

WORLD
NATION

- 'B'desh might hold next election in late 2025 or first half of 2026'
- EU seeks assurances about peaceful future from Syria's new leaders
- Priyanka carries bag emblazoned with 'Palestine' to Parliament
- Don't blame EVMs if you don't know how to fight polls: BJP to Rahul

Tabla legend Zakir Hussain, who symbolised oneness of music, passes away

Condolences pours in from across professions and nations



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 16: Zakir Hussain, the exuberant maestro of tabla who once called the instrument his "mate, brother and friend" and embodied the universality of music in his 60-year career, died in a San Francisco hospital early Monday. He was 73.

Hussain, the globally recognised musician and one of India's most celebrated, was suffering from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease, his family said

after the ventilation machine was switched off. This was 4 pm San Francisco time (5.30 am Monday, IST)," Hussain's sister Khurshid Aulia told PTI.

Regarded as the greatest tabla player of his generation, Hussain is survived by his wife Antonia Minnecola and their daughters, Anisa Qureshi and Isabella Qureshi.

"He leaves behind an extraordinary legacy cherished by countless music lovers around the globe, with an influence that will resonate for generations to come," the family said in a statement.

Born on March 9, 1951, Hussain was the son of all-time tabla great Ustad Alla Rakha. The legacy of genius was perhaps destined.

He was just seven when he gave his first performance and started touring at the age of 12. In his early career, Hussain went on to collaborate with virtually all of India's performers of the time, including Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

in a statement. Confirmation of the death of the music legend -- who cruised through genres, be it Western or Jazz, with the same ease and mastery with which he drummed out rhythm and magic from the tabla -- came after hours of fevered speculation on social media.

The tabla virtuoso had been in hospital for the last two weeks and was shifted to the intensive care unit (ICU) after his condition deteriorated.

"He passed away peacefully

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CBI files five chargesheets in online trading scam

UHPL and BSBCSL charged by the Guwahati unit

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: The CBI has filed five more chargesheets in Guwahati against 18 accused in separate cases of an online trading scam in Assam where thousands of gullible investors were cheated by offering high returns on their deposits, officials said Monday.

The Guwahati unit of the CBI has charged 16 private persons and two companies Upepithets Holdings Pvt. Ltd (UHPL) and Brahmaputra Sanchay and Biniyog Cooperative Society Ltd (BS-BCSL).

In its chargesheet against Upepithets Holdings Pvt Ltd, the CBI has alleged that its director Hemen Rava and Manager Sankar Saha were involved in orchestrating an illegal deposit scheme that solicited funds from investors under false pretence.

"They used deceptive means, including the notarised stamp papers, to lure investors with the promise of guaranteed monthly returns of six per cent and above. They cheated the investors and misappropriated the deposits for their personal gains," the CBI

spokesperson said in a statement.

The charge sheet against Brahmaputra Sanchay and Biniyog Cooperative Society Ltd also named its then chairmen Jiten Deka and Himangshu Talukdar, branch manager Indrani Das, and secretary Sanjib Deka.

The group ran an unregulated deposit scheme of Brahmaputra Sanchay & Biniyog Cooperative Society.

The scheme "Grihalakshmi" allegedly lured with promises of substantial returns such as a bonus and interest of 15 per cent annually without any viable business model that allured potential depositors to deposit a large sum of their hard-earned money.

The third CBI charge sheet is filed against four private persons namely Mainao Brahma, Dipankar Bhatta, Jyotisman Sarma, and Sumit Barman who allegedly entered into a conspiracy and were running an unregulated deposit scheme with the intention to de-

fraud the general public. They allegedly diverted and misappropriated the deposits for personal use and for purchasing landed properties, construction of buildings, and purchasing vehicles, etc.

The CBI filed the fourth chargesheet against Rishiraj Gogoi and Joy Modak who were allegedly involved in running a stock trading business in the guise of their Company "Go Millions LLP" formed for selling various cosmetics and other products.

"They... made an arrangement to collect deposits from the general public by way of business through UPI and Bank Account and did not deposit the amount in any regulated deposit scheme. All the accused are in Judicial Custody," the CBI said in the statement.

