Stadium 12:00 Noon

Chief Guest

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister

Ceremonial Distribution of 'No Dues Certificate' under Assam Microfinance Incentive and Relief Scheme to Category-III Phase-II Borrowers

12,647 (Total Borrowers)

Seed Capital under Pradhan Mantri Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme

366

Financial assistance to beneficiaries affected by disasters

5



Morigaon District

Tarunram Phukan Playground 11:00 AM

Chief Guest

Shri Pijush Hazarika
Minister, Water Resource etc., Assam

Distribution of Scooters under Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award of Pragyan Bharati Scheme

1,086

Distribution of Bicycles to class 9 students under CM's Special Scheme

12,128

Anundoram Barooah Cash Award through DBT to students scoring 75% and above in HSLC examination

622



Dhemaji District

Court Field, Dhemaji 11:00 AM

Chief Guest

Dr. Ranaj Pegu
Minister, Education etc., Assam

Distribution of Scooters under Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award of Pragyan Bharati Scheme

1,370

Distribution of Bicycles to class 9 students under CM's Special Scheme

9,990

Anundoram Barooah Cash Award through DBT to students scoring 75% and above in HSLC examination

537



Kokrajhar District

Green Field, BTC, Kokrajhar 11:00 AM

Chief Guest

Shri Pramod Boro
CEM, BTC, Kokrajhar

Distribution of Scooters under Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award of Pragyan Bharati Scheme

737

Distribution of Bicycles to class 9 students under CM's Special Scheme

11,504

Anundoram Barooah Cash Award through DBT to students scoring 75% and above in HSLC examination

365



Sribhumi District

Nilmoni H.S. School Playground, Sribhumi 12:00 Noon

Chief Guest

Shri Krishnendu Paul
Minister of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary etc., Assam

Distribution of Scooters under Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award of Pragyan Bharati Scheme

1,930

Distribution of Bicycles to class 9 students under CM's Special Scheme

12,126

Anundoram Barooah Cash Award through DBT to students scoring 75% and above in HSLC examination

848



Dima Hasao District

Lal Field, Haflong 11:00 AM

Chief Guest

Shri Debolal Gorlosa
CEM NC Hills Autonomous Council

Distribution of Scooters under Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award of Pragyan Bharati Scheme

134

Distribution of Bicycles to class 9 students under CM's Special Scheme

1,756

Anundoram Barooah Cash Award through DBT to students scoring 75% and above in HSLC examination

211



Cachar District

Gandhi Mela Field, Silchar 11:00 AM

Chief Guest

Shri Kaushik Rai
Minister, Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs etc., Assam

Distribution of Scooters under Dr Banikanta Kakati Merit Award of Pragyan Bharati Scheme

1,814

Distribution of Bicycles to class 9 students under CM's Special Scheme

20,061

Anundoram Barooah Cash Award through DBT to students scoring 75% and above in HSLC examination

1,229

Published by Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Assam

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Janasanyog /D/10399/24/13-Dec-24

SENSEX DROPS 235 POINTS

Markets end lower amid caution ahead of inflation data

MUMBAI, Dec 12: Equity market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Thursday due to selling pressure in index majors Reliance Industries, L&T and HUL as investors turned cautious ahead of the inflation data announcement.

Besides, weakness in the rupee and foreign fund outflows hit investors' sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 236.18 points or 0.29 per cent to settle at 81,289.96. During the day, it dropped 314.5 points or 0.38 per cent to 81,211.64.

The NSE Nifty dropped 93.10 points or 0.38 per cent to 24,548.70.

"Investors traded with caution ahead of the announcement of inflation and IIP data and steadily cut their equity bets. There is a lack of confidence amongst investors due to global uncertainty, rising US bond yields fuelling fund outflows, and persisting conflicts in the Middle East and West Asia," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Among the 30-share Sensex blue-chip firms, NTPC, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Motors, Maruti, Larsen & Toubro, Reliance Industries, Asian Paints and State Bank of India were the biggest laggards.

Bharti Airtel, IndusInd Bank, Tech Mahindra,



Infosys, Adani Ports and Tata Consultancy Services were among the gainers.

"Markets closed slightly lower on the weekly expiry day, shedding nearly half a per cent amid mixed signals. The market awaits a fresh catalyst to resume its rebound, while rotational buying in key sectors like IT and banking keeps recovery hopes alive," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge tanked 1 per cent, and the midcap index declined 0.56 per cent.

FMCG dropped 1.15 per cent, energy (1.03 per cent), industrials (0.83 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.81 per cent), oil & gas (0.73 per cent) and auto (0.70 per cent).

IT, utilities, tech and BSE Focused IT were the gainers.

"The market continued to remain range-bound ahead of domestic CPI data and a weakening rupee. Though inflation is anticipated to drop, investors are maintaining a close vigil on the vegetable prices, which will determine the future rate trajectory. Meanwhile, the Nifty IT index reached a new high after US inflation data met expectations, boosting hopes for a Fed rate cut next week," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the green.

European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended mostly higher in overnight trade on Wednesday.

The rupee depreciated by 4 paise to settle at an all-time low of 84.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,012.24 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude rose 0.30 per cent to USD 73.74 a barrel.

The 30-share BSE benchmark rose by 16.09 points or 0.02 per cent to settle at 81,526.14 on Wednesday. The Nifty advanced 31.75 points or 0.13 per cent to settle at 24,641.80. (PTI)

Gold rises ₹ 500 per 10 gm; silver at ₹ 97,000 per kg

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Gold prices climbed ₹ 500 to ₹ 80,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday due to persistent buying by retailers and jewellers, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity finished at ₹ 80,400 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. The yellow metal has jumped nearly ₹ 2,000 in the past three sessions.

Silver also rallied ₹ 700 to ₹ 97,000 per kg on Thursday. The white metal settled at ₹ 96,300 per kg in the previous session.

The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity also surged ₹ 500 to ₹ 80,500 per 10 grams. It ended at ₹ 80,000 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

According to traders, persistent buying by jewellers and a firm trend in the international markets were among the factors that aided the rally in gold prices.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange

(MCX), gold contracts for February delivery dipped ₹ 114 or 0.14 per cent to ₹ 78,888 per 10 grams.

"Gold traded within a volatile range and experienced minor profit booking at higher levels, with Comex prices facing resistance near USD 2,720-2,725 and MCX encountering a hurdle around ₹ 79,000," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

However, silver contracts for March delivery climbed ₹ 420 or 0.44 per cent to ₹ 96,222 per kg.

Globally, Comex gold futures fell USD 9.70 per ounce or 0.35 per cent at USD 2,747 per ounce.

"Gold surged past USD 2,700 in Wednesday's session after inflation data came in slightly mixed, however, market participants continued to discount one more rate cut in December's US Federal Reserve meeting supporting bullion," Manav Modi, Analyst, Commodity Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

Distress is also rising amid geopolitical tensions, especially in the Middle East, with Syria also now in the picture.

China's central bank increasing their gold reserve once again has also supported sentiment. Any change in rate cut expectations could increase volatility in prices, Modi said.

"Traders are now focusing on US economic data, including the producer price index (PPI) and weekly unemployment claims," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Besides, the US Fed and European Central Bank's (ECB) monetary policy, press briefings are expected to influence the bullion prices, Gandhi added.

The focus, however, will remain glued to the highly anticipated Federal Open Market Committee's (FOMC) monetary policy meeting next week, which will play a key role in determining the next leg of a directional move for the non-yielding commodity. (PTI)

Bihar's bold move to become investment hotspot

PATNA, Dec 12: Bihar, once a laggard, is emerging as an investment hotspot, leveraging its resources with investor-friendly policies, and ease of doing business. Firms ranging from Adani Group to Coca-Cola have made multi-billion dollar investment announcements and more are to come. Its industries and tourism minister Nitish Mishra, with his CEO-style approach to governance, is pivoting Bihar into a state that could be a gateway for investors to Eastern India. Bihar's industrial potential is limitless, he says. "Bihar has been a victim of perception. But that is changing now."

The Adani Group has announced investment of ₹ 8,700 crore in the state, Ambuja Cements is setting up a ₹ 1,200 crore unit, and Coca-Cola is expanding its bottling capacity.

The state offers investors fiscal incentives ranging from interest subvention to reimbursement of State GST, stamp

duty waiver, export subsidy and concessions for transportation, power, and land fee, he said.

Plus it offers a single window clearance not just at the time of approval but also in disbursement of incentives.

"No one needs to come to the Sachivalaya (Secretariat). No one needs to come to the government office," he said. "Whatever promise we are making, we are delivering it."

Disbursement of fiscal incentives happens every quarter without having to knock on any door, he said. And there is regular monitoring to avoid any slippages. Bihar is offering about 2.4 million square feet of ready-to-move Plug and Play Industrial Sheds, equipped with all basic infrastructure requirements, situated in industrial areas across the state. These are available for any industry at fixed rate, he said.

The state has also created a land bank of 3,000 acres for setting up industries. (PTI)

L&T's data centre biz onboards first major customer in Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Infrastructure major Larsen and Toubro (L&T) on Thursday said its data centre business L&T-Cloudfiniti has on boarded the first major customer at its hyperscale data centre in Sriperumbudur near Chennai.

The centre has a built-in capacity of 30 MW, of which 12 MW colocation-ready capacity is live across two floors, Larsen and Toubro (L&T) said in a stock exchange filing.

The company's client, a leading cloud service provider, has rented as much as 6 MW IT Load capacity, consisting of high-density racks spread over an entire floor, and a bulk bandwidth, the filing said.

The tenure of the contract is 10 years.

"This deal marks the beginning of many such collaborations and acts a testament to our commitment to delivering world-class colocation and cloud services to businesses across the spectrum. In the days to come, we are confident of redefining India's data centre landscape with our fast scalable and reliable solutions," L&T-Cloudfiniti Chief Executive Seema Ambastha said. L&T-Cloudfiniti is a newly incubated new-age business arm of Larsen & Toubro. It offers end-to-end solutions in data centre, multi-cloud services, network and data security, and application integration with single point responsibility.

As on today, Cloudfiniti has two live data centres, including the one at Navi Mumbai. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

'One nation, one election': Cabinet

to development works, he added. Union minister and BJP leader Ashwini Vaishnaw said at a media event that it is a "very positive thought" and very good for the country. However, he made no reference to the Cabinet's approval of the bill. (PTI)

Bomb threats at Guwahati

there was a bomb but asked the police to take precautionary measures in view of the possibility. We are trying to trace the origin of the mail," he said. In the meantime, the Guwahati Police along with the security team of the varsity has sanitised the campus, but has not found anything yet, the CP said.

When asked if the mail or the phone call was linked to any banned outfit like ULFA(I), the official denied any such possibility. "Further investigation is going on to find out details. We cannot divulge anything more at this moment," Barah said. (PTI)

No court to entertain, pass

There are several cross petitions which seek strict implementation of the 1991 law to maintain communal harmony and to preserve the present status of mosques, sought to be reclaimed by Hindus on the ground that they were temples before invaders razed them.

The bench made it clear that it would be examining the "vires (legality), contours and ambit" of the 1991 law and it was imperative to ask other courts to "stay off their hands" till it passed any further orders.

"In pending suits, the courts will not pass any effective interim or final order, including order of survey, till further orders," the bench said. Senior advocate J Sai Deepak, appearing for a Hindu party, opposed the order restraining all other courts and said the parties should have been heard before such a direction.

The CJJ said it was quite natural to ask courts not to pass any order as the Supreme Court was hearing the larger issue. The bench said if parties insisted then, the matter could be sent to a High Court.

"Can the trial courts overreach the Supreme Court," asked the bench and said the apex court was already dealing with the validity of the law. Observing the court couldn't decide the matter without the Centre's response, it asked the government to file its reply to the pleas and cross ones in four weeks. It also granted a further of four weeks to other parties to file their rejoinder after the Centre filed its reply.

Notably, the bench had issued notice to parties, including the Centre, on the lead petition in September 2022. The bench also appointed nodal counsel for assisting it in the hearing on the pleas which would be listed after eight weeks. During the hearing, the bench asked, "How many suits are pending now?"

One of the advocates said a total of 18 suits pertaining to 10 mosques were pending in several courts across the country. "Ultimately, we will have to hear the arguments," the bench said, observing the primary issue was with regard to Sections 3 and 4 of the 1991 law. While Section 3 deals with the bar of conversion of places of worship, Section 4 pertains to the declaration as to the religious character of certain places of worship and bar of jurisdiction of courts, etc.

The bench also allowed the pleas of various parties including Muslim bodies seeking to intervene in the proceedings. The top court is seized of about six pleas, including the lead one praying that Sections 2, 3, and 4 of the Act be set aside.

Among the various reasons submitted was the contention that these provisions took away the right of judicial remedy to reclaim a place of worship of any person or a religious group. Various Muslim parties, including the Gyanvapi Mosque management committee, moved the apex court to oppose several pending petitions that challenge the constitutional validity of the 1991 law.

The mosque committee listed a series of contentious claims made over the years concerning various mosques and dargahs (shrines), including the Shahi Idgah Masjid in Mathura, the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque near Delhi's Qutub Minar, the Kamal Maula Mosque in Madhya Pradesh, and others. It therefore said the petitions challenging the Act were filed with "mischievous intent" to facilitate lawsuits against these religious sites, which the 1991 Act currently protected. (PTI)

Delhi govt to raise financial aid to

The AAP, pitted against a confident BJP trying to upstage it in the polls due before February next year, believes the announcement would boost its chances in the elections.

Kejriwal asserted that he was a "magician" of accounts and knew how to save money to fund the scheme. BJP leaders who raised questions about the scheme and created doubts "should not worry any longer," he said. The AAP government allocated Rs 2,000 crore for the scheme under the budget. The eligibility criteria of the potential beneficiaries laid down that the woman should not be employed with the government or receiving pension, and they should not be paying GST or income tax.

The scheme is likely to benefit around 45 lakh eligible women, a significant number which the AAP believes would help the party bolster its performance in the poll, especially because of the promise to raise the amount to Rs 2,100 after the elections. The BJP, which is yet to announce its manifesto, attacked Kejriwal, asking why the AAP government did not implement such a scheme for women in Punjab despite a similar announcement made by him before the elections in the state in 2022.

"Kejriwal is only repeating his fake promise. Even during the Lok Sabha polls in Delhi, they got women to fill up forms but paid nothing to them," Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva claimed. Delhi chief minister Atishi said the honorarium amount will be raised to Rs 2,100 after the elections. (PTI)

Jorhat-Jhanji NH to be

in the past and also wrote to him urging that work on the road be completed at the earliest as people have been facing lots of inconvenience due to its poor progress and "deplorable" condition. Gogoi had also said that the construction of the highway has been delayed by several years and frequent accidents and long traffic jams have been common in this portion of the highway.

He had said work for several portions of the road has been 'ongoing' for the past several years and its condition was deplorable. "From frequent accidents to long traffic jams, this portion is affected with several issues," he had posted on 'X'. (PTI)

India votes in favour of UNGA

The resolution demanded immediate access by the civilian population in the Gaza Strip to basic services and humanitarian assistance indispensable to its survival, while "rejecting any effort to starve Palestinians".

It further demanded the facilitation of full, rapid, safe and unhindered entry of humanitarian assistance, at scale and under the coordination of the United Nations, to and throughout the Gaza Strip and its delivery to all Palestinian civilians who need it, including to civilians in besieged north Gaza, who are in urgent need of immediate humanitarian relief. It also demanded that the parties fully comply with their obligations under international law in relation to persons they detain, including by releasing all those arbitrarily detained. It called upon all parties to fully comply with international law, including international humanitarian law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians, especially women and children.

It reiterated its unwavering commitment to the vision of the two-state solution, with the Gaza Strip as part of the Palestinian State, and where two democratic States, Palestine and Israel, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, consistent with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The resolution rejected any attempt at demographic or territorial change in the Gaza Strip, including any actions that reduce the territory of the Gaza Strip, and stresses the importance of unifying the Gaza Strip with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority.

Last week, India voted in favour of a General Assembly resolution that called for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and reiterated the call for achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The draft resolution 'Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine' tabled by Senegal was overwhelmingly adopted in the 193-member General Assembly on Tuesday.

India was among the 157 nations that voted in favour, while eight Member States - Argentina, Hungary, Israel, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea and the United States voted against it. Cameroon, Czechia, Ecuador, Georgia, Paraguay, Ukraine, and Uruguay abstained. (PTI)

Inaugural Tribal Cultural Confluence

display their rich cultural folk dances, songs, and other cultural activities.

On December 14 the flags of AJSM and KCS will be hoisted. It will be followed with a seminar on 'Necessity to unite the Aom Janajati culture and future plan' with chief speaker Sahitya Akademi awardee, Dr Premananda Moshari and speaker Khoyasing Hanse, headmaster of Sikanigat ME School.

Dr Pabitra Kumar Pegu, working president of AJSM, will be the director of the seminar. In the evening a cultural program will be inaugurated by the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang.

On the concluding day, the organisers invited the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang; CEM of Bodoland Territorial Council, Promod Bodo; CEM of Dima Hasao Autonomous Council, Debolal Garlosa; CEM of Mising Autonomous Council, Paramananda Chayengiya; CEM of Deuri Autonomous Council, Bhairab Deuri; CEM of Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council, Tongkeswar Sonowal; CEM of Rabha Autonomous Council, Tongkeswar Rabha; CEM of Tiwa Autonomous Council, Jibon Ch Konwar; and others to grace the occasion.

Basumatari also informed that four eminent persons who have contributed to tribal culture and language, namely Roy Engthi, the architect of the Karbi Youth Festival and founding secretary, KCS; Lukas Mather from the Tiwa community; Dr Premananda Moshari for his works in the development of Bodo language and culture; and popular Karbi singer Pokhila Lekthepi, will be felicitated.



Axis Bank 2025 Outlook Report expects 7% growth in FY26

GUWAHATI, Dec 12: Axis bank's India Economic and Market Outlook 2025 report, published recently, highlighted the heightened global uncertainty in trade, elevated interest rates, slowing growth and deflation risks in China, and currency volatility.

"However, they believe the major drivers of India's economy getting back to its trend growth rate of 7% remain local", an official statement stated.

As per report current global growth forecasts show stability, but uncertainty about US policy after 20-Jan clouds visibility, it further stated.

Pegging growth at an above-consensus 7% in FY26, Axis Bank's Chief Economist Neelkanth Mishra finds support for the domestic economy in capital formation boosted by a capex cycle reboot, and tailwinds from back-ended fiscal spending in FY25, and the CRR cut and likely further macro-prudential easing helping revive credit growth.

Women entrepreneurs gather for FLO's 'Mystical Northeast'

NAME CORRECTION

The correct name of my mother is Mom Maya Chauhan as in all other documents and it was wrongly recorded as MON MAYA CHAUHAN in an online appointment receipt bearing application Reference No. 24-003476946 (ARN) Appointment ID-100026610300924 under Ministry of External Affairs Govt. of India.

**Krishna Chauhan,
S/o- Subba Chauhan,
Vill.- Durbintila,
PO and PS- Jiriking,
Dist.- West Karbi
Anglong, Assam**

GUWAHATI, Dec 12: Around 350 businesswomen and entrepreneurs from across India have gathered in Guwahati for the four-day interstate meet titled 'Mystical Northeast' hosted by the FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO).

The event, which kicked off on Thursday, is being held for the first time in the northeastern region, with activities planned in both Guwahati and Shillong.

This interstate meet, an annual feature of the organisation, aims to foster networking, idea exchange, and business collaboration among women entrepreneurs from all corners of India.

The 'Mystical Northeast' event is set to highlight the region's culture, diversity, and economic potential.

The meet will feature a series of intellectually stimulating discussions, entertainment, and learning sessions, along with a prominent exhibition called FLO Bazar.

The bazar will showcase local arts, handloom, weaves, and traditional cultural products from the eight northeastern states.

FLO, the women's business wing of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), has 20 chapters nationwide.

The event's focus is not only on business networking but also on introducing delegates to the unique cultural experiences of Northeast India.

Joyshree Das Verma, president of FLO, emphasised the significance of the event, stating, "The Interstate Meet provides a platform for women entrepreneurs and professionals to share experiences, showcase their businesses, and network. This year, we aim to foster the exchange of ideas and create opportunities for women to collaborate and lead in their respective fields."

Verma added, "Being held in the Northeast, the meet offers a chance to experience the region's

beauty and promise. The intellectually enriching conversations, coupled with discussions on best practices and traditional cuisine, make this event a perfect opportunity for learning and growth."

Shweta Jindal, chairperson of FLO's Northeast Chapter, highlighted the importance of showcasing the economic development and cultural richness of the region. "This is a moment for the Northeast to shine as both a cultural hub and a rapidly growing economic region. With the theme 'Mystical Northeast', we invite everyone to experience the heritage, resilience, and creativity of the region," she said.

Throughout the four-day event, delegates will visit tourist spots in Guwahati, including a river cruise on the Brahmaputra, and participate in a governing body meeting and a fashion show.

The event will serve as a significant platform for both cultural exchange and economic growth, an official statement stated.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2024

THE HILLS TIMES 3

'One nation, one election': Cabinet clears Bill

Draft legislation likely to be introduced during Parl's ongoing session

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved two bills, including one to amend the Constitution to implement "one nation, one election", and the draft legislation is likely to be introduced in Parliament in the ongoing winter session, sources said.

As of now, the Cabinet has given its nod to draft legislations to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies only, the sources said.

While a high-level committee led by former president Ram Nath Kovind had also proposed holding the municipality and panchayat polls along with the national and state elections in a phased manner, the Cabinet has decided to stay away, "as of now", from the manner in which local body elections are conducted. The Constitution amendment bill to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies will not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the states, the sources noted.

Another Constitution bill proposed by the Kovind panel was aimed at creating provisions to hold simultaneous elections to mu-



nicipalities and panchayats, along with the elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, by inserting a new Article 324A. It would have required ratification by half of the state assemblies.

But the Union Cabinet has kept the local body polls out as of now.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The proposed bill will require a simple majority for passage in both the Houses. The government is keen on holding wider consultations on the bills and may send them to

ONOP good initiative: CM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 12: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said "One Nation One Poll" (ONOP) is a good initiative and it can bring more development to the country.