The CBI also filed a chargesheet against Sankar Kumar Biswas, Rofiqul Islam, Dinesh Ch. Ray, and Niranjana Kumar Malakar, who collected money through UPI, cash, and cheques from different persons for investments in the name of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



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'Nehru's letters no one's personal property': BJP

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: The BJP Monday asked former Congress president Sonia Gandhi to return the correspondences of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with a host of personalities to the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library, saying the historical documents belonged to the country and were not anyone's personal property.

Speaking to reporters, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra cited reports of the PMML's deliberations on the issue to note that Nehru's correspondences with Edwina Mountbatten, wife of the last British Viceroy to India, and leaders Jayaprakash Narayan and Jagjivan Ram lay with the erstwhile Nehru Museum and Library Society, which returned them to Sonia Gandhi in 2008.

Patra also raised the issue earlier in the day in the Lok Sabha during Question Hour when Union culture minister Gejendra Singh Shekhawat was replying to questions related to his ministry.

Shekhawat noted that Patra's query, a supplementary, was unrelated to the main question raised in the House by BJP member Saumitra Khan. The minister said he has noted down Patra's suggestions and appropriate action can be taken in the matter.

The Nehru Museum was expanded to include memorials to all Prime Ministers and renamed the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library after the BJP came to power at the Centre.

Patra told reporters that 51 cartons of Nehru's correspondences were given to Sonia Gandhi after approval of the museum's then-director. However, following a legal opinion, Rizwan Kadri -- one of the 29 members of the society tasked with running the PMML -- recently wrote to the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India, Sri Lanka decide to ramp up defence, energy, trade ties

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: India and Sri Lanka on Monday adopted a futuristic vision to expand their partnership, resolved to soon conclude a defence cooperation pact and decided to ramp up energy ties by establishing electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines.

The decisions were taken during wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayaka.

Prime Minister Modi said both sides decided to emphasise investment-led growth and connectivity for the India-Sri Lanka economic partnership, and it was decided that physical, digital, and energy connectivity will be key pillars of the cooperation.

Work will be done to establish electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines, Modi said, adding India will supply liquefied natural gas to the island nation's power plants.

The Prime Minister also announced that a ferry service will be started between Rameshwaram and Talaimanar to boost connectivity between the two

nations.

"We both agree that our security interests are interconnected. We have decided to soon finalise the defence cooperation agreement. There has also been an agreement for cooperation on hydrography," Modi said.

The vexed fishermen issue also figured in the talks.

"We also discussed issues related to the livelihood of fishermen. We agree that we must proceed with a humanitarian approach to this matter," Modi said.

Referring to the Tamil issue, Modi said India hopes that the Sri Lankan government will fulfil the aspirations of the community.

The Prime Minister also noted that India has so far provided Lines of Credit and grant assistance worth USD 5 billion to Sri Lanka.

"We have cooperation in all 25 districts of Sri Lanka and selection of our projects is always based on priorities of our partner countries," PM Modi said. (PTI)

Probe against Amazon, Flipkart: SC says all pending cases should go to K'taka HC

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: The Supreme Court on Monday said the petitions of e-commerce giants Amazon and Flipkart challenging an order of the Competition Commission of India ordering a probe against them for alleged malpractices should be transferred to the Karnataka High Court.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Manmohan issued a notice on the plea filed by the CCI which sought the transfer of the petitions filed by the e-commerce platforms from the High Courts to the top court or the Delhi High Court.

"Issue notice. Prima facie, we are of the view that all cases, which are pending in various High Courts should be transferred to Karnataka High Court for hearing," the bench said and posted the matter on January 6, 2025.

The top court, however, asked the Karnataka High Court not to proceed with the hearing on the petitions filed by e-commerce giants.

During the hearing, attorney general R Venkataramani submitted CCI did not have an objection if the matter was heard by the Karnataka High Court.

In its plea before the top court, the CCI sought directions to transfer the cases pending before the High Courts of Allahabad, Madras, Telangana, Punjab & Haryana, Delhi, and Karnataka, either to the Supreme Court or the Delhi High Court. The fair trade regulator CCI ordered the probe against Flipkart and Amazon for alleged malpractices, including deep discounting and tie-ups with preferred sellers on their platforms.