"In Assam, almost in a gap of two years, we are having either Lok Sabha polls or Assembly elections. This has been impacting the pace of development work. While in Odisha, people have been voting only once in five years for both Lok Sabha and assembly. This is giving more room for the development," he added.

He also said that implementing "One Nation One Election" requires the amendment of the Constitution with a 2/3rd majority in the parliament. "I am sure our Prime Minister will be able to achieve this," he said.

a parliamentary committee.

The BJP's manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls had included its commitment to the idea. Though BJP's allies such as the

TDP, Janata Dal (United), and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), all of whom are represented in the Union Cabinet, are supporting the concept, the National Democratic Alliance will need backing from some of the members of the opposition INDIA alliance besides fence-sitters to ensure the passage of the constitutional amendment bill requiring support from two-thirds of the members in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

The NDA's current strength in Lok Sabha, which currently has 542 members and one vacancy, is around 293 against the two-third mark of 361. The INDIA bloc enjoys support of nearly 235 MPs.

In Rajya Sabha, the ruling alliance has nearly 122 members, a tally which is set to rise after the ongoing process to fill vacancies are over. The Upper House' sanctioned strength is 243. LJP leader and Union Minister Chirag Paswan told reporters that the process to implement simultaneous polls has formally begun, a nod to its approval by the Cabinet, asserting that this is in the interest of the country's development. Frequent polls are a hindrance (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

Opposition calls Assam 'banana republic' after decision to link NRC with Aadhaar

GUWAHATI, Dec 12: Opposition Congress and Trinamool Congress on Thursday criticised the Assam government's decision to make NRC application a pre-condition for obtaining an Aadhaar card, stating the state has turned into a "banana republic" under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and BJP.

In an effort to link the Aadhaar card with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Assam government on Wednesday decided that all applications for the unique identity card would be rejected if the applicant or their family had not applied for the NRC.

The decision was taken in view of infiltration attempts by citizens of trouble-hit Bangladesh, Sarma said at a press conference.

"The problem of fake beneficiaries is huge in Assam. Government data itself shows how crores of public funds were wasted in the implementation of PM Kisan," deputy leader of Congress in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi said in a post on X. Sharing a news link of PTI on the Aadhaar-NRC decision by Assam Cabinet, he said people in the state are paying GST, cess, and various other duties. "...but the entire money is being funnelled into the pockets of BJP party members," Gogoi alleged.

TMC Rajya Sabha MP Sushmita Dev, who hails from Assam, said the NRC has not been notified by the Registrar General of India to date and questioned making it the basis for Aadhaar.

"Secondly, even non-citizens in India get AADHAR cards if they have stayed 182 days in the 12 months before applying. Lastly, unless the government declares a person an illegal migrant, how can they refuse AADHAR? Assam is a banana republic under @himantabiswa & @BJP4India," she posted.

Though it is not officially stated that NRC is linked with the Aadhaar card, the Assam government's move will practically set NRC application as a pre-condition for new applicants to get the unique identity cards.

According to the new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) approved by the Cabinet, the state government will verify the submitted documents and return them to UIDAI online within 45 days of receipt.

The final NRC was released on August 31, 2019, after excluding 19,06,657 people. A total of 3,11,21,004 names were included out of 3,30,27,661 applicants.

However, it has not been notified by the Registrar General of India yet, leaving the historic and controversial document without any official validity. (PTI)

HT BRIEFS

CID investigation

NAGAO: The Crime Investigation Department (CID) of the state police mechanism, has launched an investigation into allegations of some teachers in Nagaon holding fake B.Ed degrees from outside the state. The allegations claim that these teachers have been employed by the government without proper verification of their credentials. Moreover, it has been reported that some teachers have obtained B.Ed degrees from outside the state without obtaining the necessary permission from the school inspector or without being deputed. Since 2017, the government made it mandatory for secondary school teachers to hold a B.Ed degree.

Tourists visit

GUWAHATI: In a display of cultural exchange, two foreign tourists from France and Italy visited the Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary known for its rich biodiversity and stunning natural beauty, Education Minister Ranajo Pegu informed on Thursday. On their way back, the visitors happened upon sports activities at Meleng Siding Primary School and were so impressed by the atmosphere that they decided to join the students in their games. Taking to the micro-blogging site X, Pegu stated, "This morning, two tourists from France and Italy visited the Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary."

Education minister

GUWAHATI: Assam Education Minister Ranajo Pegu has urged citizens to verify their names in the Draft Panchayat Electoral Roll for 2024-25 to ensure accurate representation in the electoral process, a press release said on Thursday. Residents can access the draft rolls by visiting the official website. Additionally, a step-by-step guide is available for citizens to check their details. Alternatively, individuals can search for their information using their EPIC number by selecting their district and entering the number.

Bomb threats at Guwahati rail station, Gauhati University

GUWAHATI, Dec 12: Bomb threats were received at the Guwahati railway station and seven locations on the Gauhati University campus on Thursday, police said.

Guwahati Police Commissioner Diganta Barah said the Meghalaya Police Control Room in Shillong received a call stating that a bomb might be planted at the Guwahati railway station.

"Accordingly, we started the investigation with Meghalaya Police and also carried out precautionary measures at the station. We have so far not found any such object," he told PTI.

The "search and sanitisation operation" at the station was carried out jointly by Guwahati Police, Government Railway Police (GRP) and Railway Protection Force (RPF).

The Assam Police also received an email claiming that bombs might be planted at seven places on the varsity campus, Barah said. "The mail did not say (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

No court to entertain, pass directions in cases of religious places: SC

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: In an important development, the Supreme Court on Thursday restrained till further directions the courts in the country from entertaining fresh lawsuits and passing any effective interim or final orders in pending ones seeking to reclaim religious places, especially mosques and dargahs (a Muslim shrine).

"As the matter is sub-judice in this court, we deem it appropriate that no fresh suit would be registered and proceedings are undertaken till further orders of this court," the CJI-led bench said.

The direction of a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan stalls proceedings in about 18 lawsuits filed by various Hindu parties seeking a survey to ascertain the original religious character of 10 mosques including Gyanvapi at Varanasi, Shahi Idgah Masjid at Mathura, and Shahi Jama Masjid at Sambhal where four persons' lives were snuffed out in clashes.



The special bench was hearing about six petitions, including the lead one filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, challenging various provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. The 1991 law prohibits the conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947.

However, the dispute relating to Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was kept out of its purview. (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

TMC raises B'desh issue, demands statement from PM

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Trinamool Congress on Thursday demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi shall speak in Parliament on the situation in neighbouring Bangladesh.

The issue was raised in the Rajya Sabha in the post-lunch sitting by TMC's Parliamentary Party leader Derek O'Brien, who sought permission to raise a point of order.

He quoted Rule 251 and said he wanted the Prime Minister to come and give a statement on the Bangladesh issue. Chairman Jagdeep Thakur however said it was not a point of order and did not allow O'Brien to continue.

The refusal was followed by TMC MPs breaking out into sloganeering in the House. Talking to reporters outside Parliament, TMC's deputy leader in Rajya Sabha Sagarika Ghose said a statement on the issue should be given in Parliament by the Prime Minister. "The Parliament is in session, it is a very sensitive matter on the situation in



Bangladesh, the Prime Minister must come to Parliament and give a full statement on Bangladesh in Parliament," Ghose said. "Our party leader Derek O'Brien raised this issue today that we are deeply concerned about people in Bangladesh, particularly the minorities," she said.

"The Prime Minister should come to parliament and give a full statement and full clarification on what the government of India intends to do with regard to the situa-

tion in Bangladesh," she said. Concerns have been expressed in India repeatedly over the targeting of Hindus in Bangladesh since the interim government of Muhammad Yunus took charge in early August.

According to sources, foreign secretary Vikram Misri on Wednesday told the parliamentary standing committee on external affairs that Bangladesh had assured action against perpetrators of violence against minorities in the country. (PTI)

Delhi govt to raise financial aid to women to ₹ 2100 from ₹ 1000 after polls

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: With Assembly polls drawing closer, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced the rollout of the Delhi government's Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana, and promised to raise the monthly aid from ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 2,100 post-elections.

He, however, clarified the money could be credited into beneficiaries' accounts only after elections as the dates are likely to be announced soon. Delhi chief minister Atishi, meanwhile, said if the Model Code of Conduct comes into force after January 13, the first instalment will be transferred into the bank accounts of eligible women before elections.

Kejriwal announced the rollout of the scheme while speaking at an event organised at the AAP headquarters, and attended by a large number of the party's women workers and supporters.

The registration for the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana,

which was announced in the budget 2024-25 by then finance minister and now chief minister Atishi, will begin from Friday, he said.

The scheme originally proposed to provide ₹ 1,000 per month to all eligible women in Delhi aged above 18 years. "The registration for the scheme will start tomorrow. It will be for ₹ 2,100," Kejriwal said amid cheers of the gathering.

"This scheme is for empowering women and addressing their financial needs. While the BJP calls it free 'revdis', I see it as a step towards strengthening our society. The BJP asks from where the money will come, but I said we will give free electricity, and we did it," Kejriwal said.

The AAP leader also expressed confidence his party will perform magnificently in the polls and urged women to actively support them. "If all women work together, we will secure more than 60 seats," he said. (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

Jorhat-Jhanji NH to be completed by Feb 2025

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday assured Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi that the Jorhat-Jhanji portion of the national highway 37 in Assam will be completed by February 2025.

The assurance was given by Gadkari in response to a question posed by Gogoi in the Lok Sabha during the Question Hour.

"I had taken 10-12 meetings to discuss this road. Due to various reasons, it was delayed. Work is now going on in full swing. The Jorhat-Jhanji portion will be completed by February 2025," the minister said.

Gogoi has been pressing for the completion of the construction work of the national highway, which passes through his Lok Sabha constituency Jorhat, for a long time. The Congress leader had met Gadkari (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

India votes in favour of UNGA resolution demanding immediate, permanent ceasefire in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 12: India voted in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution that demanded an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and reiterated the demand for immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

The UN General Assembly has overwhelmingly approved resolutions demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and backing the UN agency for Palestinian refugees that Israel has moved to ban.

The 193-member General Assembly voted Wednesday at the 10th emergency special session to adopt the draft resolution 'Demand for ceasefire in Gaza', introduced by Indonesia.

India was among the 158 nations that voted in favour of the resolution while nine member states, including

Israel and the US, voted against it. Among the 13 nations that abstained were Albania and Ukraine.

The resolution demanded an "immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire, to be respected by all parties, and further reiterated its demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages."

It demanded that the parties fully, unconditionally and without delay implement all the provisions of the Security Council resolution of June 2024 regarding an "immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages, the exchange of Palestinian prisoners, the return of the remains of hostages who have been killed, the return of Palestinian civilians to their homes and neighbourhoods in all areas of Gaza, including in the north, and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza." (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

Inaugural Tribal Cultural Confluence to begin today

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 12: The first ever Tribal Cultural Confluence showcasing the hill tribes of the state is set to commence from December 13 here at Karbi People's Hall, Taralango. The Confluence is organised by Asom Janajati Sanskritik Mahasabha (AJSJM) in collaboration with the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) and supported by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

Briefing media persons on the three-day event, the AJSJM president, Debendranath Basumatari, said, "AJSJM was formed with an aim to develop, preserve, and research the rich folk culture heritage of the hill tribes of Assam and to forge a bond among the hill tribes through cultural exchange, like organising tribal cultural confluence. During the three days of the cultural event, ethnic tribes of the state will come together and take the opportunity to (**CONTD. ON PAGE-2**)

'Out of sanctioned 3,193 posts, 2,151 IFS are in position' Over 1,300 posts vacant in IAS, 586 in IPS: Centre in RS

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: There are 1,316 and 586 vacant posts of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) officers, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Thursday.

Of the total sanctioned strength of 6,858 IAS, there were 5,542 officers in position as of January 1, 2024, he said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

There were 4,469 IPS officers working against their sanctioned strength of 5,055, said Singh, the minister of state for personnel.

Of the 1,316 vacant posts of IAS, 794 were meant for direct recruit and 522 were promotion posts, he said.

Of the 586 vacant IPS posts, 209 were for direct recruit and 377 were promotion posts, the minister



said. There are 2,151 Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers in position against their sanctioned strength of 3,193, Singh said.

Of the 1,042 vacant IFS posts,

503 were for direct recruit and 539 promotion posts, he added.

The IAS, IPS, and IFS officers are selected through the civil services examination conducted by the

Union Public Service Commission annually.

The minister, in his detailed reply, also shared details of appointments made to IAS, IPS, and IFS from General, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) during the last five years.

During the 2022 civil services examination (CSE) year, 75 General, 45 OBC, 29 SC, and 13 ST appointments were made in the IAS. Similarly, 83 General, 53 OBC, 31 SC, and 13 ST were appointed in the IPS during the same period.

A total of 43 General, 51 OBC, 22 SC, and 11 ST appointments were made in the IFS during CSE 2024, according to the data shared by the minister. (PTI)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

We cannot solve problems with the kind of thinking we employed when we came up with them - Albert Einstein

AAP's go solo gamble

Am Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal has refused an alliance with Congress in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections. It assumes significance on two counts. It marks a turning point in the political landscape of the national Capital. It underscores AAP's confidence in its political dominance. But it reveals a challenge to the unity in the opposition against the BJP-led NDA dispensation. The BJP will always like to be faced with a fractured Opposition rather than a united one. Kejriwal shunning Congress has implications which goes beyond the dynamics of both the parties. It risks splintering the opposition vote which is to BJP's benefit. The BJP gets an advantage in constituencies where it will witness a triangular contest. In so many words, such electoral battles will take place in constituencies where the Congress still has a foothold. Rise of AAP has marked systematic dismantling of Congress's long standing dominance. Post its landslide victories in 2015 and 2020 elections, the AAP appears to be the first choice of Delhi's electorate. The AAP leadership believes that its brand of governance will carry the day. It is its signal to stand on its own. The AAP, having nothing to do with Congress, conveys a message to the other INDIA constituents who have recently voiced a demand for West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee heading the anti-BJP alliance. In the days to come, it is now upto the Congress to shore up its claim to the INDIA leadership.

The AAP having nothing to do with Congress is a snub too. It may be recalled that the Congress has refused seat sharing with AAP in Haryana. The Congress despite having a more extensive national support base than the AAP is facing an existential crisis in Delhi. After being reduced to irrelevance in the past decade it looked in vain for a lifeline from the AAP in the coming Delhi Assembly elections. The decision of AAP not to accept Congress as a fellow traveller in Delhi Assembly poll is rooted in real political rationale. The Congress is unable to reclaim voter confidence in Delhi assembly constituencies, the padayatra by Rahul Gandhi notwithstanding. But it is not a win-win situation for AAP in the coming election. There are problems galore, the AAP organization is not in good health. There are many desertions. AAP leadership is perhaps excluding too much overconfidence ignoring BJP's performance in the Lok Sabha polls.

Going it alone is certainly a step towards political self sufficiency for AAP. Even as it stands poised to challenge traditional political players, its decision for a solo run focuses on the problem of managing egos and balancing ambitions among the INDIA coalition partners. It is a high gamble for AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal. A victory will shoot up his stocks in INDIA and the national Opposition while a defeat will plummet it.

Pak launches major offensive to expand trade, investment ties with B'desh

By Nitya Chakraborty

On December 9 Monday, Indian foreign secretary held crucial talks in Dhaka with his Bangladesh counterpart as also the head of interim government Dr. Muhammad Yunus to find some ways for improving the bilateral relations in the wake of reports of attacks on Hindus by the communal elements of the country. The discussions were the first at the high level between the two countries in the Bangladesh capital with no breakthrough in sight though both expressed their desire to continue the dialogue.

No sooner after the departure of the Indian foreign secretary for New Delhi from Dhaka, Pakistan Government's trade ministry swung into action to identify the areas of trade and investment in Bangladesh so that in a short term, the Yunus government can get some assistance from Islamabad in meeting its economic challenges posed by its present relations with India.

Already, in the last two months, Islamabad and Dhaka had talks about the trade possibilities but now, Islamabad wants a full-fledged meeting of the Pakistan Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission proposed to be held in end December/January to start a new era in bilateral economic relations. Bangladesh is also making preparations and its ministries have been asked to earmark the areas where Pakistan can replace the supplies from Indian sources. Islamabad has mostly identified but Bangladesh is yet to make its list final as the administration is not sure to what extent, Dhaka can be benefitted by diverting to Pakistan supplies from India.

The holding of a JEC meeting in a big way is the brainwave of the Pakistan foreign ministry and the Islamabad strategy is to give some concessions to Bangladesh taking into the additional costs due to distance compared to India. Bangladesh has already requested granting duty free access to ten product categories covering 104 items. Further Pakistan is assuring Bangladesh of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

More than trade Pakistani businessmen are interested in investments in Bangladesh having a huge market. A large number of non-resident Pakistani businessmen who are called NRPs like our NRIs, are in touch with both Islamabad and Dhaka for setting up facilities in Bangladesh. Many of them are interested in technical cooperation in textiles, the premier industry of Bangladesh. At their request, Pakistan government is including the joint ventures as an important part of discussions at the coming JEC meeting. Further, Bangladesh-Pakistan Chamber of Commerce office will be set up in both Dhaka and Chittagong.

While right now, Indian officials are not generally visiting the Bangladesh government offices for discussions as they used to do before August 5 this year, the Pakistan High Commission officials in Dhaka are now regular in meeting the officials in Dhaka. The Pak officials based in Dhaka High Commission on the basis of bilateral discussions have proposed the setting up of a joint venture between the oil exploration agencies of the two countries. A proposal has been mooted to sign a MoU between the two corporations during the JEC meeting. The proposed JV will be working for joint hydrocarbon and minerals exploration. There is another proposal that an MoU will be signed between Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAF) and Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh (EPB) at the JEC meet.

The ouster of Sheikh Hasina from power in Bangladesh on August 5 and the installation of the Yunus regime was nowhere near the imagination of the Indian policy makers. South Block was confident that like earlier challenges, Hasina would rise through this anti-quota movement challenge also. But the scenario turned completely opposite. From a virtual non-entity in Hasina years, Pakistan has entered the centre stage of Bangladesh politics. Last month, Bangladesh imported 35,000 rifles from Pakistan. An agreement has been concluded that Pakistan army will conduct training of a section of Bangladeshi soldiers. Pakistan ship has landed in Chittagong Port for the first time in the last five decades. Pakistan army and Bangladesh army are cosy.

For India, it is a very very trying period. New Delhi has to act with caution and restraint and give no further scope to the people of Bangladesh to become more anti-Indian. Bangladesh knows that Pakistan is offering the incentives with political motives, these will not be of any real benefit. Economic relations with India are more meaningful and beneficial to them.

The Bangladesh trade ministries are still giving some resistance and putting questions. But Pakistan is putting too much pressure on the fragile Yunus regime to rush with his decision to agree to Pak charter at the coming JEC meeting. Bangladesh has every right to choose its trade partner, but Dhaka will lose if it ignores India and its economic assistance. It is high time, in the coming three weeks, India communicates with Dhaka and sends the right signals. Dhaka will only lose if it falls in Pakistani trap. (IPA Service)

Superstition: Holding back Assam's growth

Superstition continues to wield significant influence over many aspects of daily life in Assam, impeding progress and growth in numerous ways. Despite advancements in science, technology, and education, deeply ingrained beliefs in the supernatural persist, particularly in rural areas. These beliefs are often entrenched in local customs and rituals, shaping not only individual behavior but also societal structures. As Assam strives to move forward, it is increasingly clear that superstition represents a barrier to its full potential. Its effects reach across healthcare, education, agriculture, and gender relations, keeping a substantial portion of society bound to outdated and irrational practices.

One of the most visible and harmful manifestations of superstition in Assam is the persistent belief in witchcraft. In remote areas, particularly in the tea gardens and rural villages, accusations of witchcraft are not just rare occurrences but a prevalent social issue. When families experience hardships such as crop failure, illness, or an untimely death, they often resort to supernatural explanations. The most common scapegoats in these situations are older women, who are sometimes accused of being witches responsible for bringing misfortune. These accusations, rooted in deep superstition, lead to tragic consequences, including physical violence, social ostracism, and, in extreme cases, death. Despite the passing of laws like the Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition) Act, the practice continues, particularly in areas where education and law enforcement remain weak. The impact of such violence is twofold: not only does it result in direct harm to the accused, but it also perpetuates gender inequality, as it is predominantly women who bear the brunt of these superstitions.

In many ways, this belief in witchcraft underlines a larger societal issue in Assam, one that prevents people from addressing real problems with practical solutions. Rather than recognizing that economic hardship or health issues may have more mundane and complex causes, such as poor farming practices or inadequate healthcare, the supernatural is invoked. This reliance on the irrational holds back societal progress by obstructing critical thinking and scientific inquiry. For example, in Assam's tea gardens, which play a significant role in the state's economy, farmers often resist adopting new techniques or technologies, opting instead for traditional, sometimes superstitious practices that they believe will ensure better harvests. Such attitudes prevent the region from achieving its agricultural potential. Crop rotation, efficient irrigation systems, and modern fertilization techniques—methods that have been proven to increase yields—are frequently shunned in favor of rituals and prayers. As a result, agricultural productivity remains stagnant, and rural poverty continues to be a pervasive issue.

Superstition also hampers Assam's healthcare system. In the face of illness, particularly in remote villages, many people turn to traditional healers, religious figures, or perform rituals in the hope of curing diseases that could easily be treated with modern medicine. While traditional medicine has its place in Assam's cultural heritage, the widespread practice of relying on superstitious remedies often delays crucial medical intervention. This is especially true in the case of serious illnesses, where waiting for a ritualistic cure can prove fatal. The belief that certain ailments are the result of curses or witchcraft leads many to ignore proper medical treatment, exacerbating

health crises. In rural Assam, where healthcare facilities are often inadequate, the consequences are grave. The lack of access to quality healthcare, compounded by the pervasive influence of superstition, means that preventable diseases continue to claim lives, especially in vulnerable communities.

The education system in Assam also faces the destructive influence of superstition. Despite the increasing emphasis on education in recent years, many rural families still harbor beliefs that limit the educational aspirations of their children. Superstitions about auspicious times to begin school or the belief that certain subjects are not suitable for girls are prevalent. In many households, children, particularly girls, are often discouraged from pursuing higher

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

education due to superstitious ideas about their future roles in society. Some parents, influenced by belief systems that prioritize marriage over education, may even prevent their daughters from completing their schooling. This stunted educational development leads to a cycle of poverty, where women are left with few opportunities for economic independence or social mobility.