The CCI's probe order followed a complaint by Delhi Vyapar Mahasang, whose members comprise many traders dealing in smartphones and related accessories.

Following the CCI's order, Amazon and Flipkart filed separate petitions in various High Courts, challenging the investigation. (PTI)

No mention of Mujibur Rahman, Yunus celebrates end of Hasina's 'autocratic government'



DHAKA, Dec 16: Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on Monday led Bangladesh in marking the 54th Victory Day, his speech making no mention of founding leader Mujibur Rahman while calling deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's administration the "world's worst autocratic government".

"Bijoy Dibosh" commemorates the Pakistan military's surrender to Indian forces and the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. 'Bangabandhu' Mujibur Rahman is seen as the independence movement's iconic figure.

His daughter Sheikh Hasina fled to India on August 5, after massive student-led protests against her government. Nobel laureate Yunus then took over as head of an interim government.

In his televised address to the nation, Yunus indicated that elections might be held by early 2026.

"Broadly speaking, the election can be scheduled between the end of 2025 and the first half of 2026," he said.

The country could not build on its achievements because of its own faults and, of late, a "monstrous autocratic government" had grabbed power, he said in an apparent reference to Hasina's Awami League government.

He said the ouster of the "world's worst autocratic government" amid a mass upsurge added extra significance to the celebration this year.

Yunus and Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin separately paid tributes to Liberation War martyrs at the National Memorial on the outskirts of the capital.

"I recall the millions of martyrs including numerous children and juveniles, youths and the elderly people's sacrifices that made possible the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Wastewater reuse can promote water circularity and sustainability'

72% of urban wastewater in India flows into water bodies, land untreated: Report

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: A meagre 28 per cent of the urban wastewater and sewage generated in India undergoes treatment while the rest flows directly into rivers, lakes, and land, according to a report by the think tank Centre for Science and Environment.

India's urban water crisis could ease if all the wastewater is treated and reused, the report released here on Monday said.

Rajiv Kumar Mital, director general of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), said, "Using and disposing of treated water without harnessing its potential means we are losing out on utilising an important resource. The challenge is to scale up and ensure that the work we do in this sector is impactful."



Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) director General Sunita Narain said India faces significant water scarcity challenges due to rapid urbanisation, industrial growth, population expansion and, most importantly, climate change.

"Wastewater reuse can be a key part of the strategy to address these concerns and promote water circularity and sustainability."

"In fact, there is an opportunity for turning wastewater into water again and this is what our report's title -- Waste to Worth -- is referring to," Narain added.

The Jal Shakti Ministry has mandated that cities must recycle and reuse at least 20 per cent of the water they consume.

Subrata Chakraborty, senior programme manager, water programme, CSE, said, "This is in line with the belief that promoting a circular economy is essential for achieving a sustainable and climate-resilient future and for managing the ever-growing demand for freshwater." (PTI)

Guwahati SARAS Mela records more than double increase in sales



GUWAHATI, Dec 16: The annual SARAS Mela in Guwahati, which connects rural entrepreneurs with urban consumers, recorded sales of nearly ₹ 20 crore this year, more than double the last time.

Panchayat and rural development minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass said on Monday that the total sales during the 16-day fair was ₹ 19.69 crore this year. It was ₹ 8.74 crore last year.

The SARAS (Sale of Articles of Rural Artisan Soci-

ety) Mela is an initiative of the Union ministry of rural development. The 'Asomi SARAS Mela' is organised under the aegis of the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission.

Dass said the stall of Purima Mahila SHG of Lakhimpur district recorded the highest sales at ₹ 1.04 crore.

Abhilash SHG of Sivasagar district and Bishbhani JK SHG of Lakhimpur district were at the second and third spots, recording sales of ₹ 93.94 lakh and ₹ 84.57 lakh, respectively.

The Asomi SARAS Mela, which concluded on Sunday, featured a total of 238 stalls, including 100 from outside the state.

Besides host Assam, 26 other states participated in the fair, the minister said.