Superstitions are not limited to the private sphere but extend into the broader socio-political landscape of Assam as well. The public realm, where policy decisions and community activities take place, is often influenced by irrational beliefs. Politicians and local leaders may appeal to superstitions to gain favor with their constituents, using promises of spiritual interventions or invoking religious symbolism to secure votes. This manipulation of superstitions for political gain perpetuates

a cycle of superstition, where belief systems are exploited to maintain power rather than being challenged or addressed. As a result, rational policies focused on economic development, healthcare, or education are often sidelined in favor of spiritual or superstitious agendas.

Even in urban areas, where education and modernity are more widespread, superstition remains an undercurrent in public life. For example, astrology plays a significant role in marriage and career decisions, influencing everything from when and whom a person marries to what profession they choose to pursue. This reliance on astrology and other forms of divination reflects a broader cultural phenomenon in which people look outside themselves for explanations and solutions, rather than trusting in personal effort, planning, and education. It is a mindset that holds back both individual and collective growth. When life choices are made based on astrologers' readings or superstitions about the future, it limits the ability to think critically and act independently. The result is a society that remains tethered to tradition, even when it no longer serves its best interests.

The persistence of superstition in Assam's society cannot be fully understood without considering the psychological factors at play. Superstition offers a sense of control in a world that often feels uncertain. In rural areas where economic insecurity is rampant and where environmental or social conditions may seem unpredictable, superstition provides people with a way of understanding and coping with the complexities of life. It serves as a form of social cohesion, offering communities a shared belief system. However, this comfort comes at a high cost. By relying on these beliefs, individuals are not encouraged to seek out more reliable,

evidence-based solutions to their problems. They are encouraged, instead, to remain passive and dependent on forces beyond their control.

Despite these challenges, change is possible. There are already signs of a shift in attitudes toward superstition in Assam, particularly among younger generations. Education and awareness campaigns have begun to challenge these ingrained beliefs, and modern healthcare practices are slowly gaining acceptance, especially in urban areas. The rise of social media and the internet has also played a role in spreading knowledge about the dangers of superstition and the benefits of science. However, much work remains to be done. The government, local leaders, and civil society must continue to work together to create an environment where superstition is no longer a barrier to progress. Efforts to increase literacy rates, improve access to healthcare, and raise awareness about the importance of scientific thinking are essential steps in breaking the grip of superstition on Assam's society.

Ultimately, for Assam to achieve sustainable growth and development, superstition must be confronted head-on. It is not merely an issue of individual belief but one that affects the entire fabric of society. Superstition holds back progress by preventing people from accessing the tools they need to improve their lives—education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. If Assam is to move forward, it must free itself from the chains of superstition and embrace rational thinking, scientific inquiry, and modern practices. Only then will the state be able to unlock its full potential and build a brighter, more prosperous future for all its people. (The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

How to increase voter turnout in elections

By: Dr. R.K. Sinha

The results of the Maharashtra and Jharkhand Legislative Assembly elections are now out, and new governments have been formed in both states. The Chief Ministers and some ministers have also taken their oaths.

In the Maharashtra Assembly elections, over 65% voter turnout was recorded, the highest in the last 30 years. This is significant for two reasons: first, it shows an almost 4% increase compared to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, and second, it is close to the average national voter turnout of around 65.66%.

But the question arises—can this voter turnout percentage be considered sufficient for a strong democracy? Certainly not! Then, what can be done? This is a serious issue that all responsible citizens of the country need to think about how can voter turnout be increased in elections?

As mentioned above, the Maharashtra Assembly elections recorded over 65% voter turnout, the highest in the last 30 years. This is significant for two reasons: first, it shows an almost 4% increase compared to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, and second, it is close to the average national voter turnout of around 65.66%.

Maharashtra's data is noteworthy because the state has the largest urban population in the country. Historically, it has lagged behind the national average due to low voter turnout in cities and towns.

However, a closer look at Maharashtra's data reveals that voter apathy in urban areas hasn't entirely disappeared. For example, Western Maharashtra's Kolhapur district recorded a high voter turnout of 76.25%, followed by Gadchiroli a region often in the news for Maoist activities at 73.68%. In contrast, Mumbai City district recorded a low voter turnout of 52.07%. Similar figures were observed in other urban districts like Pune, Thane, and Mumbai Suburban.

Power plays and electoral controversies in Maharashtra's political shift

By: Dipak Kurni

The political landscape of Maharashtra has recently witnessed dramatic upheavals following the resounding victory of the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance in the Assembly elections. Devendra Fadnavis, a seasoned leader and former Chief Minister, has returned to power, underscoring the BJP's political strategy and dominance in the state. Yet, this transition of power has not been without its share of internal discord and controversies, highlighting the complexities of coalition politics and the nuanced interplay of electoral strategies.

After the BJP's spectacular success, securing 132 of the 288 seats, the Mahayuti alliance seemed poised for celebratory fireworks. However, the post-election period revealed internal fissures, particularly in the dynamics involving Eknath Shinde, the former caretaker Chief Minister, who retreated to his village in Satara amid the unfolding drama. Shinde, who had risen to prominence by splitting from the Shiv Sena to form a BJP-backed government, believed his tenure as Chief Minister was guaranteed for another term. His aspirations, however, collided with the political calculus of the BJP's central leadership, which ultimately favored Fadnavis.

Shinde's disappointment stemmed from his expectation that his leadership, accessibility, and cooperation as a junior partner in the ruling alliance would secure his continuation in the role. However, the BJP's leadership recognized Fadnavis's political acumen, intelligence, and administrative prowess as indispensable assets. Fadnavis, despite being

overlooked initially, demonstrated remarkable discipline and resilience, accepting his role as Deputy Chief Minister under Shinde's leadership in the previous government. This time, however, the BJP brass could not overlook his credentials, and he was reinstated as Chief Minister.

The rise of Fadnavis underscores the BJP's strategic emphasis on consolidating power through capable leadership and meticulous planning. During his earlier tenure as Chief Minister from 2014 to 2019, Fadnavis focused on infrastructure development and maintained a hands-off approach to the operational intricacies of law enforcement, a quality that distinguished him from predecessors. His pragmatic governance style and ability to navigate Maharashtra's complex political terrain ultimately tipped the scales in his favor.

Shinde, recognizing the inevitability of his diminished role, sought to secure the influential Home portfolio. However, this attempt was thwarted as Fadnavis retained control over the department, reflecting the BJP's prioritization of centralized authority within the alliance. The Home portfolio, often regarded as the cornerstone of state power due to its control over law enforcement and the ability to influence dissenters, has historically been a coveted position in Maharashtra's political framework.

Amid the tussle within the Mahayuti alliance, Ajit Pawar and his faction of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) emerged as pivotal players. With 41 seats, Pawar's faction wielded significant bargaining power, ensuring his continued control over the Finance portfolio. Known for his adept fiscal manage-

ment, Pawar's alignment with Fadnavis further solidified the BJP's grip on the coalition.

Meanwhile, the Congress party's response to its defeat was to raise suspicions about the credibility of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Allegations of tampering and irregularities have been a recurring theme in Indian electoral discourse, but the Supreme Court has dismissed such claims



due to a lack of evidence. Notably, allegations of voter suppression through police intervention in Uttar Pradesh's Kundarki constituency, where BJP's Ramveer Singh won despite a Muslim-majority electorate, added fuel to the debate. These claims require thorough investigation by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to maintain electoral integrity and public trust.

In Maharashtra, Economist and commentator Parakala Prabhakar raised concerns

about unusually high voter turnout in certain constituencies during late evening hours, constituting potential irregularities. The Chief Electoral Officer of Maharashtra, S Chockalingam, clarified that voters waiting in queues after 6 pm constituted only 1 percent of the total turnout and attributed the late-night activity to the logistics of securing EVMs. Nonetheless, such allegations underscore the need for transparency and robust mechanisms to address public doubts.

The political culture of Maharashtra, distinct from that of Uttar Pradesh, is marked by a more nuanced and democratic ethos. This differentiation was evident in constituencies like Mumbai City, where Aditya Thackeray of the Opposition secured a predictable victory, albeit with a reduced margin. Such outcomes reaffirm the resilience of Maharashtra's diverse political spectrum despite the BJP's overarching dominance.

In conclusion, the formation of the BJP-led Mahayuti government in Maharashtra highlights the multifaceted dimensions of coalition politics, electoral strategy, and governance. While the BJP's ability to consolidate power through decisive leadership and grassroots mobilization remains evident, the internal dynamics within the alliance reflect the inherent challenges of managing competing ambitions. As the government takes shape under Fadnavis's leadership, the focus will undoubtedly shift to addressing pressing developmental priorities and maintaining the delicate balance of coalition governance in one of India's most politically significant states. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurni@gmail.com)

How the untiring, dangerous work for human rights has given life to support for Palestine

By: Nandita Haksar

Is it antisemitic to criticise Zionism? This was the motion up for debate at the Munk Debate, held in honour of industrialist and free speech advocate Peter Munk. Journalist Douglas Murray supported the motion at the debate in Toronto on June 17 while news anchor-writer Mehdi Hasan opposed it. The motion was resolved with the conclusion that anti-Zionism is indeed antisemitism.

India has no history of antisemitism. So why have meetings about Palestine been banned and demonstrations by students protesting against the genocide being committed in Gaza been stopped?

The unwritten reason is that for a Hinduva government, the Palestinian cause is identified with Islam, the religion of a majority of the Palestinians.

But debates about religion eclipse the central fact that the real issue is land: Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory.

This occupation was "founded on brute force, repression and fear, collaboration and treachery, beatings and torture chambers, and daily intimidation, humiliation and manipulation", writes political scientist-activist Norman Finkelstein in his 2018 book, *Gaza: An Inquest into its Martyrdom*.

It is for this reason that India, in the first years after independence from British colonialism, forbade citizens from visiting Israel and South Africa as a gesture of solidarity with the people of Palestine and South Africa fighting against apartheid.

It is also the reason why many have refused to condemn the militant group Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7 last year that killed at least 1,200 people. This is despite the fact that they neither support Hamas's ideology nor do they condone the attack on civilians.

As scholar Edward Said wrote in *Covering Islam*, the Western media and experts have been guilty of "exaggerated stereotyping and belligerent hostility" towards Muslims in general and Arabs in particular.

Scholar Jack G Shaheen's analysis of 1,000 Hollywood movies similarly found "cinema's systematic, pervasive and unapologetic degradation and dehumanization" of Arab men, women and children. In his 2009 book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Shaheen wrote that Arabs have been depicted as "brute



murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil rich dimwits and abusers of women".

This outlook is evident in the refusal of Western countries and the English media to use the term "genocide" to refer to the mass violation of human rights in Gaza. Increasingly, the human rights discourse has been used by the West to justify the Israeli occupation and freedom of speech has been weaponised to vilify Arabs.

Anyone who has seen the bombing of hospitals, the testimonies of doctors who have worked in hospitals there, the images of children buried under rubble and the relentless bombing of infrastructure would be hard put to deny that Israel is not committing war crimes that amount to genocide.

It is the human rights community that has played a vital role in documenting these crimes against humanity and even if many of these reports lie buried, they are a record of Israel's violations.

More recently, Amnesty International documented how Israeli forces have carried out acts prohibited under the Genocide Convention, with the specific intent to destroy Palestinians in Gaza.

"Israeli forces have caused unprecedented destruction, at a level and speed not seen in any other conflict in the 21st century, leveling entire cities and destroying critical infrastructure, agricultural land and cultural and religious sites, rendering large swathes of Gaza uninhabitable," says the report released on December 4.

There is no telling what the impact of the International report will be. There will certainly be an effort to undermine its influence.

Long before Hamas's attack on October 7, Israel had been condemned for crimes amounting to genocide in a 2009

United Nations Fact Finding report by Richard Goldstone, former judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa and a Jew from a family that supported Zionism.

The United Nations appointed the committee after the three-week long "Operation Cast Lead", as Israel called it, during which 1,400 Palestinians were killed between December 2008 and January 2009.

Goldstone's report found that the operation was anchored in a military doctrine aimed at disproportionate destruction and disruption in the lives of as many people "as a legitimate means to achieve military and political goals". The goal was to clear: "dire consequences for the non-combatants in Gaza". The report added that this policy was rooted in the humiliation and dehumanisation of the Palestinian population.

The report also commended the resilience and dignity of the residents of Gaza and recommended that the Security Council "refer the situation in Gaza to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court".

Israel's reaction was predictable, dismissing the report and condemning Goldstone, who was accused of being an antisemite and a traitor to the Jewish people. The vilification and defamation of Goldstone even led to the US House of Representatives voting 344 to 36 in condemning the report as "irremediably biased and unworthy".

Finkelstein wrote that Goldstone's report was significant in heralding the dawn of the new era in which the "human rights dimension of the Israel-Palestine conflict moved centre stage – and even temporarily – displacing the fatuous 'peace process'". The report also coincided with a vicious campaign in Israel and the United States to discredit human rights organisations.

Under the mounting pressure

Goldstone recanted. But he did not recant from the main charge that Israel deliberately deployed "disproportionate and indiscriminate force in order to punish, humiliate and terrorise a civilian population". How could he when Israeli soldiers and writers had boasted that the Israeli Defense Forces had unleashed "insane" amounts of firepower.

An indiscriminate and disproportionate attack on civilian areas is itself a war crime. Two decades since Goldstone's report, human rights activists and organisations have continued their work of documenting Israel's war crimes, providing activists, students and journalists with material evidence with which to expose Israel's genocidal acts.

It is also the human rights discourse that gives space to students to protest on campuses and the right to free speech to journalists such as Mehdi Hasan, comedian Bassem Youssef or intellectual-activist Finkelstein to publish his books on Israel's war crimes. Youssef's interview with English broadcaster Piers Morgan, in which the comedian highlighted the racism of the Western media, got millions of viewers from around the world.

When we listen to debates, read books on genocide and war crimes or take part in protests on political issues, it is the efforts of human rights activists and organisations that keep us informed of events on the ground, often at risk to their own lives.

The human rights discourse has indeed been weaponised and even used to justify wars. But the human rights discourse has also been used to expose war crimes. That is why it is important to remember the human rights community of activists and to pay tribute to their work this Human Rights Day. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Trump 2.0: A game changer in the Russia-Ukraine war?

By: Nataliya Butyrska

Ukraine has passed the thousandth day of full-scale war. The country has managed to stay alive in the largest conflict since World War II, despite Russia's significant advantage in human and material resources, and the unreliable military assistance of Ukraine's Western allies.

Even after 1,000 days of conflict, uncertainty continues to define the Ukraine-Russia war. Following the failure of his initial blitzkrieg strategy, President Putin has shifted to a strategy of prolonged conflict, banking on the West's wavering resolve to support Ukraine "as long as it takes". According to former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, the biggest problem Ukraine has faced is the "dominance of the concept of [avoiding] escalation" in the decision-making processes of Kyiv's Western partners. This cautious approach has led to delays in the supply of Western weapons and significant restrictions on the use of these weapons, significantly worsening the Ukrainian army's position on the battlefield.

The failure of Biden's containment strategy

The containment strategy chosen by President Biden has failed to weaken the Russian economy and isolate Moscow enough to force Putin to abandon this war. Moreover, Russia has been able to rebuild its economy and its military-industrial complex, still receiving Western components for weapons production via intermediary third countries.

President Biden may have avoided the direct clash between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia, but this has not removed the threat to Ukraine's neighbours. Russian drones and missile wreckage are regularly found in Romania, Moldova, and Poland, but NATO has not yet dared to shoot down Russian air targets even over the territory of its member states. This indicates the West's inability to respond appropriately to security challenges and has only deepened relations between Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China. This was confirmed by the participation of North Korean troops in the war.

The war is causing heavy civilian casualties and significant damage to Ukraine's economy and energy sector. It is paradoxical that recently the world has been increasingly hearing about "war fatigue", not from Ukrainians exhausted by the war, but from countries that have not been directly affected by the war.

This general "fatigue" has resulted in the international community's willingness to sacrifice parts of Ukraine's territories to appease Putin. "Peace in exchange for territory" has become a deceptive strategy to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict—a process actively promoted on international platforms and in the global information space. In fact, almost three years into a full-scale war, Ukraine has once again returned to the issue of peace through concessions, as it did after the occupation of Crimea and Donbas in 2014.

Trump's quick end to the war

Donald Trump's victory significantly raises the prospects of a freeze in the Russia-Ukraine war. During his election campaign, he repeatedly said that he could end the Russia-Ukraine war in 24 hours. However, for Ukraine, the critical question remains the terms on which such a truce would be established. Trump's comments raise concern in Kyiv as he has threatened to cut off financial support and the supply of weapons to Ukraine as a way to bring both parties to the negotiating table.

While the Biden administration stated that only Ukraine should decide where, when, and how to start negotiations, Trump does not hide the fact that he will initiate the negotiation process. The biggest risk for Ukraine in these circumstances is the newly elected American president's desire to broker a "quick deal". Hasty agreements could result not only in significant concessions for Ukraine but also a fragile ceasefire that could quickly escalate into a new clash.

Donald Trump has not yet unveiled his peace plan, but his team's ideas point to the possibility of freezing the war, postponing Ukraine's accession to NATO for at least 20 years and creating a demilitarised zone along the front line, all while excluding the involvement of American financial and human resources in the peacekeeping process. The



Trump administration's desire to transfer responsibility for the situation in Ukraine onto Europeans only strengthens Moscow's confidence that the situation is developing most favourably.

Recently, Moscow has been escalating significantly and is trying to seize as much Ukrainian territory as possible, driving Ukrainian troops out of Russia's Kursk region before the United States (US) inaugurates its new president. In response to the Ukrainian army's permission to use Western long-range weapons to strike into Russian territory, the Kremlin has approved an updated nuclear doctrine. One of the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons is if ballistic missiles are launched against Russia.

Raising the stakes in the war and Putin's calculations

A high-stakes game requires strong positions from all parties. Russia is trying to gain a dominant negotiating position by intensifying missile and drone attacks against infrastructure, energy facilities, and civilians throughout Ukraine. The recent shelling of Ukrainian cities has not stopped day or night. Kyiv alone has suffered 10 combined aerial assaults in 2024, with Russia deploying 1,250 aerial weapons.

Putin's strategic calculation is not to reach agreements on ending the war and legalising 20 percent of occupied Ukrainian territory; rather, he seeks to gain control over all of Ukraine. The Russian president has repeatedly stated that Moscow is ready to negotiate with Ukraine, but based on emerging "realities" (meaning that Russia retains territorial gains) and the agreements reached in Istanbul. On 15 April 2022, representatives of Ukraine and Russia preliminarily agreed to certain conditions for ending the war, which required Kyiv to agree to neutrality, significantly limit the size of its army (number of troops, aircraft, weapons and equipment), and enact several bans on joint exercises with other countries, as well as bans on the admission of foreign troops and weapons into its territory. As for Russia's commitments, Moscow promised not to attack Ukraine again and agreed to comprehensive security guarantees with the US, Britain, France, and China. Given the complete failure of the Budapest Memorandum, which did not protect Ukraine from military aggression by one of the signatories, this agreement looks like an attempt to limit Ukraine's sovereignty in exchange for dubious security guarantees.

Putin may agree to negotiate with the new American president to break his diplomatic isolation from the West. The incentives that Trump will give him to end the war remain to be seen. Moreover, whether Donald Trump is ready to respond to all of Vladimir Putin's terms, which would automatically mean the surrender of Ukraine's interests and a weakening of the US position, remains uncertain.

There are doubts about Trump taking into account all the risks and obstacles when he prematurely claimed to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The ability to pull off a "big deal" in international relations using business templates for negotiations did not yield significant results with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Iran, and China during his last presidential term. It is quite possible that it might not work with Russia either.

Ukraine: A more flexible position and the search for approaches in the Trump era

In this situation, Ukraine can hardly hope to liberate the occupied territories and return to 1991 borders. While the Ukrainian government officially emphasises that it will not make any territorial concessions, President Zelenskyy said in a recent speech to parliament that "Ukraine may

have to outlast someone in Moscow to achieve all its goals". This refers to the diplomatic settlement of territorial issues after a change in Russia's political leadership in the future. For now, Ukraine's priority should be to strengthen its negotiating position with the support of the US and to obtain effective security guarantees. According to Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "This is a losing status for Ukraine at the entrance. In a weak position, there is nothing to do in these negotiations."

Taking into account the change in political leadership in the US, the Ukrainian government has to fulfil several important tasks.

First, matching Donald Trump's "transactional" approach to international relations, the Ukrainian government must convince Trump that continuing to support Kyiv is beneficial for the US. This is not only about Washington's geopolitical status, which could be damaged by making concessions to Putin and the threat of a renewed war; Ukraine can become an important contributor to the economic and security spheres of the West. In his Victory Plan, Volodymyr Zelenskyy proposed that Western companies can engage in the joint protection and extraction of important natural resources, including rare-earth metals. He also put forth the possibility of replacing certain US army contingents stationed in Europe with Ukrainian units after the war.

Second, Ukraine needs to develop an algorithm for long-term support by European countries, which will be forced to take greater responsibility for security in the European continent and increase financial spending on defence. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the EU has been providing significant political, economic, financial, and humanitarian assistance to Kyiv. Supporting Ukraine is in the interests of European countries because, according to EU High Representative Josep Borrell, "The ten-year security agreement, which the EU signed with Ukraine in June, remains valid. We supported and will continue to support Ukraine. And we will do it not because we are very friendly and very generous - but because it is in our interests! Ukraine's security is part of our security." Many European countries allocate a large portion of their military budgets to support Ukraine. Another important trend has been the participation of European companies in joint arms production, investment in the Ukrainian military sector, and the localisation of Western arms production plants in Ukraine.

Third, Ukraine must mobilise its internal resources. On 18 November, the President of Ukraine presented a 10-point conceptual document, the Internal Resilience Plan, which envisages consolidating efforts and resources for long-term struggle. This plan covers various areas, including maintaining unity, strengthening the army and defence industry, changing approaches at the front, protecting energy and improving the quality of human capital. In the context of a long-term war, such a strategy is necessary to adapt the state's governance and society to new realities.