Stalls of Assam recorded sales of ₹ 11.07 crore, while the stalls from other states sold products worth ₹ 6.71 crore. The food stalls did business for ₹ 1.91 crore.

"The fair's continued success highlights its growing popularity. We express our gratitude to the visitors, stallholders, and participants for their active involvement in making the event a success," Dass said. (PTI)

Trade deficit widens to record USD 37.84 bn

Exports contract 4.85 pc in Nov

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: After recording double-digit growth in October, India's exports in November contracted by 4.85 per cent year-on-year to USD 32.11 billion, while the trade deficit widened to an all-time high of USD 37.84 billion due to record surge in gold imports.

According to the commerce ministry data, imports rose by 27 per cent year-on-year to a record USD 69.95 billion in November due to high inbound shipments of vegetable oil, fertiliser, and silver.

Gold imports during the month under review soared to an all-time high of USD 14.8 billion as against USD 3.5 billion in November 2023.

Cumulatively, during April-November this fiscal, exports increased by 2.17 per cent to USD 284.31 billion and imports by 8.35 per cent to USD 486.73 billion.

Trade deficit, the difference between imports and exports, during April-November widened to USD 202.42 billion from USD 170.98 billion during April-November 2023.

Briefing on the data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said that fluctuations in oil prices are impacting the exports.

Petroleum product shipments have declined by about 50 per cent to USD 3.71 billion last month. During the first eight months of this



cal also, these exports contracted by 19 per cent year-on-year to USD 44.6 billion.

However, the secretary said that non-oil exports are still recording healthy growth, and this along with services sector would help the country cross USD 800 billion of total exports by end of this fiscal.

On high trade deficit and imports, the secretary said one should not be concerned about this as the country is growing.

"Therefore, our demand for imports will be higher. As long as our exports and foreign direct investments are growing, it will finance our imports," he said.

He also said that the ministry is focusing on 20 countries and six services and manufacturing sectors including IT/ITes to further boost the

shipments.

In these 20 nations, there are huge potential to increase exports and to tap into that, the ministry is in touch with the Indian missions abroad.

The ministry is calling a meeting with these missions in January next year and "we will be devising a strategy on how to improve exports in the 20 countries", Barthwal said.

As per estimates, services export in November 2024 increased to USD 35.67 billion as compared to USD 28.11 billion in November 2023.

These exports reached an all-time high of USD 34.31 billion in October, registering an increase of 22.3 per cent year-on-year.

Crude oil imports last month rose by 7.9 per cent to USD 16.11 billion.

At export front, key sectors that registered negative growth during the month under review included oil meals, iron ore, coal, gems and jewellery, chemicals and handicrafts.

However, sectors that recorded positive growth are textiles, engineering goods, electronics, pharma and spices.

Raw cotton raw waste, used in the textiles industry, saw a surge in imports from USD 30.61 million in November 2023 to USD 170.73 million last month. (PTI)

Markets decline amid weak global trends; Sensex falls 385 points

MUMBAI, Dec 16: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Monday as investors turned cautious ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision amid weak global cues.

Besides, selling pressure in metal and IT counters amid a weak rupee and sluggish Chinese economic data hit investors' sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 384.55 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 81,748.57. During the day, it dropped 581.84 points or 0.70 per cent to 81,551.28. The NSE Nifty lost by 100.05 points or 0.40 per cent to 24,668.25.

"Domestic equities took cues from Asian and European indices and ended negative, as investors await the outcome of the US FOMC meeting on rate decision later this week.

"Although a rate cut is on the cards, there is a lack of confidence amongst the investors due to the sluggish Chinese economy and concerns ahead of Trump's decision on import tariffs on key economies," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

There is heightened action in the primary markets, with five IPO listings and seven new IPOs opening for subscription in this week, he added.

From the 30-share Sensex blue-chip pack, Titan, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever and JSW Steel were the biggest laggards.

The BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.73 per cent, and smallcap index climbed 0.47 per cent.