President Zelenskyy has stated that the decisive moments of this war will take place next year. Trump's desire to end the war quickly, on one hand, accelerates the prospect of peace for Ukraine. On the other hand, it reduces the probability of a just and lasting peace, which Ukraine has long advocated for. In the current situation, Vladimir Putin sees favourable conditions for achieving his goals and has set terms that could lead not only to Ukraine's capitulation but also to the loss of its statehood. However, given Trump's unpredictability, forecasting an end to the war remains highly uncertain. (Courtesy: ORF)

Superpower retreats and their fallout

By: Bhopinder Singh

The Vietnam War was fought between the forces of the North (supported by the Soviet Union and China) and those of the South (supported by the United States of America). While it lasted twenty years (1955 to 1975) the direct involvement of the American troops lasted about a decade from 1965 onwards. The scars of 58,281 US fatalities and 303, 644 wounded had tired the spirits, emotions and morale of the Americans, and they secretly negotiated a pull-out plan under the garb of the Paris Peace Accords that the Americans knew would not hold up.

The Americans made many insincere and knowingly immoral promises to intervene on behalf of its ally, the Southern side, but when the push came to shove, it pushed the Southern side under the bus with non-intervention or support. Later day US President Ronald Reagan was to coin the term 'Vietnam Syndrome' to suggest a reluctance to support an international military intervention, beyond a point. A similar renege of support after almost a decade of direct military intervention was to face the Soviet-propped puppet government of Afghanistan, under Mohammad Najibullah.

Ultimately the political and popular will of the Soviets had waned as the human and financial cost of continuing the war in Afghanistan had waned. A few years later, exactly as it had happened in Vietnam, the Afghan government was ousted in a bloody offensive and Najibullah's corpse was dragged behind a truck through the streets of Kabul. Eventually, the Soviets left him to his fate. It was the sort of end of a regime that was far less than ideal as the land of many 'Great Games' earlier i.e., Afghanistan, had seen similar consequences of bloodlust with the British troops leaving Afghanistan in Jan 1842 (only one survivor had managed to reach the British controlled township of Jalalabad). Sadly, even Najibullah's ouster wasn't to be the last of the 'abandoning' of a regime in Kabul.

In 2021, an exhausted and dispirited American force 'abandoned' its ally i.e., the Ashraf Ghani government, in Kabul on the pretext of a deal signed between the Taliban and the US in Doha.

Everyone knew that the deal would not hold up and lo behold the Taliban stormed into Kabul, soon after. The 'longest war in US history' with a two trillion financial cost, a no-win situation, and mounting pictures of 'US body bags' had yet again forced the Americans to push their ally under the bus. By blindsiding its purported ally, the Americans had unilaterally let down its ally after making promises to defend the same. Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh was left mocking the US on its pusillanimous stand, "when a superpower decided to become a mini power".

Recently, and yet again, it was the decisive reluctance of a major power and ally



i.e., Russia and Iran, that left the beleaguered Syrian Government of Bashar Al Assad, to its inevitable fate and within days of some token support, the Syrian capital of Damascus fell to rebels, who routed the Russia-Iran supported Bashar Al Assad regime. To be fair, the 'abandonment' of Bashar Al Assad cannot be compared to the Vietnam or Afghanistan situations, as the principal power behind the Syrian regime no longer had the wherewithal to continue supporting, even if they wanted to.

Russia is already bleeding and reeling under the humiliating and costly stalemate on the Ukrainian front, whereas the Iranians

and their strategic regional proxies (e.g. Hezbollah and the Houthis) were getting systematically decimated and attacked with literal impunity.

After the Syrian rebels had taken over Idlib and were dashing the next profile target of Homs, the Russian fighter planes did bomb some rebel strongholds, but it simply wasn't enough. Soon, the Syrian rebels made the kill for Damascus, and the isolated and unsupported forces of Bashar Al Assad simply couldn't hold on. History repeated itself and in the face of supporting foreign allies failing the regime, it was tantamount to pushing the same under the bus!

The lessons are substantial for other regions facing similar belligerence or circumstances i.e., counting on declared allies cannot be assumed, definitely and certainly not, infinitely. When there were grave tensions on Indo-Sino borders in 2020, then President Donald Trump (author of a book aptly titled, 'The Art of Deal') made meaningless offers to 'negotiate' between the two sides, as opposed to denouncing Chinese expansionism and aggression, unequivocally. While certain military orders with Delhi were indeed signed and expedited – the same made great transactional and commercial sense to the American defence sector. This is something that the already cornered Ukrainian President Zelenskyy must be fearing as President-elect Donald Trump sheepishly talks about yet another 'deal' to supposedly end the

Russia-Ukraine war. History is instructive of the consequences that await whenever similar 'deals' (read, abandonment) are made by a Superpower, be it the Americans or most recently, the Russians in Syria. Reveling on the latest situation in Syria, Donald Trump tweeted, "Assad is gone. He has fled his country."

His protector, Russia...led by Vladimir Putin, was not interested in protecting him any longer – while it is true, it has been no different for the US, throughout history. Trump too has the blood of letting down Afghanistan on his hands. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Russian forces edge closer to key eastern Ukraine city in 'intense' fighting

'Its capture would compromise Ukraine's defensive abilities and supply routes'

KYIV, Dec 12: Fighting around the key eastern Ukraine city of Pokrovsk is "extremely intense" after a monthlong Russian push, Ukraine's top military commander said, with analysts estimating Russian forces are now within just a few kilometres of the city.

Ukrainian troops repelled nearly 40 Russian attempts to storm defences around Pokrovsk over the previous 24 hours, the General Staff said in a battlefield report Thursday.

"Russian occupiers are throwing all available forces forward, attempting to break through the defences of our troops," Ukrainian army chief Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi said in a Facebook post late Wednesday. His forces are outnumbered, he said.

Ukraine's stretched defences in Donetsk have been creaking since early this year under a fierce Rus-



sian drive to capture its neighbour's entire eastern Donbas region.

Russian forces are trying to overwhelm Ukraine's battlefield defences with sheer numbers of troops and powerful glide bombs that blast fortifications to smithereens.

Pokrovsk, which had a population of about 60,000 before Rus-

sia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, is one of Ukraine's main defensive strongholds and a key logistics hub in the Donetsk region. Its capture would compromise Ukraine's defensive abilities and supply routes and would bring Russia closer to its stated goal of seizing the entire Donetsk region. But Ukraine's dogged resistance

and Western military aid have rendered the gains costly for the Kremlin in losses of troops and armour.

A major worry for the Kyiv government is that tens of billions of dollars of key US military support to hold Russia at bay may dry up under President-elect Donald Trump.

The Institute for the Study of War estimated late Wednesday that Russian forces have moved to within about 6 kilometres of Pokrovsk, approaching from the south.

The Donetsk operation has had "a massive cost" for Russian forces, the Washington-based think tank said. Those losses "will temper their ability to translate these gains into more far-reaching offensive operations" in the months ahead, it said.

Though the Russian push has

been slow moving, it has recently accelerated in Donetsk and compelled Ukrainian defenders to make localised retreats. Major battlefield victories have eluded the Russians.

Ukrainian media have reported tensions between Ukraine's commanders as the military pressure has built. Unconfirmed reports said Syrskyi, the military chief, had personally taken charge of some brigades around Pokrovsk.

A renowned Ukrainian military officer, Serhii Filimonov, commander of the "Da Vinci Wolves" battalion of the 59th Motorized Brigade, described Pokrovsk's defence as a "disaster."

Senior officers are placing "unrealistic" demands on units and are unfamiliar with circumstances on the front line, Filimonov wrote on his Telegram channel this week. (AP)

South Korea's Yoon defends martial law as act of governance, vows to 'fight to the end'



SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA), Dec 12: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol defended his martial law decree as an act of governance and denied rebellion charges, vowing Thursday to "fight to the end" in response to attempts to impeach him and intensifying investigations into last week's dramatic move.

The main opposition Democratic Party quickly slammed Yoon's speech as "an expression of extreme delusion" and "false propaganda." Later Thursday, it and other opposition parties submitted a new impeachment motion against Yoon for a floor vote this weekend.

The opposition-controlled parliament also passed motions Thursday to impeach and suspend Yoon's police chief and justice minister over the imposition of martial law, escalating the pressure on Yoon's embattled government.

Yoon's short-lived December 3 martial law declaration has generated political chaos and large protests calling for his ouster. The decree brought hundreds of armed troops who attempted to encircle parliament and raid the election commission, though no major violence or injuries occurred. Martial law lasted only six hours as Yoon was forced to lift it after the National Assembly unanimously voted it down.

In a televised speech Thursday, Yoon, a conservative, said he enacted martial law as a warning to the liberal Democratic Party. He called the party "a monster" and "anti-state forces" that he said tried to use its legislative muscle to impeach top officials, undermined the government's budget bill for next year and sympathised with North Korea.

"I will fight to the end to prevent the forces and criminal groups that have been responsible for paralysing the country's government and disrupting the nation's constitutional order from threatening the future of the Republic of Korea," Yoon said. "The opposition is now doing a sword dance of chaos, claiming that the declaration of martial law constitutes to an act of rebellion. But was it really?"

Yoon said martial law was an act of governance that cannot be the subject of investigations and doesn't amount to rebellion. He said the deployment of nearly 300 soldiers to the National Assembly was designed to maintain order, not dissolve or paralyse it.

Kim Min-seok, head of a Democratic Party task force, dismissed Yoon's statement as "an expression of extreme delusion" and "a declaration of war against the people." Kim accused the president of attempting to incite pro-Yoon riots by far-right forces. He said the Democratic Party will focus on getting the motion impeaching Yoon passed on Saturday.

It's unclear how Yoon's comments will affect his fate. Opposition parties hold 192 seats combined, eight votes short of a two-thirds majority of the 300 members of the National Assembly. The earlier attempt to impeach Yoon failed with most lawmakers from Yoon's governing People Power Party boycotting the vote. Yoon's speech was expected to

deepen a divide inside the PPP. When party chair Han Dong-hun, a critic of Yoon, called Yoon's statement "a confession of rebellion" during a party meeting, Yoon loyalists angrily jeered and called on Han to stop speaking. Han has urged party members to vote in favour of Yoon's impeachment.

Opposition parties and even some PPP members say the martial law decree was unconstitutional. South Korean law allows the president to declare martial law during wartime or similar emergencies, and they said such a situation did not exist.

They argue that deploying troops to seal the National Assembly to suspend its political activities amounted to rebellion because the constitution doesn't give a president such rights in any situation.

The country's law enforcement authorities are investigating whether Yoon and others involved in imposing martial law committed rebellion, abuse of power and other crimes. A conviction for rebellion carries a maximum penalty of death.

The National Assembly on Thursday passed a bill that could introduce an independent counsel to investigate Yoon on rebellion charges without his approval. A bill it endorsed earlier this week on appointing an independent counsel requires Yoon's approval. The Justice Ministry on Monday placed an overseas travel ban on Yoon.

South Korean law gives a president immunity from prosecution while in office, except for allegations of rebellion or treason. This means that Yoon can be questioned and detained by investigative agencies over his martial law decree, but many observers doubt that authorities will forcefully detain him because of the potential for clashes with his presidential security service.

On Wednesday, Yoon's presidential security service didn't allow police to search the presidential office.

Yoon's statement was seen as an about-face. Last Saturday, he apologised over declaring martial law and said he wouldn't avoid responsibility for it. He said he would leave it to his party to chart a course through the political turmoil, "including matters related to my term in office."

On Wednesday, Yoon's former defence minister, Kim Yong Hyun, was arrested on allegations of playing a key role in a rebellion and committing abuse of power. The national police chief, Cho Ji Ho, and the head of Seoul's metropolitan police have been detained while their actions of sending police forces to the National Assembly are investigated as a criminal matter.

The impeachment motion against Cho accuses him of committing rebellion and violating other laws by deploying police forces to the parliament after martial law was announced. The separate motion for Justice Minister Park Sung Jae accuses him of rebellion because he didn't question the constitutionality of Yoon's martial law decree and didn't actively stop its enforcement. (AP)

Pakistan court indicts Imran Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi in Toshahana 2.0 case



ISLAMABAD, Dec 12: A Pakistan court on Thursday indicted former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the second Toshahana case.

Special Court Judge Shahrukh Arjumand, who presided over the hearing at the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi, framed the charges against them.

Also known as Toshahana 2.0, the case was initially filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). However, in light of NAB Amendments, the Federal Investigation Agency took over the case and filed its challan in September.

The Toshahana case involves allegations of corruption against Khan and Bibi, specifically regarding the sale of gifts from foreign dignitaries.

They were arrested in the said case on July 13 — the same day they were acquitted in the iddat case. However, the Islamabad High Court approved her post-arrest bail plea in the case in Oc-

tober and she was released after spending months behind bars.

Separately, the IHC dismissed an FIA plea to revoke her bail after she appeared in court for the hearing of the Toshahana 2.0 case, also called the jewellery set case.

The FIA had argued that she had failed to appear in court multiple times, which, they claimed, amounted to abuse of the court's trust.

Bibi's lawyer, Salman Safdar, informed the court that his client was present and had not absented herself from previous hearings without valid reasons.

Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb stated that if a defendant fails to appear in court after being granted bail, the trial court could revoke the bail, but he refused to withdraw the bail.

Khan has been implicated in dozens of cases since his government was toppled through a no-confidence vote in April 2022. (PTI)

Pro-democracy ex-lawmaker in Hong Kong convicted of rioting during 2019 protests

HONG KONG, Dec 12: A Hong Kong judge on Thursday convicted a pro-democracy former lawmaker of rioting during mob violence at a subway station at the height of the city's anti-government protests in July 2019.

Prosecutors accused Lam Cheuk-ting of provoking a group of about 100 men armed with wooden poles and metal rods who attacked protesters and bystanders at a train station. The men, all clad in white shirts, in contrast with the black worn by protesters, claimed to be protecting their homeland in Yuen Long, a residential district in Hong Kong's New Territories. Dozens of people, including Lam, were injured in the violence, a key chapter that escalated the protest movement as the public criticised police for their delayed response. The landmark ruling could shape the city's historical narrative of the incident.

Judge Stanley Chan ruled that Lam was not acting as a mediator as he had claimed, but rather was trying to exploit the situation for political gain.

He said Lam's words directed at the white-shirted men had "fanned the flames." Lam, who is already in prison on a national security charge, is expected to be sentenced at a later date.

Chan was still reading out the verdicts for six other lesser-known co-defendants in the



same case. The prosecution alleged the seven defendants had either berated the white-shirted men, used obscene hand gestures, hurled objects or shot jets of water by pointing a hosepipe at them.

The defendants had pleaded not guilty to the rioting charge.

During the trial, Lam said he chose to go to Yuen Long because he hoped his then position as a lawmaker could pressure the police to act quickly. He said he could not leave the scene while fellow residents were in danger. Some defendants who targeted the white-shirted men with a hosepipe argued that they were just trying to stop the attackers from advancing.

The 2019 protests were sparked by a proposed extradition law that would have allowed criminal suspects in Hong Kong to be sent to the mainland for trial. The govern-

ment withdrew the bill, but the protesters widened their demands to include direct elections for the city's leaders and police accountability.

The social movement was the biggest challenge to the Hong Kong government since the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997. In response, Beijing imposed a national security law in 2020, leading to the arrest of many activists. Others were silenced or went into exile.

In November, Lam was sentenced to six years and nine months in jail in the city's biggest national security case.

More than 10,000 people were arrested in connection to the protests for various crimes, such as rioting and participating in an unauthorized assembly. About 10 white-shirted men were convicted in other cases related to the mob violence in July 2019, local media reported. (AP)

Tight security for Taliban minister's funeral as Islamic State group claim deadly suicide attack

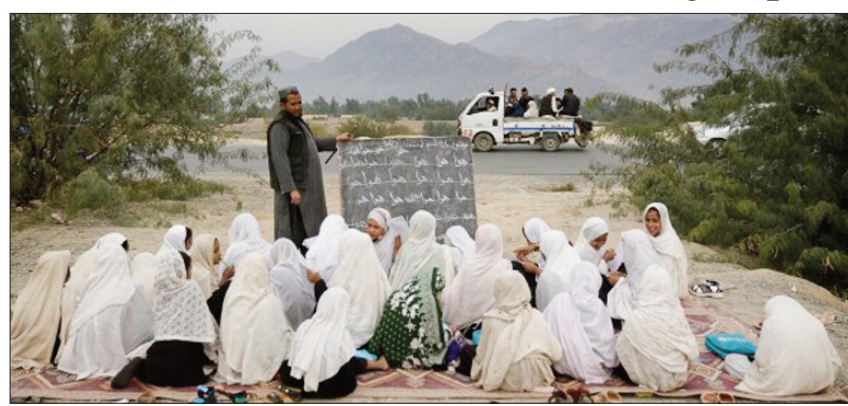
KABUL, Dec 12: Tight security measures were in place Thursday for a Taliban minister's funeral in Afghanistan after he was killed in a suicide bombing claimed by an affiliate of the Islamic State group.

Cabinet member Khalil Haqqani was the most high-profile casualty of an assault in the country since the Taliban seized power three years ago.

He died in a blast Wednesday at the Ministry for Refugees and Repatriation in the capital, Kabul, along with several other victims. Officials have not given the latest toll for the dead and injured.

Haqqani is the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the acting interior minister and the leader of a powerful faction within the Taliban. The US placed a bounty on both their heads.

In a statement carried by the Amaq News Agency, the IS affiliate said one of its fight-



ers carried out the suicide bombing. The fighter waited for Haqqani to leave his office and then detonated his device, according to the statement.

The minister's funeral is Thursday after-

noon in Garda Serai district, eastern Pakia province, which is the heartland of the Haqqani family.

Hamdullah Fitrat, the government's deputy spokesman, said Thursday that top

officials will attend and security measures are in place.

A video purportedly from the scene of the funeral showed a vast but empty patch of land with a row of guards and armoured vehicles on one side. A fire truck is on standby.

The UN Mission in Afghanistan was among those to condemn the ministry attack. "There can be no place for terrorism in the quest for stability," the mission said on the X platform.

The IS group's affiliate, a major rival of the ruling Taliban, has previously carried out bombings across Afghanistan.

But suicide attacks have become rare since the Taliban seized power in August 2021 and US and NATO forces withdrew. Such assaults have mostly targeted minority Shiite Muslims, especially in the capital. (AP)

Foreign powers should not take advantage of fissures in Syrian society: Singapore



SINGAPORE, Dec 12: Singapore's foreign ministry has said international powers should not take advantage of the fissures in Syrian society to pursue their own strategic objectives. "All parties must ensure the safety and well-being of Syrian civilians who have already suffered so much," the ministry said in a statement on Wednesday, adding that Singapore is closely monitoring developments in Syria.

The complex situation in Syria can only be resolved definitively through an inclusive, Syrian-led political process as affirmed in the UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Any meaningful political solution must respect the sover-

eignty, territorial integrity, and independence of Syria, it said.

Since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011, more than 3,00,000 Syrians have been killed and more than 13 million have been displaced with many seeking refuge in other countries. "We hope they can return safely to their homes when peace is restored," the ministry said.

Given the current volatile situation, Singaporeans should avoid travelling to or remaining in Syria, the ministry advised, adding that Singapore has no diplomatic representation in Syria, which constrains its ability to extend consular assistance in an emergency. (AP)

FBI Director Wray announces plan to resign, paves way for Trump nominee Kash Patel

WASHINGTON, Dec 12: FBI director Christopher Wray has announced his decision to resign at the end of US President Joe Biden's term in January, paving the way for President-elect Donald Trump's nominee Indian-American Kash Patel to take charge of the country's top investigating agency.

The move has been welcomed by Trump.

"After weeks of careful thought, I have decided the right thing for the bureau is for me to serve until the end of the current administration in January and then step down," Wray told his FBI colleagues during a town hall here on Wednesday.

On November 30, Trump nominated his loyalist and staunch supporter Patel as the next FBI director, thus cutting short Wray's 10-year term by three years. Wray was appointed by Trump during his first term in 2017.

The FBI director told his colleagues that his goal is to keep the

focus on the mission — "the indispensable work they are doing on behalf of the American people every day".

"And in my view, this is the best way to avoid dragging the bureau deeper into the fray, while reinforcing the values and principles that are so important to how we do our work," Wray said.

"It should go without saying, but I will say it anyway: This is not easy for me. I love this place. I love our mission. And I love our people. But my focus is, and always has been, on us and doing what is right for the FBI. And it was important to me that you all got to hear about my decision directly from me before it gets announced publicly," he said.

Welcoming the decision, Trump said Wray's resignation was "a great day for America".

"It will end the weaponisation of what has become known as the United States Department of Justice," he said.

Trump appointed Wray to lead



the FBI during his first presidency after firing Wray's predecessor James Comey in 2017 following the FBI's investigations into alleged contacts between the 2016 Trump campaign and Russia.

But in recent years, Wray has fallen out of favour with the president-elect after the FBI assisted with a federal probe into Trump's

handling of classified documents, a case that has since been dropped.

"I just do not know what happened to him. We will now restore the rule of law for all Americans. Under the leadership of Christopher Wray, the FBI illegally raided my home, without cause, worked diligently on illegally impeaching and indicting me, and has done

everything else to interfere with the success and future of America," he said.

"They have used their vast powers to threaten and destroy many innocent Americans, some of which will never be able to recover from what has been done to them," the president-elect added.

Trump said Patel was the most qualified nominee to lead the FBI in the agency's history.

"As everyone knows, I have great respect for the rank and file of the FBI, and they have great respect for me. They want to see these changes every bit as much as I do but, more importantly, the American people are demanding a strong, but fair, system of justice," he said. Patel, 44, requires approval by the Senate before he can be appointed.

"We want our FBI back, and that will now happen. I look forward to Kash Patel's confirmation so that the process of Making the FBI Great Again can begin," Trump said. (PTI)

Two bills introduced in BTCLA session Winter session of Bodoland Territorial Council begins

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 12: A two-day 'Winter Session' of the Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly (BTCLA), 2024 began on Thursday at the BTC Legislative Assembly Hall in Kokrajhar.

The session was chaired by Katiram Boro, the speaker of the Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly.