"The national market traded in a range-bound manner while the realty sector outperformed in expectation of growing demand and a potential rate cut cycle in 2025. Rising US 10-year bond yields and a strengthening dollar led investors to remain watchful of the upcoming US Fed policy and its commentary for 2025 rates," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Among sectoral indices, metal dropped by 0.95 per cent, teck fell by 0.82 per cent, oil & gas (0.75 per

cent), BSE Focused IT (0.74 per cent) and utilities (0.63 per cent).

Really surged 3.17 per cent, consumer discretionary (0.69 per cent), consumer durables (0.50 per cent), capital goods (0.38 per cent) and healthcare (0.22 per cent) were the gainers.

"...the Nifty Metal index dropped...pressured by weak global prices and concerns over US-China trade dynamics. Weaker-than-expected retail sales data from China, a key consumer of metals, added to fears of slowing demand.

"Nifty IT snapped its five-day winning streak, shedding 0.9 per cent on account of profit booking. Nifty Really gained more than 3 per cent, buoyed by new property launches and optimism surrounding strong housing demand in 2025," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended mostly lower on Friday.

Meanwhile, wholesale price-based inflation declined to a three-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items.

India's merchandise exports in November dipped by 4.85 per cent to USD 32.11 billion against USD 33.75 billion a year ago.

On Monday, the rupee depreciated by 9 paise to close at an all-time low level of 84.89 (provisional) against the US dollar.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 2,335.32 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.75 per cent to USD 73.91 a barrel.

"There is heightened action in the primary markets with five IPO listings and seven new IPOs opening for subscription this week. We expect markets to consolidate within a broad range, as sentiments remain cautious ahead of US Fed and Bank of Japan's interest rate decision this week," Khemka said. (PTI)

WPI inflation declines to 3-month low of 1.89 pc

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Wholesale price based inflation declined to a 3-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items, and experts predicted a 0.25 per cent interest rate cut by the RBI in the policy review in February.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) based inflation was 2.36 per cent in October 2024. It was 0.39 per cent in November, last year. In August, 2024, it was 1.25 per cent.

As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 8.63 per cent in November, as against 13.54 per cent in October. The decline was led by a dip in vegetable inflation which stood at 28.57 per cent, as against 63.04 per cent in October.

Inflation in potato, however, continued to be high at 82.79 per cent, while in onion it fell sharply

to 2.85 per cent in November.

The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 5.83 per cent in November, against a deflation of 5.79 per cent in October. In manufactured items, inflation was 2 per cent in November, against 1.50 per cent in October.

In a research note, Barclays said wholesale price inflation softened in November, on lower primary food inflation, which more than offset higher inflation seen in manufactured products.

"December to date, global prices are up 0.7 per cent and are likely to push December WPI inflation higher," Barclays said.

As per the consumer price index data released last week, retail inflation moderated to 5.5 per cent in November, compared with 6.2 per

cent in October.

Barclays said this is within the monetary policy committee's (MPC) tolerance band of 2-6 per cent indicating that CPI inflation will be drifting closer to the 4 per cent target by March 2025.

"We expect the MPC to cut the policy repo rate by 25bps in its February meeting. We are mindful of the almost new-looking MPC that will be in charge of this decision," Barclays said.

The government appointed a new RBI Governor earlier this month. Former Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra took over as the 26th RBI Governor on December 11 replacing Shaktikanta Das.

In October, the government had reconstituted the 6-member MPC. (PTI)

Manipal Academy of BFSI and Axis Bank launch women-exclusive young bankers cohort

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 16: Manipal Academy of Banking, financial services and insurance (MABFSI) recently announced its partnership with Axis Bank for the launch of the Axis Bank Young Bankers Program Women's-Only Cohort, an official release stated.

The diversity cohort was officially inaugurated at the MABFSI campus in Bengaluru by Rajkamal Vempati, President & Head - Human Resources at Axis Bank, reaffirming the Bank's dedication to building a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Commenting on this he said "Our diversity batch in the Axis Bank Young Bankers program includes a talented group of women, with 24% being married and 44% over the age of 25".

"Over the years, we have successfully integrated numerous young women who have brought fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to our operations," he further added.