The session began with a question hour where the opposition leader raised concerns over infrastructure development in the BTC, particularly during the financial year 2024-25 as well as implementation of the BTR Peace Accord 2020, ex-gratia payments for Bodoland Martyrs' families, and concerns related to land revenue, health, education, and forest management.

The welfare of Bodoland department, Government of Assam, had earmarked ₹ 250 crore for infrastructure, but the opposition questioned the proper implementation of these funds and the BTR Peace Accord 2020 clauses as per memorandum of settlement (MoS) signed.



The opposition also raised issues regarding the implementation of development schemes, forest, land, and revenue matters, sought clarification from the ruling government on their efforts in these areas which are meant for the welfare and uplift of the citizens.

In response, the council introduced two significant bills on the first day of the session.

The Bodoland Territorial Council Flood Plain Zoning Bill 2024, pertaining to the Water Resources Department, and the BTC Land & Revenue Regulation Bill 2024, which were both presented by the concerned department's executive members in the house.

Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, who holds the

finance portfolio, presented the supplementary demands (Normal Budget) for the financial year 2024-25 under Rule 141 of the Assembly to have a ushering of sustainable development aspects in the council.

The session is expected to address key developmental and policy matters aimed at strengthening governance in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) on the second day of the session.

The CEM further stated that the two bills have been introduced in the house, and hopeful that the bills would be passed on Friday after being debated in the session.

CEM Boro said that the government of BTR is rendering relentless services towards the welfare and development of the peoples across the region, and marked the better governance in the council. He has stressed that the government is committed on the focus strongly on fulfilling the aspirations of the people and ensuring the peace and progress of Bodoland region.

"It is a delighted moment to attend the first day of the two-day Winter Session of the Bodoland

Territorial Council Legislative Assembly at Bodofa Nwgr, Kokrajhar. Our focus remains strong on fulfilling the aspirations of the people and ensuring the Peace and progress of BTR", CEM Boro added.

However, the session also witnessed criticism from the opposition. Opposition leader, Derhasat Basumatary criticised the ruling government for its failure to provide satisfactory answers regarding the issues raised. He alleged that since the formation of the government, there has been little progress in the respect of implementing adequate development schemes and welfare programs for the public of the region.

Meanwhile, the former chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Council, and MCLA from Debagarh constituency, Hagrama Mohilary is seen absent in the session. Mohilary is remaining absentee for several consecutive sessions of the BTC Legislative Assembly since formation of BTC Govt under the leadership of Pramod Boro, the CEM of Bodoland Territorial Council since December 15, 2020.

Prasanta Phukan gets rousing welcome in Dibrugarh



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 12: Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Prasanta Phukan on Thursday got rousing welcome at Dibrugarh airport after becoming the cabinet minister in Himanta Biswa Sarma led cabinet.

Phukan's supporters and party workers gathered at the airport to felicitate Phukan who was inducted as state cabinet minister.

The party workers assembled at the Dibrugarh BJP Mandal office, where he was welcome by the party members. He was felicitated with traditional gamusa and flower garland.

Phukan was given the charge of power department, skill, employment and entrepreneurship department, medical education and

research department.

Speaking to media persons, Prasanta Phukan said, "I thank Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for giving me the opportunity to work for the people of the state. I also like to thank party members and my associate for supporting me. As people as elected me, so, I will work dedicatedly for the development of the society and people."

"We are happy that Prasanta Phukan was given the ministry. He is one of the senior BJP leader who won the Dibrugarh seat for fourth consecutive time. We are expecting from much from him because along with other ministry he was given the charge of power ministry," said a member of BJP.

Barim Engti elected as president of ASS

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Dec 12: Barim Engti has been elected as the president of Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS), Karbi Anglong on Thursday.

He will lead the ASS, Karbi Anglong for a three-year term from 2025 to 2027.

The election which leads the Karbi Anglong branch of the ASS, a respected literary body, was held in the office in Bokajan.

Four persons, namely Barim Engti, Munimanta Saikia, Anil Hazarika and Horeswar Bora filed nominations for the president, vice president and secretary. The papers of Horeswar Bora were rejected.

The ASS Election Officers, Sunil Gogoi and Parmanand Talukder who announced the election results in a press conference here said that Munimanta Saikia was elected to the post of vice president and Anil Hazarika won the post of Secretary.

Appointments for the rest of the body will be made later. Following the results, members of ASS, Karbi Anglong congratulated by the trio-Barim Engti, Munimanta Saikia and Anil Hazarika for their win.

Wild elephant found dead

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 12: A wild elephant was found dead on Thursday at Kocharigaon crops field near the Kondoli Komarpura area under Kathiatoli forest range.

As per the local sources, the elephant, which was relatively young, died on Tuesday and was spotted by the locals near a small water body in the village.

Upon seeing the carcass, the locals informed the forest officials of Nagaon forest division as well as Kathiatoli forest range office. The officials rushed to the spot immediately and send the body of the elephant for post mortem.

Later, it was revealed by the forest officials that the elephant was seen alive last night.

As per the officials, the death of the elephant appeared to be natural. However, the actual cause of the death is yet to be ascertained.

On the other hand, the local had come with the different version claiming that the elephant have died due to drinking contaminated water.

Lok Adalat will be held on Dec 14 in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 12: The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Jorhat, will organise the fourth National Lok Adalat in the district on December 14, said DLSA Jorhat secretary Devojyoti Bhuyan.

Bhuyan informed that a total 377 cases compoundable offences under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Indian Penal Code (IPC), Negotiable Instrument (NI) Act, family disputes, civil suits, Motor Accident Claim (MAC), Motor Vehicle (MV) Act, Consumer Dispute cases will be taken up in nine benches at Judicial courts of Jorhat.

"Two benches at Judicial courts of Titabar and three benches at the Executive Magistrate Courts of District Administration, Jorhat," Bhuyan added.

He further informed that 17128 pre-litigation cases of Bank, BSNL and APDCL will also be taken up for settlement in the Lok Adalat, adding, "For speedy and maximum disposal of the cases pre-Lok Adalat sittings are going on since a month in concerned courts and institutions with the aid of conciliators, Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) and Law students."

The significance of the Lok Adalat is that apart from speedy disposal of the cases, the paid court-fee is refunded and appeal shall not lie against the disposed cases. Bhuyan has appealed all concerned to actively participate in the Lok Adalat to accelerate the justice delivery system and for any detail query requested to contact phone no 6901281634 or e-mail at dlsa.jorhat@gmail.com or visit DLSA Office.

BTR government to celebrate 4 Years of progress and unity

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 12: The Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) government under the leadership of CEM Pramod Boro is set to celebrate a significant milestone, marking its fourth anniversary, with a two-day event on December 14 and 15 themed "Regaining Sustainable Peace, Harmony, and Integrity," an official statement said on Thursday.

The celebrations will not only reflect on the region's achievements under the present administration but also highlight a vision for a brighter, more prosperous future for the citizens of BTR.

On December 14, government offices, educational institutions, and Block Development offices across the region will take part in a series of activities designed to foster community engagement and promote collective responsibility.

The day will begin with the "My Bodoland, Clean Bodoland" initiative, featuring a "Safai Abhiyan" (Cleanliness Drive) across the region. Local leaders, including EMs, MCLAs, TCLLC and VCDC members, along with government officers, community leaders, and other stakeholders, will participate in this meaningful event.

Following this, a seminar themed "My Bodoland, Peaceful Bodoland" will be held, with keynote addresses by eminent citizens and experts. These talks will provide insights into sustainable peace, showcasing the BTR Government's vision of a "Peaceful, Smart, and Green Bodoland".

The grand celebration on December 15 will take place at the Bhergaon Mini Stadium in Udalguri, BTR. The event will also honour partner agencies for their exceptional contributions to BTR's development.

This two-day celebration not only offers a moment to reflect on the progress made in the past four years but also serves as a reaffirmation of BTR's commitment to promoting peace, unity, and sustainable development in the region.

TU expresses concern over proposed road widening

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Dec 12: Tezpur University (TU) has expressed concern regarding over road adjacent boundary wall of the university.

In this regard, a delegation from TU submitted memorandum on Wednesday to the district commissioner Ankur Bharali.

The memorandum highlights concern regarding the widening of the PWD road in front of university, connecting Poruwa Chariali to National Highway (NH) 15 with possible impact on the boundary wall.

The university delegation also emphasised that the alignment of the widened road, as depicted in the detailed project report, poses a serious threat to the university.

Beside this, the delegation pointed out the unjustified extension of the road towards the University boundary, which could jeopardize the safety and infrastructure of the institution.

"We have already informed our concern by bringing this to the notice of hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam vide letter D.O. TU/VC(I)/2024 dated 27.09.2024", Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, vice chancellor of the university informed.

The matter was also brought to the notice of additional chief engineer, PWD (Roads), Tezpur Zone, Assam vide letter No.F.13-101/04 (EC)/4060 dated 27.11.2024 citing the possible risks such as, threat



against the safer mobility of the University community as the space between the gate and new roads are intended to be reduced to an alarming extent.

Further, the memorandum also pointed out that the proposed road will create disturbance for the sensitive laboratory equipment including animal house, which are housed near to the boundary wall, besides it may cause structural risk for the boundary wall.

The university community further alleged that due to vested interest, the road expansion is not happening towards the other side, where sufficient land is available.

The TU community feels if the road widening is done towards the university side, the historic Main Gate of TU, designed based on the

sketch of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, will have to be closed down permanently.

"There is a lot of anguish among the University community regarding the unscientific widening of the road. This may boil over into agitation if timely action is not taken in the right spirit," the memorandum read.

The members of the delegation were Prof Kusum K Bania, president, Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA), Dr Pallavi Jha, vice president, TUTA, Jadav C Nath, president, Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA), Dr Ratan Boruah, secretary, TUNTEA and Pragyandeep Boarh, general secretary, Tezpur University Students Council.

4th Convocation of AEI held in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 12: The 4th Convocation of the Assam Energy Institute (AEI), an affiliate of the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Petroleum Technology in Amethy, UP, was held on Thursday.

The event took place in the Polasani campus where Dr Aniruddha B Pandit inaugurated the convocation through audio visual media from Mumbai in the presence of the minister of Education and Tribal Affairs of the State Dr Ranuj Pegu.

Dr Pegu in his speech expressed satisfaction over the growth of AEI in Sivasagar.

"There are 16000 unemployed engineers in the state and it is not that they lack the requisite marks

for jobs, but they lack the vital skills for communication and leadership essential for the 21st century. The nation demands youth's contribution, as the taxpayer's money goes to educating the youths," said Dr Pegu.

"We must keep an open eye on all the Millennial Goals. Despite all the efforts since the independence, there are still hungry people, and homeless people around. We must rectify and gather general knowledge to face the world. He urged diploma holders to live up to the expectations of the nation. Indians are at the backbone of every global industry today and hence strive harder to set new benchmarks in professionalism," Dr Pegu added.

NFR, IIT-G hold discussion on automated bridge monitoring system

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 12: A high level technical discussion and demonstration session was held on a number of state-of-the-art technologies for automated bridge monitoring and robotic underwater bridge maintenance on Thursday, said an official statement.

The discussion was held between Northern Frontier Railway (NFR) and IIT-Guwahati at the NFR (Construction) headquarters in Maligaon.

During the discussion, a detailed roadmap for collaboration between the two esteemed institutions on this aspect was also drawn up.

One of the interesting technolo-

gies discussed during the session was an Advanced under water Inspection and Maintenance system of Railway Bridges, which will utilise robotics and AI based systems to address the unique challenges of underwater bridge maintenance, including detection of faults and retrofitting.

"Another major area of discussion was a command center based predictive maintenance System for automatic monitoring of Railway Bridges, which is a cutting edge initiative aimed at enhancing bridge safety through predictive analytics," the statement added.

The session was held in presence of general manager, Northeast Fron-

tier Railway Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, general manager, Northeast Frontier Railway (Construction) Arun Kumar Choudhary and other senior official of NFR. Senior professors from various departments of IIT-Guwahati were also present during the discussion session.

Recently, NFR has signed strategic Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with IIT Guwahati for the innovative solutions to enhance safety, efficiency, and sustainability in rail infrastructure.

The collaboration between NFR and IIT Guwahati sets a benchmark for blending academic research with practical implementation in the railway sector.

15th edition of 'Under the Sal Tree' starts from December 15 Badungduppa Kalakendra celebrates 25 years of theatre innovation

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 12: The Badungduppa Kalakendra, based in Rampur, Goalpara district is celebrating its silver jubilee year with the 15th edition of the 'Under the Sal Tree' theatre festival.

It was known for its eco-friendly ethos and international acclaim, the festival will be held from December 15 to December 17, 2024.

It was founded in 1998 by Late Sukracharjya Rabha, Badungduppa Kalakendra has been a pioneer in coexistence of art and nature.

The festival which will be held amidst a serene Sal tree plantation stands out for its zero-carbon-footprint approach. From bamboo and straw seating to performances without microphones, every aspect of the event reflects its commitment to sustainability.

This year, the festival's theme revolves around retrospection and shared memories, as Badungduppa completes 25 years of theatre innovation and relentless experimentation.

"This 25-year journey has been one of challenges and triumphs. It is the love and support of our patrons that has kept us moving forward. We invite you to join us in com-



memorating this incredible voyage," said managing director Madan Rabha.

The festival will feature plays in four different languages, inviting theatre groups from various parts of India. A special session has been planned to recount the cherished memories of Badungduppa's journey, with prominent personalities who have supported this journey in attendance.

The event will open on December 15 with an inauguration by renowned painter Rabinam Brahma, followed by Dantan Raja

(Rabha), directed by Dhananjay Rabha and scripted by Madan Rabha. In the afternoon, Monglee (Bodo), directed by Pabitra Rabha and performed by Dapon the Mirror, will be staged.

On December 16, the Tamil play Kindhan Charithram, directed by Rajiv Krishnan of Perch Theatre, Chennai, will be staged, followed by Kisan Raj (Hindi), and directed by Dr Gaurav Das of Anuchintan Art Centre, Kolkata.

The final day, December 17, will begin

with a Rabha folk performance and conclude with an open session reflecting on the 25-year journey of Badungduppa Kalakendra. Each evening's performances will be followed by discussions around a bonfire, fostering artistic exchange among audiences, artists, and scholars.

The festival also commemorates the pioneering concept of "Hygiene Theatre," introduced by Late Sukracharjya Rabha, which integrates art and sustainability. Over the years, the festival has welcomed theatre groups from across India and countries such as South Korea, Brazil, Poland, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, earning global recognition.

As part of its silver jubilee celebrations, Badungduppa Prakashan is preparing to release several publications documenting its remarkable journey. Supported by the directorate of cultural affairs, government of Assam, IOCL, and Bongaigaon Refinery, the festival is a testament to the enduring power of art to preserve cultural heritage.

President Cheena Rabha, secretary Lakhikanta Rabha, and managing director Madan Rabha have urged theatre enthusiasts to participate in this milestone event and honor the legacy of Late Sukracharjya Rabha, who passed away in 2018.

Rahul Gandhi meets family of 2020 Hathras rape-murder victim, invites BJP criticism



HATHRAS (UP), Dec 12: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi met the family of a Dalit woman here who died allegedly after being gangraped in September 2020.

The Congress MP reached Bool Garhi village around 11.15 am, even as police stepped up deployment in and around the hamlet in the Chandpa area the district in light of his visit.

Gandhi spent around 35 minutes with the family at their home and interacted with them. He left without speaking to a waiting group of reporters who had gathered in the village for his visit.

After Gandhi's visit, Congress' former Hathras chief Chandragupta Vikramaditya told reporters, "Rahul Gandhi has a relation with this family. He has always stood with them and will continue to do so. Today he came to listen to their problems. He is continuously fighting for their problems." Last month, the Congress MP and LoP had tried to go to violence-hit Sambhal district to meet the victim families but was stopped by the state government with local authorities citing prohibition on the entry of outsiders, including public representatives, till December 10 in view of the law and order situation in the area.

Before Gandhi met the family, Chandragupta Vikramaditya told PTI, "Rahul ji and Priyanka ji are the leaders who are in touch with aggrieved people across the country. Rahul ji has been in touch with this family also."

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, however,

criticised Gandhi for the visit, saying he is "confused" and "not aware of the status of the case".

"The CBI has already conducted an inquiry into this case. Under the BJP rule, no culprit is allowed to get away scot free," Pathak said. "Whether Sambhal or Hathras, he (Gandhi) keeps visiting them just to be in limelight and not for any other reason."

UP Minister for Minorities Welfare Om Prakash Rajbhar also slammed Rahul Gandhi. "If he was not aware of facts of the case, he should know that a CBI probe had long been done."

"If he knows of any higher investigating authority, he should let us know. Such visits are mere gimmicks showing the Congress desperation," Rajbhar said.

Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi had met the family on October 3, 2020 and declared they will fight for ensuring justice to the deceased.

The 19-year-old woman was allegedly gangraped on September 14, 2020. She was moved to Aligarh for treatment and later to Delhi, where she died on September 29, 2020.

She was cremated in the early hours of October 30, with her family alleging the local police had forced them to conduct the last rites in the dead of the night. Local police officers, however, had told PTI that the cremation was carried out "as per the wishes of the family".

After an initial police probe in the matter, the CBI had taken over the investigation into the case and filed a charge sheet against all four accused. (PTI)

Modi govt's policies failed to revive economy: Cong

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Asserting that the Centre's policies have "failed" to revive the economy, the Congress on Thursday said the government's strategy of cutting corporate taxes, giving "generous corporate handouts" and raising the tax burden on the salaried middle class has only helped enrich large monopolies without any discernible increase in investment or hiring.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said what is needed for stimulating demand is tax cuts for the salaried middle classes and income support to the poor.

His remarks came over a media report which claimed that the sharp slump in economic growth rate to 5.4 per cent in July-September this year has sparked concerns among policy makers that low single-digit income growth in the corporate sector despite four times growth in

profits over the last four years, is one of the reasons behind the slowing of demand.

In a post on X, Ramesh said, "Private sector profit is at a 15-year-high and has grown four times over the last four years. But salaries are stagnant, having grown annually at rates between 0.8% and 5.4% across sectors."

The CEA has sagely suggested that India Inc needs to look within and that "there has to be better balance between the share of income going to capital as profits and that going to workers as wages", Ramesh said.

If only the Government had not cut corporate taxes steeply in 2019, some of that balancing could have been achieved through policy itself, he said. (PTI)

Opposition raises concerns over simultaneous polls

BJP, allies say burden on exchequer will be lessened

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Opposition parties on Thursday raised concerns over bills cleared by the government for holding simultaneous elections and said larger consultations are required while ruling NDA leaders asserted the burden on the exchequer will be lessened.

The Union Cabinet approved bills to implement 'One Nation, One Election' and sources said the draft legislations are likely to be introduced in Parliament in the ongoing Winter session.

Opposition MPs questioned if the country is logistically ready to hold simultaneous elections, pointing out that recent polls in Maharashtra and Jharkhand could not be held together with that in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir.

Minister of State for Agriculture Bhagirath Chaudhary welcomed the move and said, "One nation, one election will be good for the nation. It will help in saving people's money."

He also dismissed the reservations expressed by opposition, and said, "they are in a habit to oppose everything."

BJP's ally Lok Janshakti Party (RV) MP Shambhavi Choudhary also welcomed the move.

"This is an ambitious bill, LJP has supported it... Every six month there is election in some state and leaders focus on that. Many times representatives are also not able to give time in Parliament, resources are wasted," she said.

"One Nation one election sounds good, if the nation can go



in that direction, nothing like it. But what is the reality? Is the Election Commission ready for it? Do we have enough forces, infrastructure?" Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Anil Desai said.

"J&K, and Haryana elections could have been held together with Maharashtra but it was not done. Even the Jharkhand election was held in two phases... If government has some solution it can be discussed, but in present situation it does not appear they can do it," Desai said.

Congress Lok Sabha member K Suresh said his party has already made its stand clear, and it is opposed to simultaneous polls.

"Our party has already cleared our stand from the beginning, our stand has not changed. We are opposing it. Entire opposition is opposing it," he said.

CPI(M) Rajya Sabha member John Brittas said it is against the

federal spirit of the country.

"One nation, one election, is part of their slogan 'one leader, one country, one ideology, one language...' It's against the federal spirit of the country," he said.

"If they are keen on reform in the electoral scene, they should understand what are the issues plaguing the electoral system. If they were so keen about one election, why did they segregate the election of Maharashtra and Haryana, they could not even hold four elections together," Brittas said.

DMK leader Tiruchi Siva also said his party opposes the bill.

"Let them bring it, my party is totally against it, we have too many questions to raise, and they have to be replied in a comprehensive manner," he said.

Siva questioned what would happen if a government comes into minority.

"Suppose if Lok Sabha gets dis-

History will never forgive those not allowing level playing field in House: Sibal

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: With the opposition seeking the removal of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Thursday said history will never forgive those who do not allow a level playing field in the functioning of the House.

In a first, parties of the opposition INDIA bloc spearheaded by the Congress on Tuesday submitted a notice in the Rajya Sabha for moving a no-confidence motion against Dhankhar, accusing him of being "extremely partisan" in his role as the Chairman of the Upper House of Parliament.

In a post on X, Sibal said, "Jagdeep Dhankar. 60 Members of Rajya Sabha submit a Notice for his removal."

Unprecedented. Sad day for the Mother of Democracy!" "History will never forgive those who do not allow a level playing field in the functioning of the House," the Independent member of the Rajya Sabha said. If the motion seeking

Dhankhar's removal is moved, the opposition parties need a simple majority to get it passed, but they do not have the requisite numbers in the 243-member House.

Opposition members, however, have insisted that it was a "strong message to fight for parliamentary democracy".

Noting that the role of the chairperson of the Rajya Sabha is of pivotal importance, the Opposition parties have said Dhankhar is expected to conduct himself in a non-partisan manner but has instead reduced "the prestige of the position he presently occupies to that of a mere spokesman for the Government of the day".

On behalf of the Opposition, Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh and Naseer Hussain on Tuesday submitted the notice signed by 60 opposition MPs -- including from the Congress, RJD, TMC, CPI, CPI-M, JMM, AAP, DMK, Samajwadi Party -- to Rajya Sabha Secretary General P C Mody.

The vice president is the ex-officio chairman of the Rajya Sabha. PTI ASK With the opposition seeking the removal of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Thursday said history will never forgive those who do not allow a level playing field in the functioning of the House. In a first, parties of the opposition INDIA bloc spearheaded by the Congress on Tuesday submitted a notice in the Rajya Sabha for moving a no-confidence motion against Dhankhar, accusing him of being "extremely partisan" in his role as the Chairman of the Upper House of Parliament.

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"History will never forgive those who do not allow a level playing field in the functioning of the House," the Independent member of the Rajya Sabha said. (PTI)

Jharkhand assembly passes ₹ 11,697cr supplementary budget, House adjourned sine die

RANCHI, Dec 12: The Jharkhand Assembly on Thursday passed the second supplementary budget of ₹ 11,697.45 crore for the 2024-25 fiscal.

After this, the four-day session of the assembly was adjourned sine die by Speaker Rabin Nath Mahato.

Finance Minister Radhakrishna Kishore tabled the second supplementary budget, allocating a maximum outlay of ₹ 6,390.55 crore to the women, child development and social security department to boost the government's flagship scheme Mayan Samman Yojana. Under this scheme, the state government initially provided ₹ 1,000 per month to women between the age group of 18 and 50 years. The amount has been increased to ₹ 2,500 per month from December. Taking part in the debate on supplementary budget, BJP's Satyandra Nath Tiwary said that his party appreciated the initiative but is not happy with the way certain criteria were brought in post-election.

During the election, the ruling party promised to give the benefit of Mayan Samman to all women, but now it brought certain qualifying criteria. I don't think even one per cent of the women will be able to qualify the criteria, he said.

Tiwary said that those who work for Krishi Sakhi and Pashu Mitra schemes get only ₹ 1,500 remuneration. (PTI)

Memo No. IV/DPU/DCRB/2024/E/5019

AUCTION NOTICE

Intending bidders are invited to participate in public auction of gold seized weighing 8133 grams (purity 99.40% to 99.70%) in connection with Dillai Police Station Case No. 61/2021 in compliance of the SOP issued by CID HORS, Assam vide Memo No. CID/Cell-VII/Law/F-05/Misc-Gold Disposal/2021/1834 Dtd. 27/05/2022 and as per the decision of the Committee for auction of seized Gold, Karbi Anglong District by submitting their documents affixing court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and twenty five paise) only (non-refundable)

Terms & Conditions.

- Bidders shall have a GST Registration Number along with GST Clearance Certificate with Gold/Gold Jewellery as an item at trading. (to enclosed copy of GST)
- Bidders have to submit their Permanent Account Number (PAN).
- Bidders should have an annual turnover of more than rupees 5 crores.
- Security deposit of ₹ 10,00,000 (ten lakhs) in Demand Draft or call deposit/Banker cheque pledge in favour of SP Karbi Anglong.
- Financial soundness certificate from the bank.
- Copies of IT return of the last three years indicating the annual turnover.
- Minimum bid value will be the base price of the Gold which will be calculated by taking the previous three days average market price of the Gold from the date of auction including GST.
- Successful bidder will have to lift the Gold by depositing the required amount to the treasury within 7 days from the date of auction.
- In the event of failure to lift the Gold by depositing the required amount, the security deposit shall be forfeited.
- The last date of submission of bidding documents is at **11 AM on 18/12/2024**. The tender box will be opened at **12 PM** in presence of the bidders and the members of the Auction Committee and the **auction will be held on the same day at 3 PM** after scrutiny of bid documents and selection of appropriate bidders.
- Upon deposit of the required amount through Treasury Challan in Demand Draft, the Gold will be handed over to the successful bidder in presence of the members of the auction committee.
- The bidders may inspect the Gold at the time of the auction.
- Only the eligible bidders fulfilling above conditions will be allowed to participate in the auction.

Sd/-
Superintendent of Police
Karbi Anglong, Diphu

Janasanyog/C/5089/24/13-Dec-24

NOTICE INVITING APPLICATION

Applications are invited from interested individual/individual Fish farmer/Co-operative Societies FPO/FPC as per letter E. Com No 455467 Dated 11th November, 2024 for the project Fisheries Entrepreneurship Development in Assam through Pond Aquaculture under RIDF- XXIX as per Block and GP wise target given below.

Sl. No	Name of the Development Block	Name of the Gaon Panchayat	Allotted Target(Ha)	Unit Cost (Rs. In Lakh/Ha)	Project Share (Rs. In Lakh/Ha)	Beneficiary Share (Rs. In Lakh/Ha)
1	Algapur	Bakrihawa, Bhatikupa, Chandipur, Mohanpur, Sayedbond, Burnebrease, Uttar Kanchanpur, Chiprasangam (Chiprasangan)	2.00			
2	Hailakandi	Brajpur(Brojapur), Kalinagar, Sereapore and Itorkandi	1.00			
3	Lala	Tantoo Dhanipur, Nizvernapur Sarbanandapur, Junsabad Ummednagar, Mohammedpur, Jalalpur,Koyah Ramehandi, Sahabad	2.00	12.994	7.0741	5.92
4	Katlicherra	Katlicherra, Appin Rongpur, Dinanathpur, Sonacherra, Rupacherra	2.00			
5	South Hailakandi	Dholai bagan, Paloicherra, Sultanicherra, Ghamura, Doriarghat, Koricherra	1.00			
Total			8.00			

Applicants need to submit the following documents along with the application form.

- The applicants should have minimum 10(ten) bigha to 40 (fourty) bigha suitable land.
- Ownership of the land should belong to concerned applicant/fish farmer/Co-operative Societies/FPO/FPC. If the proposed land is in the name of his/her family members, then (NOC) No Objection Certificate/Notary Affidavit from the actual owner of the proposed land is to be furnished. Land holding documents must be submitted at the time of application. In case of community groups The minutes of the meeting stating their interest to avail benefit is mandatory at the time of submission.
- The land owned by community group by means of lease agreement, should be a period of not less than 10 years. Individual land of single pattadar, but taken on lease by a group of people/unemployed/SHG shall not be less than 12 years. In terms of lease agreement, the beneficiary must submit a registered deed (non-transferable).
- All applicants must agree to excavate their part (50%) for completion of the project as per plan and estimated within 30 days from the date of providing alignment by concerned JE and FDO of the concerned block. Rest 50 % will be excavated through tendering system.
- Front page of the bank passbook (Photo copy). The bank account must be linked with the applicant's Aadhar No.
- Submission of the following documents are mandatory- Aadhaar Card/PAN Card/ Voter ID.
- Passport size photograph and photograph of the proposed project site.
- SC & ST applicants must submit the caste certificate along with application for inclusion in the SC & ST target category.

N.B. After completion of 50% excavation of pond area by the beneficiary, the remaining 50% pond area will be excavated by civil work contractor as per existing procedure. Last date of submission of application along with relevant documents is 23rd December, 2024. For any further enquiry, contact 0/0 the District Fisheries Development Officer, Hailakandi.

Sd/-
District Fisheries Dev. Officer
Hailakandi

Janasanyog IC/5075/24/13-Dec-24

PROVISION OF MANPOWER
E-Tender Notice No. SCL/Engg/02 of 2024. Dated: 09-12-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN. 1. Brief Description of Item:** Provision of manpower for sweeping, cleaning, swabbing & maintenance (House Keeping) of Officer's Rest House (Old & New). Sr. DEN/EN's offices at Sihar for two years. **Tender Value:** ₹91,08,854/- **Earnest Money:** ₹18,22,000/- E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 30-12-2024 and opened at 15:30 hrs. on 30-12-2024. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 30-12-2024 in website <http://www.gem.gov.in>. DR/Works, Sihar **NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY** "Serving Customers with a smile"

PROVISION OF WATER SUPPLY ARRANGEMENT
Tender Notice No.: Dy.CEE/PS/MLG/36R/24-25. Dated: 09-12-2024. E-Tender is invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Tender No.:** Dy.CEE/PS-MLG-HQ-36R-24-25. **Name of Work:** At Malignon - Setting up of water recycling plant and along with provision of water supply arrangement in NFR stadium complex and Central Golanagar. **Advertised Value :** ₹. 47,93,288.22/- **Earnest Money :** ₹ 95,900/- **Date and time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 30-12-2024.** For details please visit in website www.reps.gov.in Dy. CEE/PS/MLG/HQ **NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY** "Serving Customers with a smile"

CANCELLATION NOTICE
This notice is issued for general information to all concerned that due to some technical error the tender for the "Supply of Ration Feed Materials under the Group-B (Fruits) for zoo captives of the Assam State Zoo, Guwahati for a period of one year" which has been published on 25th November, 2024 in the web portal <https://assam.tenders.gov.in> is hereby cancelled and a fresh tender for the same will be issued shortly.
Sd/-
Divisional Forest Officer
Assam State Zoo Division
Guwahati-05
Janasanyog IC/5049/24/13-Dec-24

REPAIR AND RENOVATION WORK UNDER LUMDING DIVISION
E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/162 of 2024. Dated: 10-12-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN. 1. Brief Description of Item:** Major repair and renovation to the chambers, toilets, garages of the officers and staff in the DRM Building and also platform surface of platform No.1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 other service building/structure of Lumding Railway station under ADEN/II/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹3,18,41,366/- **Earnest Money:** ₹3,09,200/- E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 06-01-2025 and opened at 15:00 hrs. on 07-01-2025. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 06-01-2025 in website <http://www.reps.gov.in>. DR/Works, Lumding **NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY** "Serving Customers with a smile"

CARRYING OUT REPAIRS TO SIGNALING ASSETS FOR RESTORATION/MAINTENANCE
E-Tender No. SNT-37-LMG-2024-25; Dated: 09-12-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Name of work & its Location:** Carrying out repairs to signaling assets for restoration/maintenance in Thekraguri-Nailalung section including Chaparmukh branch under SSE/Signal/Lumding for a period of 12 months. **Tender Value:** ₹22,79,000.05; **Bid Security:** ₹45,600.00; E-tender will be Closed at 15:00 hrs. on 02-01-2025 and Opened at 15:30 hrs. on 02-01-2025. For details visit: www.reps.gov.in Sr. DSTE, Lumding **NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY** "Serving Customers with a smile"

CANCELLATION NOTICE
This notice is issued for general information to all concerned that due to some technical error the tender for the "Supply of Ration Feed Materials under the Group-B (Fruits) for zoo captives of the Assam State Zoo, Guwahati for a period of one year" which has been published on 25th November, 2024 in the web portal <https://assam.tenders.gov.in> is hereby cancelled and a fresh tender for the same will be issued shortly.
Sd/-
Divisional Forest Officer
Assam State Zoo Division
Guwahati-05
Janasanyog IC/5049/24/13-Dec-24

Stalemate in Chakma council as 13 ruling MNF members join opposition camps

11 seats required to form an executive body in the 20-member council

AIZAWL, Dec 12: A day after Chakma Autonomous District Council's chief executive member Rasik Mohan Chakma was removed from his position through a no-confidence motion, 13 ruling MNF members joined opposition camps, leaving the 20-member council without a majority party to form the executive body.

BJP Chakma district president Durjya Dhan Chakma said eight council members of the Mizoram National Front (MNF) joined the party at a function held at Chakma council headquarters in Kamalanagar on Thursday.

Additionally, five other MNF members, including council chairman Mohan Chakma, joined the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) on Wednesday soon after Rasik Mohan's removal, according to ZPM council member Kali Kumar Tongchangya.

The MNF's strength in the CADC before Rasik Mohan's removal was 14, while the ZPM had five members and the BJP one, an official said.

With eight MNF members joining the BJP and five others joining the ZPM, the saffron party now has nine members in the council, while

the ZPM has 10 and the MNF is left with one.

Eleven seats are required to form an executive body in the 20-member council.

According to the current council composition, no party has a majority to form the executive body, the official added.

Both Durjya Dhan Chakma and Kali Kumar Tongchangya expressed optimism that their parties would be able to form an executive body soon.

The CADC was created in 1972 under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for the Chakma tribe in Mizoram.

The last council polls held on May 9 resulted in a fractured mandate, with the MNF emerging as the single largest party by winning 10 out of 19 seats, while the BJP bagged five and Congress won four.

Later, the Congress won the Rengkashya seat, polling for which was countermanded due to the death of a BJP candidate. However, some BJP and Congress members later joined the MNF, enabling the party to form the executive body headed by Rasik Mohan Chakma. (PTI)

Permanent solution to Manipur crisis will take time: CM Biren Singh

'State and central governments have been putting all efforts to bring a permanent solution'



He also mentioned that the bravery and courage of the past could also be seen among present-day women of the state, as they had been leading from the forefront in every issue pertaining to the safety of the people of the state.

Singh said, "Manipuri women have contributed in multiple sectors, including social, economic, art and culture, hospitality, and games and sports, among others, apart from their household activities" and that the "cultural performances shown by our women in different national and international events have showcased the uniqueness of our culture across the world."

He informed that "the state government, acknowledging the hard work and commitment of women, had introduced certain women welfare schemes, including Ima Nongthangleima Yaipha Tengbang Scheme, providing financial assistance of ₹ 500 per month to unemployed women who are above the age of 40 years."

Singh also spoke on the initiatives of the central government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in passing the Women's Reservation Bill 2023 in Parliament.

He also mentioned other initiatives taken up by the state government for students, including the Chief Minister's Scholarship for Civil Service Coaching, Chief Minister's Coaching Scheme for Entrance Examination to Professional Courses for NEET and JEE, and the establishment of DIET in every district, among others.

Later, replying to media queries on the treatment of Myanmar refugees, Singh said, "Those who are criticising should come here and see the ground realities. There are no differences. Refugees are being treated under the guidelines of the United Nations and the supervision of the government of India and the government of Manipur. Equal treatment is being given."

Earlier, Singh, along with the legislators, paid floral tributes to the statue of Nupi Lan at Nupi Lan Memorial Complex in Imphal.

Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Th Biswajit Singh, who was also present on the occasion, said Nupi Lal is observed every year to remember the courage and sacrifice of women freedom fighters and to pay tribute to their contributions, adding that the observation is a proud moment for every Manipuri. (PTI)

3 cadres of militant outfit Prepak (Pro) arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 12: Three cadres of the banned militant outfit People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (Prepak-Pro) were arrested in Manipur's Thoubal district, police said on Thursday.

The arrested members of the outlawed group were involved in extortion, a police statement said.

"Acting on information that some active cadres of Prepak (Pro) organisation are loitering in and around Thoubal Athokpam area, a combined team of Commando Unit Thoubal and a column of 4 AR (Assam Rifles) led by OC-CDO, Thoubal, under the supervision of Sr. SP Thoubal District, rushed to the area near HDFC Bank and arrested three active cadres of the unlawful organisation around 4 pm on Wednesday," it said.

They have been identified as Nambam Indrajit Singh, Rajkumar Mohan Sana and Warepan Albert Meitei Thoi.

A grenade, demand letters of Prepak (Pro), three mobile phones and one motorcycle were recovered from their possession, the police said.

During interrogation, the arrested cadres of the militant outfit admitted that they were involved in extortion from schools, colleges and government offices of Thoubal district under the instruction of one Sinthoiba of their organisation, according to the statement.

The arrested persons along with seized items were handed over to the Thoubal Police Station for taking further necessary legal action against them.

Meanwhile, security forces, during separate search operations in Churachandpur and Chandel districts, recovered 10 firearms and a cache of ammunition, another police statement said.

More than 250 people in Manipur 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)

Livestock vital for boosting rural economy and GSDP growth: Tripura CM

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 12: Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday highlighted the vital role of livestock in bolstering the rural economy and the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of both the state and the country.

"The role of livestock in strengthening the rural economy of our country and the state of Tripura is undeniable. The active participation of self-help groups (SHGs) in livelihood generation and socio-economic development through animal husbandry is highly significant," said Saha.

Saha said this during the launch of the A-HELP Programme (Accredited Agent for Health and Extension of Livestock Programme) at Pragna Bhavan.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has introduced numerous schemes for the welfare and development of the people. In alignment with this, both the state and central governments have been working diligently. Veterinarians are extending their services to even the remotest parts of society," he stated.

Saha further explained that the Government of India, on September 1, 2021, executed an agreement between the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying and the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) through the Rural Development Department.

"Under this agreement, members of self-help groups engaged in animal husbandry will serve as accredited representatives of A-HELP to provide primary animal health services. I believe this program will be successful," he remarked.

He emphasised the need to strengthen the state's veterinary infrastructure, mentioning that Tripura currently has one veterinary college, which faces a shortage of faculty and steps are being taken to address this issue.

"At present, the department's staff are actively working to implement various developmental projects while also providing animal health services. The participation of animal husbandry staff as accredited representatives under A-HELP will undoubtedly enhance the state's animal health infrastructure," he noted. Saha explained that under this scheme, animal husbandry workers associated with the Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission (TRLM) will be selected as accredited A-HELP representatives.

These workers will receive 16 days of specialised training, supported by the National Dairy Development Board, to equip them for their roles.

"Following this training, the administrative infrastructure of the Animal Husbandry Department will extend its services to rural-level animal husbandry farmers through these trained workers. However, critical services such as artificial insemination and vaccination will be provided under the direct supervision of local veterinarians to ensure proper animal health care," he clarified.

Additionally, the A-HELP representatives will be tasked with registering livestock and poultry in villages, maintaining records of their births and deaths, and ensuring overall animal health management.

During the event, ARDD minister Sudhangshu Das, secretary Deepa D Nair and others were present.

Arunachal govt appoints guardian ministers to monitor development activities

ITANAGAR, Dec 12: The Arunachal Pradesh government has appointed ten "guardian" ministers for 28 districts in the state to review and monitor various development activities, according to a notification. A notification issued by Planning and Investment Secretary R K Sharma on Wednesday stated that the ministers would conduct quarterly review meetings in their respective districts for ongoing important infrastructure projects and would follow up on flagship welfare programmes.

"The guardian ministers shall attend at least two meetings of 'Seva Apak Dwar' and understand the expectation of the people from the government. They shall submit their activities and action taken reports to the CMO," the notification said.

The monitoring division would compile the activities and action taken reports and bring out notes for briefing the government, which would be reviewed in the CM's e-Pragati meetings so that necessary direction and course correction could be taken up accordingly, it said.

The divisional commissioners shall review the works done by the guardian ministers under their jurisdictions and submit the report to the chief secretary for further necessary action, the notification said.

According to it, Environment and Forest Minister Wangki Lowang will look

after Lower Siang and Lepa Rada districts, Education Minister Pasang Dorjee Sona has been given the responsibility for Lohit, Namsai and Anjaw and Commerce and Industries Minister Nyato Dukam will oversee development works in Upper Siang, East Siang and Siang.

Home Minister Mama Natung has been entrusted with the responsibility for Tawang, West Kameng and Bichom and Health Minister Bituram Wahge for Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts.

Civil Aviation Minister Balo Raj will look after Upper Subansiri, Shi Yomi and West Siang districts and Agriculture Minister Gabriel Denwang Wangsu will oversee the welfare and development of East Kameng, Pakke Kessang and Lower Subansiri.

Women and Child Development Minister Dasanglu Pul has been given the task of Dibang Valley and Lower Dibang Valley and Law Minister Kento Jini for Papum Pare, Capital Complex and Keyi Panyor, while Panchayati Raj Minister Ojing Tasing will look after Kurung Kumey, Kra Daadi and Kamle districts.

The state government has also appointed 26 bureaucrats as mentor secretaries for each district to review and implement overall developmental activities, another notification said. (PTI)

Arunachal govt calls for multi-pronged efforts to eliminate TB by 2025

ITANAGAR, Dec 12: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen KT Parnaik (retd) on Thursday called for a multi-pronged efforts to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) from the state by 2025.

During a meeting with state health commissioner Pawan Kumar Sain to review the implementation of the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP), Parnaik emphasised the need to double patient support, utilise technology and better diagnostic tools, and explore new drugs to eradicate TB.

The governor stressed that the special 100-day campaign, recently announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, should become a mass movement in the state, according to a communiqué from Raj Bhavan.

Parnaik, who has adopted several TB patients from seven districts as part of the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyan, urged political leaders, government officials, and community leaders to adopt TB patients as well.

"With the collective effort of all Arunachalese, the state can eliminate TB," he said. (PTI)

Mizo communities meet Tourism Minister for development of Jampui Hill

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 12: Leaders of the Mizo Convention met with Tripura's Tourism Minister, Sushanta Chowdhury, at Eden Lodge, Jampui Hill of Tripura, to discuss key proposals aimed at boosting tourism in the region.

Jampui Hills is situated about 200 kms away from Agartala and is the highest hill range in the state bordering Mizoram.

This permanent seat of eternal spring is situated at an altitude of 3000' above sea level. During this season the hill is covered with floating clouds and it provides a rare experience for the tourists.

The view of rising and setting sun from various viewpoints in Jampui hills is a wonderful sight for the tourists. From the watchtower at the highest peak, Betlingchip (3200

feet high), the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Kanchanpur - Dasda valley other hill ranges of Tripura and Mizoram unfold an enigmatic scenic vista.

The meeting, held in the presence of UK Chakma, IAS, Secretary of the Tourism Department, focused on transformative initiatives such as constructing a Sky-walk, developing trekking routes, establishing an eco-park, promoting Thaidawr Tlang (Betlingchip) as a nature reserve, and redeveloping the Tlaksih paragliding site.

Accompanying the Mizo leaders of Tripura was BC Nungya, Chairman of the BAC, Jampui Hill RD Block, who also shared his insights during the deliberations. The dialogue followed the success of the Tourism Promo Fest recently held at Vangmun Playground, Jampui Hill.

APSCPCR recommends disciplinary action against officials involved in sex racket

ITANAGAR, Dec 12: The Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (APSCPCR) has recommended to the state government for initiating strict disciplinary action and termination of services against three state government employees, including a policeman, for their alleged involvement in a sex racket involving minor girls.

The alleged sex racket case was brought to light by the minor victims in August this year and a regular case was subsequently registered.

Police have arrested 9 people, out of which 3 are prime accused, in connection with alleged rape and sexual assault of minors. The sex scandal continued over a period of 4 years from 2019 to 2024 till the lodging of FIR in the said case.

The child panel, which took suo moto cognizance of the case, termed the four-year operation of the racket and the reported sexual exploitation of minors as "alarming".