With the introduction of the new women-only cohort, female participation has seen a significant increase. The program now includes 700 women, improving the gender ratio from 31% to 38% for FY 24-25, marking a notable advancement compared to previous cohorts, the release stated.

Airtel launches new ₹398 prepaid plan

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 16: Bharti Airtel, on Monday announced the launch of a new prepaid plan priced at ₹ 398, designed to meet the evolving digital and entertainment needs of its customers, an official statement said. The plan offers a rich suite of benefits, including unlimited local, STD, and roaming calls, 2GB of unlimited 5G data per day, and 100 SMS per day, all with a validity of 28 days, it further claimed.

According to the statement, the latest plan would stand out with its value offering a 28-day subscription to Hotstar Mobile, providing access to premium entertainment on the go including live sports, blockbuster movies, and popular web series, it said. Additionally, it reflects Airtel's commitment to delivering more than just seamless connectivity, addressing the evolving entertainment needs of customers and enhancing their overall experience.

Nephrocare India calls for healthy lifestyle to prevent kidney diseases

KOLKATA, Dec 16: Nephrocare India, a publicly listed kidney care services provider, on Monday stressed the importance of preventive and early renal care to combat the growing kidney diseases in the country.

The company, which plans to expand to 300 clinics across India over the next few years, said a healthy lifestyle is key to addressing this mounting health challenge.

"India adds nearly 2.5 lakh new dialysis patients annually, while over seven crore individuals suffer from various stages of chronic kidney diseases," said Dr Pratim Sengupta, MD & CEO, Nephrocare India Ltd.

The silent progression of the disease, coupled with the country's rising prevalence of diabetes and hypertension, has intensified the challenge, he said.

"India has around 82 million diabetic patients and is on the verge of becoming the Diabetic Capital



of the World. About 32 per cent of diabetics are likely to experience renal issues in their lifetime," Sengupta said at Nephrocare's third-annual Walkathon event on Sunday.

Hypertension, another leading

cause of kidney disease, is worsened by India's excessive salt consumption, which is 2.5 times the international average, Sengupta highlighted.

"Diabetes and hypertension form a fertile ground for renal fail-

ure. Additionally, unregulated use of over-the-counter painkillers and antibiotics is significantly worsening the burden of kidney disease in the country," he added.

Amid these challenges, Sengupta emphasised the need for adopting a healthy lifestyle.

"To propagate this message, we organised Walkathon, titled 'Walk for Health, Walk for Your Kidneys', which aimed to highlight the role of regular exercise and lifestyle changes in preventing kidney diseases," he said.

Sengupta noted the growing need for specialised renal care in India as kidney ailments continue to rise due to changing lifestyles, limited awareness, and increasing painkiller abuse.

Nephrocare India has already committed a capital expenditure of ₹ 70 crore for its expansion plans which will run until March 2026, to establish new clinics across the country. (PTI)

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CBI files five chargesheets

Titan Capital Market. The accused did not invest the amount received from the different depositors with any Regulated Deposit Scheme. "They cheated the depositors by collecting money from them for investments and did not return the said amount to them," the agency said.

The CBI has successfully traced databases containing details of depositors, who were deceived into investing in these unregulated deposit schemes, it said. (PTI)

Tabla legend Zakir Hussain

Shivkumar Sharma. As news spread about the death of the loved musician, a distinctive figure with his broad smile, and curly locks that kept rhythm with the rapid, blurry movement of his fingers on the tabla, the tributes poured in.

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday condoled the demise of tabla icon Zakir Hussain, describing it as an irreparable loss to the music world.

"The sound of the tabla became silent. The passing away of Ustad Zakir Hussain, decorated with Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Vibhushan, is an irreparable loss to the music world. May God give peace to the departed soul. Om Shanti," Acharya said in a post in Hindi on X.

Sarma said the death of Ustad Zakir Hussain has made the world of culture poorer.

"Making his fingers dance on the dayan and bayan, he took Indian Tabla to the global stage and will always be synonymous with its intricate rhythms," he added.

The CM said Hussain was a doyen of music and a stalwart of creativity, whose works endeared him to people across generations.

"His passing leaves a void that will be hard to fill. My heartfelt condolences to his family, disciples, and countless admirers," Sarma said.