The report alleged that prime accused Chaya Dulom, a female attendant with the department of health and family welfare and her husband David Dulom, a surveyor with the water resources department, lured adolescent girls into the racket. Victims reportedly faced repeated sexual exploitation, often multiple times a day, the report said.

The Commission expressed concern over the complicity of government employees in such heinous crime and recommended strict disciplinary actions, including termination of service.

It also called for an investigation into the role of police constable Hainu Naim, who allegedly coerced victims to co-operate with the accused instead of protecting them.

The Commission suggested that disciplinary authorities across departments take stringent measures against erring employees involved in heinous crimes to deter such activities in the future.

"The sex racket was going on since the year 2019 under the guise of a restaurant cum bar at Itanagar. Chaya Dulom and her gang was continuously involved in enticing adolescent girls for work at the restaurant cum bar with ulterior motives of attracting customers and sexual exploitation of the victims. During the enquiry it was informed by the victims that they were subjected to rape and sexual exploitation several times even in a single day," the Commission said in its report.

The Commission observed that since the racket has been going on in the state

capital over a prolonged period of 4 years there are compelling reasons for having many more victims as well as accused persons in the said case if thoroughly investigated.

"The fact that the number of victims in this case is more than the number of accused persons is in itself highly questionable and reflects the lacunas in the entire investigation process," it said.

In addition, there is a high probability of involvement of high-profile persons who can manipulate the course of the investigation, the Commission said and recommended for reconstitution of SIT for a thorough investigation into the case in order to bring out the extent of the offence and actual picture of the case, APSCPCR Chairperson Ratan Anya said in the report.

The Commission also recommended for timely disbursement of victim compensation to all the victims as per the provisions of the Arunachal Pradesh Victim Compensation Scheme, 2011.

During the investigation by the Commission, Anya said, around 9 victims were found to be major, over 18 years of age, and their case details have been forwarded to the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW) for further intervention. (PTI)

'Nagaland's reputation elevated on global stage by Hornbill Festival'



KOHIMA, Dec 12: Chief Minister of Nagaland, Neiphiu Rio recently said that the Hornbill Festival had elevated Nagaland state's reputation on a global stage.

Rio expressed this while congratulating on the successful completion of the 25th Edition of the Hornbill Festival which concluded a day ago.

Speaking on the occasion, Rio said that this year marks a historic milestone as "we commemorated 25 years of this iconic festival, a matter of immense pride for all citizens of Nagaland."

Rio then said that the policy of partner countries of the Hornbill Festival and states has added a multi-dimensional aspect to the festival, fostering collaborations, partnerships, and developmental possibilities. The Music Festival has transcended boundaries, positioning Nagaland as an international music destination and providing unparalleled platforms for our young talents within our state, he also said.

"Most importantly, our collective goal of promoting, preserving, and celebrating

our age-old traditions, rich cultural heritage, and the Nagaya way of life continues to be strengthened through this event", the chief minister added.

Rio then said that, while celebrating the resounding success of the festival's 25th edition, it is important to acknowledge the challenges we faced this year, particularly in light of the natural calamities and hardships of recent months.

Despite these adversities, several government departments worked tirelessly, completing multiple projects on a war footing in record time, he stated.

These achievements underscore the immense potential for Nagaland to achieve accelerated progress when all government and supporting agencies work in unison with the same zeal and commitment, Rio added.

Neiphiu Rio then mentioned that the success of the 25th edition of the Hornbill Festival is a triumph for the Nagaya people.

"Every citizen of Nagaland is a stakeholder in this unique and unparalleled festival, which showcases not only our cultural richness and soft power but also the unity of our people, and congratulates all concerned for their noble service," he added. (NNN)

No.DV/BTC/VETY/D-15(CH)/2024-25/1081

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing nonrefundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and Twenty Five Paise) only in plain paper which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 Form are hereby invited from the Class-III, Class-II and Class-I (A, B and C) category of contractor registered under A.H. & Veterinary Department, BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works stated below:

Group	Name of the works & location	Tender Amount	Time of completion
A	Construction of Assam type Hygienic Meat Shop (24x7) at Panbari under Chirang District	Rs. 13,00,000.00	90 Days
B	Construction of Vety. Sub-Centre at Kawli under Tamulpur District.	Rs. 15,00,000.00	90 Days

The bidders have to submit Tender Processing Fee of Rs. 1,000.00 (Rupees One Thousand) only in the form of Demand Draft duly pledged in favour of "The Principal Secretary, Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar" with quotation/tender for each group.

The bidders have to submit 1% In case of ST/SC/OBC and 2% for General/Firm against Administrative Approval (A.A.) amount as Earnest Money in form of Fixed Deposit/Call Deposit/ Demand Draft under any Nationalized/Provincialized Bank duly pledged to the "Director, A.H. & Vety. Deptt., BTC, Kokrajhar" in time of submission of tenders.

Date of Receiving Tender from 11th December, 2024 to 20th Dec., 2024 (Up to 3.30 P.M.)

Date of Opening of Tender 20th December, 2024 (at 4.00 P.M.)

The detailed Plan & Estimate may be seen in the office of the undersigned during office hours up-to 12 noon of 20th December, 2024.

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1079

Sd/- Director,
A.H. & Vety. Deptt.,
BTC, Kokrajhar

'Pushpa 2' reflection of people's love, want records to be broken soon: Allu Arjun

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Telugu superstar Allu Arjun on Thursday said the humongous success of his latest release "Pushpa 2: The Rule" is a reflection of people's love and he hopes the box office record of the film, which has become the fastest movie to earn ₹ 1,000 crore, is broken soon by another movie.

A sequel to Arjun's 2021 Telugu blockbuster "Pushpa: The Rise", the film released on December 5 with dubbed versions in Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, and Malayalam, and has emerged as one of the biggest hits of 2024.

It has broken many records at the box office, first by registering the opening numbers of ₹ 294 crore and then breaking into the ₹ 1,000 crore club in just six days.

"The 1,000 (cr) number is a reflection of the people's love. The numbers are temporary but the love that is etched in your hearts will remain forever. I believe that the numbers always have to be broken. Yes, it's nice to be in this spot and enjoy the records, probably for 2-3 months," the actor told reporters here.

"It doesn't matter which film does it, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi or any other. But I want these records to be broken soon because that is pro-

gression. It means India is going up. I wish for these numbers to be broken as soon as possible because that is growth and I love growth," he said.

He happily posed for the shutterbugs and struck his trademark 'Pushpa Jhukega Nai' pose for the cameras.

"Pushpa 2" joins movies like Aamir Khan's "Dangal", Prabhas' "Baahubali 2" and "Kalki 2898 AD", SS Rajamouli's "RRR" and Shah Rukh Khan's "Pathaan" and "Jawan" in the coveted Rs 1,000 crore club.

Directed by Sukumar, Arjun returns as labourer-turned-sandalwood smuggler Pushpa Raj in the sequel alongside Mandanna as Srivalli and Fahadh Faasil as SP Bhanwar Singh Shekhawat.

Arjun, 42, said it is not love but "wild love".

The actor, who won a National Award for "Pushpa: The Rise", said the credit for the sequel's success goes to its team, especially director Sukumar.

"It is purely his hardwork and vision that has put all of us at this level. I owe this entire credit just to you," he said.

Arjun, also known for movies like "Arya",

"Vedam" and "Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo", expressed his gratitude to all the film industries across the country.

"Pushpa cannot be Pushpa without the support of the Hindi audience and the Hindi film industry. Each one of them has given us so much love and support, so many directors and actors have poured in so much love and support on social media in making Pushpa 1 what it is.

"I would like to thank the entire Hindi film industry and the Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, Malayali and, of course, the Telugu film industry. They have all accommodated us for the release of Pushpa on December 5. Every industry has shown so much grace, I would like to thank all of them," he added.

The actor also said that he firmly believes that India will soon be the leading country of the world. "Not as Pushparaj but as an Indian standing in the capital of this country, I would like to say that I believe India will lead the future of the world.... And ye naya bharat hai. Ye ab rukega nahi, ye kabhi jhukega nahi. (This is New India. It will not stop, it will never bow down.)

Arjun also shared his favourite moment from the movie. (PTI)



Gitanjali Rao to direct half live-action, half animation feature film

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Filmmaker-actor Gitanjali Rao says she is set to direct a part animated, part live-action feature-length film titled "Lost and Found".

Rao, known for her starring role in "October" and directing the acclaimed animated film "Bombay Rose" as well as animated shorts "Orange" and "Printed Rainbow", said the script of "Lost and Found" is ready.

"It's called 'Lost and Found'. It's an Indian-French co-production. I have a French producer already and I have an Indian producer... This film of mine which I have been scripting over the last three years and I was here last year in the co-production market, it's a feature-length animation film, half live-action, half animation," she told PTI in an interview.

Rao was speaking on the sidelines of Film Bazaar 2024, which was held parallelly along with the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa.

The actor-filmmaker, who studied commercial art from Mumbai's JJ College of Art and did theatre with stage veteran Satyadev Dubey, said she felt "isolated" after working in animation for a long period of time.

And, that's why she wanted to work with actors and cinematographers on set, she added.

"The story evolved in a way that it's real and the protagonist goes into a painting and that's where my animation starts and he comes back. So, I have a



balance between the two (animation and live action), it's in the financing stage...

The moment the financing comes in within two years the film should be done, should be out," she said, adding a veteran actor is in the talks to star in "Lost and Found".

Rao further spoke about how director Shoojit Sircar remembered her performance in a stage play from years ago and then cast her in the 2018 meditative drama "October".

"Shoojit said 'There is this role for you. Will you do this?' So, there are times where everything comes together and you are a fool to say no. I did 'October' and I pursued my film. ('Bombay Rose') took much longer to finish and by that time everybody knew me as the 'October' actress. Also, I did it to support my bread and butter... It's difficult to finance (a film after) years and years of scriptwriting development.

"So I was doing acting, not as a career prospect, but as interesting projects (were coming my way) and it was giving me some amount of money. I worked with Aparna Sen because I love her as a director... I figured out through acting I can work with other directors and understand how they work and I use a lot of acting in my animation films. So whatever I learnt as acting is actually both as an actor and in animation," said the director. (PTI)

Ayushmann Khurrana starts shooting for 'Thama'

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Actor Ayushmann Khurrana has started shooting for "Thama", the latest chapter in Maddock Films' horror comedy universe.

Khurrana, who will be essaying the role of a vampire in the movie, shared the news in a post on his Instagram on Wednesday evening. The actor posted a screenshot of a message he received from Maddock Films head Dinesh Vijan.

"#Thama Day one," the actor said.

Vijan, who conceptualised the horror comedy universe, which also includes "Stree"

films as well as "Bhediya" and "Munjya", welcomed Khurrana in the franchise.

"Dear Ayushmann, It's fang-tastic to have you on board Maddock's horror comedy universe. Who better than Ayushmann to play the 'undead THAMA'? We believe this is a role you will love to sink your teeth into! Best Wishes, DV," read the message.

Actors Rashmika Mandanna, Paresh Rawal and Nawazuddin Siddiqui will also feature in the movie, which will be directed by Aditya Sarpotdar, who helmed "Munjya".

"Thama" will be released in theatres on Diwali 2025. Niren Bhatt, the writer of Maddock's most recent hit "Stree 2", has penned "Thama" along with Suresh Mathew and Arun Fulara.

Amar Kaushik, the director of "Stree 2", will produce the movie along with Vijan. (PTI)



Churning in Hindi cinema forcing filmmakers to think differently: Manoj Bajpayee

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Hindi cinema is going through a lull phase but this churning will, hopefully, lead to something better as creative people always find a way, says actor Manoj Bajpayee.

In a year where the box office once again appears to be dominated by blockbusters from the South like "Kalki 2898 AD" and "Pushpa 2: The Rule", the successful business of "Stree 2", "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3", and "Singham Again" has given some hope to Bollywood.

Asked whether Hindi cinema was in "trouble", Bajpayee said that isn't the case.

"... But it is definitely forcing filmmakers to think differently. And there is nothing wrong with it. I think it is a churning, it's a lull period. I'm hopeful that it will go back to its natural self very soon.

"I don't see it as a problem because creative people always find a way. It is a jolt, a shock. And, now they are thinking hard and trying to come together to find a solution to it. And they will find a solution," the actor told PTI in an interview during a visit to the news agency's headquarters.

Bajpayee said horror comedy "Stree 2", which earned over Rs

800 crore at the box office, did "remarkable" business.

"That means people are somewhere willing to go to theatres but they want something else. And that 'something else', a filmmaker has to really innovate and think hard about... My films these days come onto OTT and they have an even bigger audience.

"Last year, my film 'Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai' amassed historical views on OTT. If we convert it into rupees (box office collection), then it would be called an all-time blockbuster. The same goes for 'Gulmohar'."

The National Award winner said mass audience always wants a hero and when theatres shut down during the pandemic, people stopped getting that from Hindi cinema but in south, single screens have thrived. "We always search for a hero in our films. In the changing times, people stopped getting their hero because there were many multiplexes. The south never let the multiplexes flourish and maintained unity. They knew that their cinema would survive only through mass audiences.

"But we (Hindi industry) changed because while multi-

plexes were coming up, an aspirational India was also emerging.

They wanted their hero. The kind of heroes they got, who ruled for 20-30 years... During COVID, there was a shift as mass audiences were going to theatres in big numbers but the multiplex audience chose to sit at home and enjoy OTT."

Rising ticket costs could also be a factor in people choosing to stay at home and enjoy movies on the OTT, according to Bajpayee.

Citing the example of "Pushpa 2" star Allu Arjun, he said the Telugu actor is giving the audiences the kind of films they want.

"The person who is going to the theatres, he is a mass guy and he can't afford the ticket of a multiplex. Our mass audience can't go to the multiplex but even if they are able to go there, they want to see 'Pathaan', 'Jawan' or 'Animal'. The single screens are running packed and their audience see their hero in Allu Arjun. He is giving them the kind of film that should be enjoyed in the-



atres," added the actor, who worked with Arjun in "Vedam" and "Happy".

Whether it is Allu Arjun, Jr NTR or Mahesh Babu, the audiences in the north are not new to these actors as they have been watching their Hindi-dubbed films for years now through satellite TV channels and streamers, the actor said.

"I did some Tamil and Telugu films during those days. One day someone told me that they liked my movie 'Khatron Ka Khiladi'. I wondered when I did a film titled 'Khatron Ka Khiladi'? Later I realised that it was the name of my Telugu or Tamil films which were dubbed

in Hindi," said Bajpayee, who has starred in Tamil movies "Anjaan" and "Samar" and Telugu titles "Prema Katha" and "Puli".

Bajpayee, who is friends with many Malayalam actors and filmmakers, said he wants to venture into Malayalam films.

"They are making very good films. But they are also aware of the fact that I don't know the language. So, they'll get me those roles that have very less Malayalam dialogues or a character who speaks Hindi, English or doesn't speak a word."

The actor's upcoming film "Despatch" is set to premiere on ZEE5 on Friday. (PTI)

Indian film bags tve Global Sustainability Film award

LONDON, Dec 12: Indian film "The Kumbaya Story" has bagged a trophy at the 13th tve Global Sustainability Film Awards (GSFA) held at the iconic BAFTA here.

Produced by the Kumbaya Producer Co. Ltd, the movie clinched the award in the Transforming Society Short Film category at the ceremony last night.

"The Kumbaya Story" narrates the inspiring journey of resilient women who have transformed their lives through the art of weaving, culminating in the establishment of the Kumbaya Producer Company.

Adding to India's accolades, "GOBUK: Harmony in the Highlands", a film by Greenhub India that delves into the realm of sustainable tourism, was shortlisted in the Young Filmmakers category.

"Laapataa Ladies", India's official entry for the Oscars 2025 in the Best International Feature category, also earned a place in the shortlist for the Founder's Award.

The Founder's Award in the Feature category went to the Kenyan film "NAWI", which sheds light on the harrowing global issue of child brides.

"NAWI" has already garnered significant acclaim, including the Best Young/Promising Actor award at the 2024 Africa Movie Academy Awards, and has been selected as Kenya's entry for the Academy Awards.

In the Docu-Feature category, the Founder's Award went to the Canadian documentary "500 Days in the Wild", which chronicles a woman's extraordinary journey across Canada, traversing the vast landscape by hiking, biking, and paddling.

"500 Days in the Wild" is also Canada's official entry at the Oscars. (PTI)

Resilient Baroda face explosive Mumbai; Delhi take on MP in semifinals

BENGALURU, Dec 12: Baroda walked through a wall of fire in the group stage to qualify for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy knockouts, and that grit will be their primary weapon against an explosive Mumbai in their semifinal contest here on Friday.

Baroda (NRR: 2.35), Saurashtra (2.26) and Gujarat (1.93) had 24 points each in Group B before a better Net Run Rate propelled the top two teams into the quarterfinals.

In a way, it was fate's way of rewarding Baroda's sheer will to negate clutch situations and ability to find multiple heroes in, arguably, the toughest group in this edition of the SMAT.

They have high-velocity T20 performers in Hardik and Krunal Pandya, still none of the Baroda players feature in the top-10 list in batting or bowling.

Pacer Atit Sheth has taken 13 wickets but he is on 11th slot while newcomer Bhanu Pania is Baroda's top run-getter with 271 runs but he is in 18th place on the batsmen's list.

The quarterfinal win over Bengal validated their collective fire power.

Young openers Shashwat Rawat and Abhimanyu Rajput led their batting before pacers Hardik, Sheth and Lukman Meriwala, another underrated domestic performer, joined forces to skittle a capable Bengal line-up for a smooth win.



But Hardik played no insignificant role in Baroda's run thus far. He might be playing here after the BCCI made it mandatory for frontline stars to make themselves available for domestic events when they are not on national duty.

However, Hardik has not shown any laxity and Meriwala accepted the value the all-rounder brings in along with his sibling in Baroda's quest to add a third SMAT title and the first since the 2013-14 season.

"Yes, he brought a lot of dif-

ference to our team. Hardik and Krunal are batting in the middle-order, and they can exploit a good start given by our (top-order) batsmen. Hardik and Krunal also bowl. So it's good support for the team," he said.

Mumbai, the 2022 champions,

were largely untested in Group E and their first real test came against Vidarbha in the last eight match on Wednesday.

Their batters led by Ajinkya Rahane carried the team past a 200-plus target with minimum fuss, but even in that victory Mumbai would not have missed the profligate ways of their bowlers.

Experienced Shardul Thakur and Mohit Avasthi have taken 12 wickets apiece but leaked more than 10 runs an over, and they need a much more restrained effort against Baroda.

While all-rounders Suryansh Shedge and Tanush Kotian added more depth to their line-up, Mumbai will certainly welcome more consistency from under-scanner opener Prithvi Shaw. Both the sides have veterans and experienced young names, but Delhi under Ayush Badoni have shown a steel and all-round stability, hence a marginal upper hand over Madhya Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh will rely on spinner Kumar Kartikeya Singh, the second highest wicket-taker in this tournament with 15 scalps, to stop an informal Delhi top-order led by Priyansh Arya and Yash Dhull. MP's batting will depend on RCB star Rajat Patidar.

Semifinal 1: Baroda vs Mumbai, 11 am.

Semifinal 1: MP vs Delhi, 4.30 pm. (PTI)

Corner of Foreign Field: RCB fans bring 'Ee Saala Cup Namde' chants in Brisbane too

BRISBANE, Dec 12: The Indian Premier League teams have garnered a lot of fan base among the diaspora across the globe but none can beat the passion of Royal Challengers Bengaluru fans, who have been loyal despite trophy-less 17 years. "Ee Saala Cup naamde" ("This year, the Cup is Ours") chants reverberates through Chinnaswamy but watching a few RCB loyalists clad in famous red and blue jersey create a lively atmosphere at the Allan Border field in Brisbane during an India Women's team game against Southern Stars. "We are always RCB fans. Both women and men teams. Extremely happy

and proud that our women's team has won the WPL last year and we want the men's team to emulate that in 2025," Ramprasad, who has been living in Brisbane for the last 26 years, said.

He has watched almost every game that the Indian men's team played at the Gabba, where the third Test between India and Australia will be played from December 14. The entire RCB fans group with him carries the tricolor and RCB flag whenever they go to watch international matches here too.

"I am a life-member card holder of KSCA (Karnataka State Cricket Associa-

tion) and have watched one IPL match in Bengaluru. I, like every RCB fan, want Virat to score a century at the Gabba. We played well at Perth but Adelaide was a disappointment. Hopefully the team will turn this around in Brisbane like last time," he said. It consultant Ajay Mohan Patan, who came to this part of the world in 2007 is confident that their favourite Virat Kohli will hold the much awaited IPL trophy soon.

"Everywhere we go we carry red and blue colours. We always play bold and win the heart. Yes we have not won the cup but I am sure we will win this time. Ee Saala

cup namde. I would appeal to the fans to have patience. RCB is forever our team," he said.

"Although he hasn't won the IPL yet but we have to look at the consistency. We can't always have the cup in our mind. We have to believe in a process. It is just a matter of time before we win the Cup," he said.

"Our loyalty as fans is unwavering. One player has played for so many years for one team. You must understand that there is no player like Virat. He is a player for the ages. The Cup will certainly come," he added. (PTI)

McSweeney hopes to throw a few punches at Bumrah in Gabba

BRISBANE, Dec 12: Rookie Australia opener Nathan McSweeney hopes to "throw a few more punches" at the Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah in the third Test at the Gabba, starting Saturday.

Bumrah tuned out to be McSweeney's nemesis in his maiden Test series as he dismissed the right-hander thrice in the last two games but he came back well with a gutsy first innings 39 in the first innings of the second Test in Adelaide. The young opener feels that it couldn't get better initiation to international cricket

"He got me again in Adelaide ... (but) I'm really enjoying the experience (of trying to) work out a game plan on the run against a world-class bowler," McSweeney said.

"Hopefully, I'll get better the more I face him, and I can throw a few more punches hopefully here at the Gabba."

The 25-year-old has worked closely with Marnus Labuschagne during his early days in Queensland and then at South Australia, and the two complements each other while batting together.

"He's a beauty of a guy. I think what we see on TV when the bowler is bowling the ball, he's really intense, but in between overs, he's actually quite calm," McSweeney said.

"It gives me confidence just realizing that we're all going through the same stuff - I'm (in my) first game, trying to work it out, (and) he's 50 games in, still trying to tinker and work things out ... it's a very important series, we're not quite all batting the way we want to, but there's always room for learning and tinkering, and we haven't all quite worked it out yet."