"He was a bridge between the musical traditions of India and the West. I had the privilege of conferring the Padma Vibhushan upon him. I convey my deepest condolences to members of his family and his countless admirers," President Droupadi Murmu said in her message.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Hussain "brought the tabla to the global stage, captivating millions with his unparalleled rhythm".

"Through this, he seamlessly blended Indian classical traditions with global music, thus becoming an icon of cultural unity. His iconic performances and soulful compositions will contribute to inspire generations of musicians and music lovers alike. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and the global music community," the PM wrote on X.

Deputy Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi said the death of the table maestro is a profound loss for the world of music.

"His virtuosity on the tabla captivated audiences worldwide, transcending cultural boundaries. Ustadji's immense contribution to the world of music will live on through his countless masterpieces," he added.

Expressing his condolences to Hussain's family, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge called him a "cultural ambassador who bridged borders and generations with his mesmerising rhythms".

Hussain, pivotal in moving the tabla from an accompanying instrument to centre stage, told PTI last year that music is his world.

"It is the garb I wear. Tabla is a mate, it is a brother, a friend, it's the bed I sleep in. My father always said that each instrument has a spirit and half the battle if you are a student is to get that spirit to accept you as a mate, as a friend and once that happens then the instrument reveals how you should react to it, how you should touch it and express yourself through it," Hussain said.

Throughout his long career, the percussionist was at the front of innovation and experimentation in fusing different sounds from different worlds.

He collaborated with several renowned international and Indian artists but it was his 1973 project Shakti with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L Shankar and percussionist T H 'Vikku' Vinayakram that brought together Indian classical music and elements of jazz in a hitherto-unknown fusion.

His groundbreaking work with Western musicians such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, jazz musician Charles Lloyd, banjo player Bela Fleck, bassist Edgar Meyer, percussionist Mickey Hart and The Beatles' George Harrison brought Indian classical music to an international audience, cementing his status as a global cultural ambassador.

Hussain received four Grammy Awards in his career, including three at the 66th awards ceremony earlier this year. And, in fact, was planning a series of concerts in Mumbai early next year as part of the fusion band 'Shakti', for which he got one of his Grammys.

The percussionist, who was also a composer and dabbled in acting, received the Padma Shri in 1988, Padma Bhushan in 2002, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2023.

Microsoft chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said Hussain was a true legend who brought immense joy through his rhythmic brilliance.

"Your music transcends boundaries and will live on forever," Nadella said in a post on LinkedIn.

Besides his work as a tabla player, Hussain also composed music for many movies, including "Mr and Mrs Iyer".

He also acted in the Merchant Ivory film production "Heat and Dust", "The Perfect Murder" and "Saaz", opposite Shabana Azmi. (With inputs from PTI)

Cong MPs stage protest

against minorities in Bangladesh. "Our government should raise its voice, speak with the Bangladesh government, and ensure their security."

Priyanka Gandhi also raised the issue of the alleged removal of a photograph of Pakistan surrendering to India from the Army headquarters.

"In that picture, there is Field Marshall Sam Manekshaw, Lt Gen J S Aurora... they are being insulted today. Why is politics being played over it?" she posed. The Congress MPs also walked out of the Lok Sabha, saying Priyanka Gandhi was not allowed to raise the 'Vijay Diwas' issue in the House.

"Today, we walked out of the Lok Sabha because our leader Priyanka Gandhi was not allowed to raise the 'Vijay Diwas' issue and the matter related to the photographs (of the 1971 war victory) in the Army chief's lounge being removed."

"Her speech was interrupted. To condemn that, INDIA bloc partners walked out," Congress MP Manickam Tagore said. (PTI)

CM to grace Bhutan's

with performances of Assam's Bihu alongside Bhutan's traditional dances, weaving an elegant panorama of shared cultural heritage and goodwill. Notably, the visit will be Sarma's maiden journey to Bhutan since assuming the office of chief minister.

₹ 13,422 cr disbursed to street

no fraud-related complaints have been received against the agencies or companies disbursing loans under the Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (SVANidhi) scheme.