"So that gave me a little bit of confidence - we're always striving to be better, and I think that's what makes guys like Steve (Smith) and Marnus really good." (PTI)



"Facing him for the first time, he's quite a unique bowler ... So (it's) just (about) adapting to his angle and where he delivers on the crease. I got two pretty good balls from him (in Perth), so (I) try and just wear that on the chin and trust that what I've been doing is going to be good enough."

NDTL receives approval from WADA to manage Athlete Biological Passport

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: The National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL) here has received approval from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to manage the Athlete Biological Passport (ABP), which is significant for the country's initiatives to curb the abuse of banned performance-enhancing substances. The WADA granted the approval on December 6, a press release from the sports ministry stated.

The Athlete Biological Passport (ABP) is an advanced anti-doping tool that monitors an athlete's biological markers over time. By analysing variations in parameters such as blood and steroid profiles, the ABP helps to ensure fair play in sports and protect clean athletes.

"The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has granted approval for the

NDTL, New Delhi on 6th December 2024, as an Athlete Passport Management Unit (APMU) to manage the Athlete Biological Passport (ABP)," a PIB release said. "This milestone marks a significant achievement for India in advancing its anti-doping initiatives. Now, India is part of a group of the 17 APMUs approved by WADA worldwide."

"India's APMU would serve the country as well as the anti-doping organisations of neighbouring countries."

The NDTL has been engaging in dope testing since 1991. This recognition from the WADA will open new pathways and strengthen NDTL's credibility as a key player in the world in the fight against doping. The WADA had suspended its accreditation of the NDTL in 2019 due to non-conformities with the Interna-

tional Standard for Laboratories (ISL). Later, the accreditation was restored in 2021. The objective of having Athlete Biological Passport (ABP) is to monitor selected variables (biomarkers of doping) over time that indirectly reveal the effect of doping, as opposed to the traditional direct detection of doping by analytical doping controls.

According to the WADA website, ABP is currently composed of two modules - haematological and steroidal. Haematological module considers a panel of biomarkers of blood doping that are measured in athletes blood sample. The steroidal module considers a panel of biomarkers of steroid doping measured in athletes urine sample.

It's a new approach that monitors an athlete's blood profile over time and can

detect changes in its overall composition that could be the result of doping, whether or not a specific banned substance is discovered. This profile is known as an ABP.

Anti-Doping Organizations (ADOs) can integrate the ABP into the larger framework of a robust anti-doping program in order to identify athletes requiring further attention through intelligent and timely interpretation of passport data. The ABP provides valuable information that can be used to direct anti-doping activities such as 'target testing' or investigations more effectively, and pursue possible Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs) (use or attempted use by an athlete of a prohibited substance or a prohibited method) of the World Anti-Doping Code. (PTI)

'Shuttle' Badminton HPC inaugurated in Bhubaneswar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 12: 'Shuttle by Dalmia Bharat', a High-Performance Centre (HPC) dedicated to promoting excellence in badminton, was inaugurated on Thursday at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar by the chief minister of Odisha, Mohan Charan Majhi and the chief minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma in the presence of India's chief national coach, Pullela Gopichand and Puneet Dalmia, managing director, Dalmia Bharat.

The HPC, a three-way collaboration among the state of Odisha, Pullela Gopichand Badminton Foundation (PGBF) and Dalmia Bharat Group, will be known as the 'Dalmia Bharat Pullela Gopichand Badminton Academy'.

Spanning an indoor area of 77,000 sq ft, housing eight badminton courts with a spectator capacity of 400 seats, the academy will utilize advanced sports amenities at the venue to promote



holistic training and development of the young talent under the guidance of world-class coaches. The iconic structure has modern residential facilities for 50 players, a gymnasium and an amphitheater for outdoor activities. A viewing ring on the terrace provides a unique 360-degree panoramic view of the city.

The construction is an architectural marvel, featuring a pioneering shuttlecock-inspired design,

a first of its kind in India. The construction also showcases a commitment to sustainability, incorporating low carbon (green) cement, rainwater harvesting for groundwater recharge, and energy-efficient LED lighting. Also, the distinctive inverted shell design minimizes the power consumption, contributing to its environmental responsibility. The aerodynamic circular shape allows a smoother wind flow, re-

Teen Indian GM Gukesh becomes youngest world chess champion



SINGAPORE, Dec 12: Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh on Thursday became the youngest world chess champion at 18 years after beating title-holder Ding Liren of China in the 14th and last game of a roller-coaster showdown that went right down to the wire.

Gukesh secured the requisite 7.5 points as against 6.5 of Liren after winning the last classical time control game of the 14-game match that seemed headed for a draw for most part. As title winner, he will get a major share of the USD 2.5 million prize purse.

"I was dreaming this moment for the last 10 years. I am happy that I realised the dream (and made it) into reality," the soft-spoken Chennai-lad told reporters after the historic triumph here.

"I got a bit emotional because I was not expecting to win. But then I got a chance to press on," he added.

The reticent teenager grinned widely and raised his arms in celebration after the triumph, a stark contrast from the poker face he usually sports while playing.

Before Gukesh's feat on

Thursday, the legendary Garry Kasparov of Russia was the youngest world champion when he won the title at the age of 22, dethroning Anatoly Karpov in 1985.

Gukesh had entered the match as the youngest ever challenger to the world crown after winning the Candidates tournament earlier this year.

He is the second Indian after the legendary Viswanathan Anand to win the global title. Anand, a five-time world champion, had last held the title in 2013 before going down to Magnus Carlsen. "Every chess player wants to live this dream. I am living my dream," said Gukesh.

Gukesh, who won the 14th game against Liren after 58 moves in four hours, is the 18th world chess champion overall. If Thursday's game was also drawn, winner was to be decided in shorter duration tie-breaks on Friday.

Gukesh had won the third and 11th rounds before Thursday's decisive game, while the 32-year-old Liren emerged victorious in the opening and 12th games.

All other games were drawn in the match. (PTI)

Chief Minister of Odisha, Mohan Charan Majhi and Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated the Dalmia Bharat Pullela Gopichand Badminton Academy at the Kalinga Sports Complex in a grand ceremony

during the maximum wind pressure on the facade.

Underlining Dalmia Bharat's commitment towards the promotion of sports and nurturing talent in India, Shri Puneet Dalmia, MD, Dalmia Bharat, said, "We are grateful to the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha, Shri Mohan Charan Majhi, and the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam, Shri Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma for their graceful presence today. Himanta ji, as the President of Badminton Association of India, you have been a catalyst in our global badminton success, and we look forward to reaching even greater heights in the future."

"Dalmia Bharat has always been an integral part of Odisha's

illustrious journey and today, we are delighted to present the people of the State with another iconic facility that will nurture the future champions. We hope the venue will become a major part of the competitive circuit and draw international and national professionals. We are grateful to Shri Pullela Gopichand for his invaluable guidance and support in this effort."

Shri Pullela Gopichand shared, "I am excited to be part of this revolutionary journey, initiated by Dalmia Bharat and the Odisha government. The facility, with its unique design and state-of-the-art amenities, will play a crucial role in shaping the future of Indian badminton."

Kohli addresses team, Rohit bats against semi-new and new ball

BRISBANE, Dec 12: He used to be the cynosure of all eyes at training sessions during his captaincy days and Virat Kohli was once again the centre of attention as he addressed his teammates here on Thursday.

After the demoralising 10-wicket defeat in the Adelaide day/night game, the visitors needed a bit of inspiration going into the crucial third Test of the series, and the youngsters in the side couldn't have got a better mentor than 'King' Kohli himself to guide them with his words of wisdom.

The team huddles before the start of the training session has been a constant feature for years now and Kohli used to do a lot of talking during his days in charge.

He did take a back seat once he left captaincy but with skipper Rohit also under immense pressure after four straight defeats, the senior-most player (in terms of Test debut) had to take the initiative ahead of the match starting here on Saturday.

With vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah by his side, Kohli was seen speaking animatedly to the group and everyone, including Rohit, listened to him with rapt attention.

Unlike before the pink ball Test, Rohit looked in far better shape during his net session at the Gabba but question marks remain over whether he would be back to opening the innings or stay put at No. 6, which isn't his preferred slot.

On the day, while KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal once again faced the new ball at the nets, Rohit took on a slightly older Kookaburra at the beginning. Having faced that for some time, he did change nets with Rahul and also played a brand new red cherry for a while.

The Gabba pitch has a decent grass cover and has always been one of the most traditional Australian wickets with both seam and bounce being on offer. Rohit's susceptibility



has been against the moving deliveries more than bounce, and hence, it would be interesting to see if he takes on the challenge head on.

After his session, Rohit and head coach Gautam Gambhir were immersed in a lengthy chat and a from a distance, it looked like they were discussing technique. Gambhir was seen shaping up for some shadow drives, with Rohit watching him intently.

Akash Deep is believed to be the most consistent bowler in the Indian net session but that is no indicator that he will replace the young Harshit Rana, who was taken to task by Travis Head during the second Test in Adelaide.

After four wickets on Test debut in Perth, Harshit was smashed for 86 in 16 overs but skipper Rohit came firmly to the youngster's

defence.

The burly Harshit can bowl the heavy ball and Gabba, just like the Optus Stadium track, could suit his style of bowling although he has been losing steam in subsequent spells after the opening one.

Akash Deep at the other hand troubled Jaiswal twice, getting the outside edge of his bat, and those were clear catches in the slip cordon. He also got a pat on the back from the skipper.

Akash Deep has more experience of bowling at first-class level but one certainly knows that Gambhir is a man of strong convictions and is also a firm believer in Harshit's talent.

Also there is a possibility of strong afternoon thunder showers on first day and it could be a bit overcast with 60 percent hu-

midity. A good seam bowling option won't be bad.

Mohammed Shami, whose presence was solicited by one and all, might not join the Indian team if it is entirely left to him. Shami, who has played nine Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 games after his Ranji Trophy comeback, himself "feels" that he is not ready to take the rigours of red ball cricket right now.

"The swelling seems to come and go. He himself is keen on playing more and more domestic cricket and hence the possibility of him once again playing Vijay Hazare Trophy for Bengal (starting December 21) looks imminent at the moment.

"He can then bowl at least three spells and 10 overs per game," a BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

"Shami is at the business end of his career. What if his knee acts up badly in Australia after a long spell? He will have to field on hard grounds. He missed the last IPL due to ankle surgery.

"This time, he has a hefty ₹ 10 crore deal with SRH. You can't blame him if he wants to preserve himself for white ball format for now," the source added.

Washington Sundar is the most technically equipped batter, Ravichandran Ashwin is the best spinner in terms of skills, and Ravindra Jadeja is easily the best package as an all-rounder, who can restrict the opposition with dart-board hitting accuracy besides being a very capable middle or lower middle-order batter.

Ashwin bowled well within himself at Adelaide and had Mohammed Siraj not messed up the aerial chance that Head offered off the off-spinner's bowling when on 64, who knows what his figures would have read.

Back in the day at Gabba, the late Shane Warne used to be lethal and Nathan Lyon could be seen more as a restrictive option. (PTI)

Momentum is with Australia after win at Adelaide: Sunil Gavaskar

BRISBANE, Dec 12: The legendary Sunil Gavaskar feels Australia will have the momentum in the third Test against India starting on Saturday thanks to their victory in the Pink Ball Test at Adelaide last week.

Australia levelled the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy 1-1 with a 10-wicket win in the day-night Test after losing the first Test at Perth by 295 runs.

"The momentum that the Indian team got in Perth was lost during the 10-day gap. Now, the momentum is with Australia because they have won this Test match," Gavaskar told Star Sports.

"After the Adelaide Test, a few days later, you are playing at The Gabba. So, the momentum is now with the Australian team," he added.

Speaking to the same channel, former spinner Harbhajan Singh said India should try to play their best cricket to register a win at the 'Gabba' before travelling to more favourable venues in Sydney and Melbourne.

"Their best chances will be, I think, in Sydney and Melbourne. Anyway, if you play your best cricket at The Gabba and win there, then you will definitely win one match out of Melbourne or Sydney," Harbhajan said.

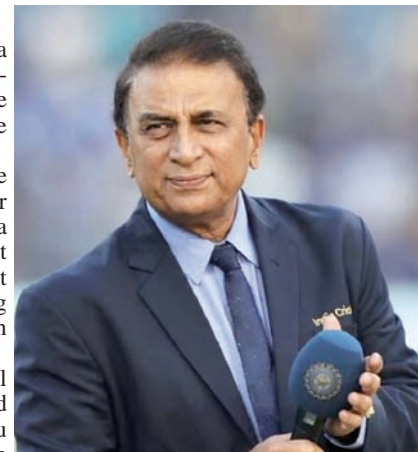
He said India have the ability to make a comeback into the series despite the heavy loss in Adelaide.

"The equality of the first two Tests shows that both teams have the ability to come back. Australia has come back; now maybe it's India's turn to turn the tables," he said.

The owner of 711 international wickets too agreed that the long interval between the first and second Test resulted in India losing the momentum.

"This series is tough because both teams have had losses. What happened with Australia in Perth, maybe they didn't expect it. And what happened with India in Adelaide, maybe India also didn't expect it.

"Although there was a very long gap in the middle between the two Tests, sometimes such a gap spoils the momentum, and it happened here," he said. (PTI)



New ICC chairman Jay Shah meets top officials of 2032 Brisbane Olympics



BRISBANE, Dec 12: Jay Shah, who took charge as ICC chairman earlier this month, on Thursday met with top officials of the 2032 Brisbane Olympics organising committee to discuss the sport's potential inclusion in the Summer Games.

Cricket will make a return to the Olympics after 128 years when it is played in the 2028 Los Angeles Games. The sport is not yet confirmed for the 2032 edition in Brisbane.

"Very exciting time ahead for Cricket's involvement in the Olympics movement - a meeting with the @Brisbane_2032 organising committee in Brisbane, Australia today," Shah posted on

X with visuals of the meeting.

The meeting was attended by Brisbane 2032 organising committee chief Cindy Hook and Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley.

The former BCCI secretary is expected to watch the action of the third Test between India and Australia, starting at the Gabba from Saturday.

Among Shah's immediate priorities is to find a solution to the hosting of Champions Trophy in February-March. A hybrid model has been agreed by all stakeholders but no announcement has been made yet, fuelling speculations over the future of the event. (PTI)

Not the time to look at what happened at Gabba in 2021: Mitchell Marsh

BRISBANE, Dec 12: The Australian team doesn't have the time to think about India's incredible victory at the Gabba in 2021 and ahead of their face-off at the same venue almost four years later, Mitchell Marsh says the home side would rather focus on its ability to bounce back like it did in Adelaide last week.

On the previous tour, Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill had starred in a historic series winning fourth innings chase at the Gabba, handing Australia their first loss at the venue since 1988.

"The biggest thing for us is focussing on this week and not (any) more time on the past. The way we bounced back from Perth (defeat) was an example of that. So we are really focussed on playing our style this week," Marsh said on sidelines of the Australian practice session.

On his own fitness concerns, he said: "I had a sore back, but right now it's feeling as good as it has felt."

Marsh hasn't bowled



much in first two Tests but that was always part of the plan.

"We had a really clear plan before the series started. I didn't bowl as much as I would have liked to in the lead-up to the series, but our medical staff and Ronnie (coach Andrew McDonald) and Patty (captain Pat Cummins) were really clear on my lead-up.

"I trusted that. I haven't had to bowl too much so

far, but my body is feeling really good."

Marsh said he did not believe in rationing his bowling quota going into the third Test.

"I will try and be ready to bowl as much as Patty needs me. Our all-rounders haven't bowled a hell of a lot in Australia the last few years.

"I am really well placed. For me it is all about being able to contribute. Whether that is

five overs and bowling the occasional good ball and getting a wicket or just bowling overs to give our boys a chop out, I love it."

Steve Smith seems to have got into a form rut but Marsh said that the veteran batter doesn't need unsolicited advice.

"I don't think he has to do anything to show he is Steve Smith. We know he is one of our best players ever and we are certainly

backing him to get a few runs. I am probably not in position to be telling Smith how he takes the way he needs to work on.

"We know he (Smith) is a class player and scored a lot of runs for Australia and certainly at times when we have needed, he seems to have stepped up and certainly he has got full faith in his mind."

Save Travis Head, Australian batting has looked a bit shaky but Marsh believes that each one needs to have his own plans of dealing with the Indian bowling.

"Each batter has their own plans and we need to back each others' plans, it's about applying pressure in your own method," he said.

Marsh also didn't reveal Josh Hazlewood's exact fitness status. The senior pacer was out with a side strain in second Test and didn't bowl on Thursday during training.

"Great thing about Josh is he is a level headed guy and will do everything to get up for the game," Marsh added. (PTI)

Treesa-Gayatri pair keep semifinal hopes alive

HANGZHOU, Dec 12: The Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand defeated the Malaysian combination of Pearly Tan and Thinaah Muralitharan in straight games in their second Group A tie to keep alive their semifinal hopes at the BWF World Tour Finals here on Thursday.

Treesa and Gayatri, the only Indians to have qualified for the season-ending tournament, beat their opponents 21-19 21-19 in just 46 minutes to stay afloat in the competition.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Indians had lost to world No.1 Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning of China in their opening group match.

Treesa and Gayatri had lost 20-22 20-21-14 to Sheng and Tan, who had claimed a silver medal at the Paris Olympics.

The Indians are currently placed second behind the Chinese and will need to win against the Japanese pairing of Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida on Friday to book their semifinal berth.

Treesa and Gayatri started on an aggressive note and surged to a 6-2 lead in the opening game before the Malaysians roared back and it went neck-and-neck after that.

But the Indians kept their composure in the final stages to pocket the first game.

The second game too was a close affair till the first five points before the Malaysians took a slender lead. (PTI)

Bihar govt transfers Moin-ul-Haq stadium to BCA; major revamp planned by 2027

PATNA, Dec 12: The Bihar government has transferred the Moin-ul-Haq Stadium here to the state cricket association, clearing the decks for it to become a multi-sport complex and an international venue with a 40,000-seat capacity at an estimated cost of ₹ 400 crore.

The renovated stadium will

have 76 corporate boxes and accommodation for 250 VIPs and the sports complex will feature a badminton court, volleyball court, swimming pool, five-star hotel, fully-equipped players' hostel, restaurants, a clubhouse, and other modern amenities, stated a release.

The construction is slated to begin early next year, with com-

pletion target of 2027.

"The Bihar Government has fulfilled its responsibility. Now, it is up to the BCA (Bihar Cricket Association) to begin its work. The BCA will expedite the construction and deliver a world-class stadium to the people of Bihar within two-three years, where they can enjoy international matches,"

BCA president Rakesh Kumar Tiwari stated in a press release after the signing of documents on Tuesday.

As part of the agreement, the state government has waived the land registry fee of approximately ₹ 37 crore.

The registry documents were signed by Mahendra Kumar, di-

rector of the sports department, on behalf of the state government, and BCA president Tiwari.

The event was also attended by sports department deputy director Sanjay Kumar, Patna district sports officer Om Prakash, BCA secretary Jiaul Afrin, GM administration Neeraj Rathore, among others. (PTI)

Rohit must return to opening if he has to throw the first punch: Shastri

BRISBANE, Dec 12: Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who knows a thing or two about winning Test rubbers in Australia, on Thursday asked India skipper Rohit Sharma to return to the opening slot "if he has to throw the first punch" on an opponent brimming with confidence.

Shastri was serving as team director when India won their maiden Test series in Australia in 2017-18 and was the head coach when the side rallied brilliantly to stun the hosts in the last tour in 2020-21.

The move to slot Rohit at number six did not yield the desired results for India and they were hammered by 10 wickets in the second Test at Adelaide, leaving the five-match clash locked at 1-1 and with everything to play for in what Shastri believes could decide the fate of the series.

"That's where he's (Rohit) been at his best over the last eight or nine years," Shastri was quoted as saying by "The Age".

"It's not that he's going to set the world on fire - he could - but that's the place that's best for him...If he has to do damage, if he has to throw the first punch, that's the best place from where he can do it."

Rohit had only one fifty in his last 10 innings heading into the Pink-ball Test last week when Shastri, interestingly, advised against changing the opening combination of Yashasvi Jaiswal and KL Rahul after their success in the position while backing the captain to bat in the middle-order.

Shastri said he has no doubt the winner of the third Test, starting here on Saturday, could go on to claim the series.

"I feel whichever team wins this Test match will win the series. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind. So it is very, very important that India get the balance right, because Australia have got the confidence back," the former captain said.



The triumph of 2021 is considered one of the greatest in the history of Indian cricket and Shastri, while speaking at the first annual Usman Khawaja Foundation

lunch at the Gabba, said the unity showed by the team, despite restrictions due to COVID-19, played a big part in the historic win.

"In COVID, the first Test match you start with five bowlers and the same five bowlers don't play the last Test. That says it all, it's like Australia playing without these five bowlers in the last Test of the series, it's a different ball game. Plus you didn't have quite a few batsmen as well. So it's a tribute to the players.

"You can only do so much as a coach from behind the scenes. At the end of it, it's the players who have to go out there and do their job and they were magnificent."

Four years ago, after getting bundled out for their lowest Test total of 36 in Adelaide, India made a magnificent comeback to win two of the remaining three games and emerge winners.

Shastri fondly recalled a conversation between Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill, who was helping out the latter with some useful tips right after his dismissal, as India went for the jugular to score 140 odd runs in the final session of play to

shock the hosts at the Gabba, which was until then the home team's fortress.

"I'll never forget it," Shastri said.

"Last session, 140 runs to get. We had two different change rooms because of COVID. I went down from the coaches' room to have a chat with either Rishabh or (Chateshwar) Pujara. When I was about to reach the toilet, I heard a conversation between Gill and Pant.

"Seventy-one overs bowled, Gill had got out for 91, and they were the two youngest players in the side, 21 and 22. 'Nine overs left, they need the new ball, they'll bring (Marnus) Labuschagne on with his leg spin, you've got to score 45-50 runs there'.

"They are planning how they can reach closer to the end score, and no way was I going to stop them, I don't want to change that mindset. So I just walked past and said 'do what you have to do'. In the end, we chased down nearly 150 in that last session." (PTI)