"As on 08.12.2024, 94.31 lakh loans have been disbursed amounting to ₹ 13,422.16 crore under the PM SVANidhi scheme. Out of 94.31 loans, 40.36 lakh loans have been repaid by street vendor beneficiaries," he said in the written reply.

All states have been divided under three categories based on their size -- large states, hilly and northeast states, small states, and Union territories, Sahu said. He also said that based on their size and categorisation, each state has been provided a disbursement target against which their performance is measured and ranked.

In July this year, Madhya Pradesh secured first place under the 'Best Performing State' category in the PM SVANidhi scheme. After Madhya Pradesh, Assam has been ranked second in the 'Best Performing State- Innovation and Best Practices Award' category. (PTI)

No mention of Mujibur Rahman

achievement of our independence," he said. His speech, however, made no mention of the political leadership in 1971 and of Mujibur Rahman -- a sharp departure from previous Victory Day addresses. Critics accuse his interim government of trying to erase Mujibur Rahman's legacy. The authorities have earlier announced a decision to phase out the currency notes currently in circulation.

The new ones will not carry Rahman's image. On Monday, Army bugles played the Last Post, commemorating those killed during the 1971 War. East Timor President Jose Ramos Horta accompanied Yunus at the celebrations.

Deviating from tradition, Bangladesh did not stage a Victory Day Parade in the capital. "The army is currently engaged in activities across the country, and organising the parade requires advance preparation, which wasn't feasible this year," liberation war affairs adviser Farook-e-Azam told the Daily Star newspaper.

But he said the celebration would be inclusive for all with 'Victory Fairs' across the country featuring art and craft exhibits and agricultural product displays, and showcasing domestic goods. He said schools were hosting their own events as part of the festivities and cultural programmes would include the participation of children, women and men, making the celebration inclusive for all.

"The shift in the celebration format aims to bring more active public involvement and create a festive atmosphere in every part of the country," Azam said.

The liberation movement began when the West Pakistan leadership refused to hand over power to the Awami League in line with the 1970 election results. India backed Bengali guerrillas and dealt with the mass migration of people from Bangladesh.

Eight Indian military veterans of the Liberation War travelled to Dhaka this year to mark Victory Day. Similarly, eight Bangladesh veterans were in Kolkata to join the Vijay Diwas celebrations. In his speech, Yunus indicated that elections would be held in 2025 or early 2026 after updating the voters' list.

"From now on, the responsibility has been entrusted to them to start the process of forming the future government. They have started their preparations. They have a lot of work to do," he told a local news agency, referring to the Election Reforms Commission.

"We have to make sure that the names of all those who have become eligible to vote in the last 15 years are included in the voters' list. This is a big task," he said.

"He said after the student uprising, there was no room for making any mistakes. Many young people who were deprived of this right in the past will vote for the first time," he added. (PTI)

'Nehru's letters no one's personal

seeking his help in restoring the papers to the museum's custody, he added. The BJP leader said Kadri did not receive any reply. Taking a swipe at the Gandhi family, Patra said these were not the personal property of anyone or any family but historical documents part of the "treasure" of India.

"As Nehru was a member of the family, it suffers from a sense of entitlement over his letters," he alleged. He asked, "What were the contents of the letter that the first family felt should not be made public?" Patra noted that the digitisation process began in the museum in 2010 but the Gandhi family decided to take back the letters' possession before that. (PTI)

Minister Gorlosa unveils plans for stadium upgrades and heritage restoration Cachar set for transformation with key projects

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 16: Cachar is ready for significant transformation as Nandita Gorlosa, Assam's Minister for Sports, Youth Welfare, and Minority Development, led a high-profile review meeting on Monday.

It was held at the new conference hall of the Deputy Commissioner's office. The gathering underscored Assam government's commitment to infrastructure improvement and sports development, signaling an ambitious vision for the district's progress.

The meeting highlighted critical developmental projects, with substantial input from the Public Works Department (Buildings), Public Works Department (National Highways), and the Sports Department.

Among the notable initiatives discussed was the restoration of Silchar's historic Circuit House, a heritage site slated for a comprehensive renovation.

This project aims to blend historical preservation with modern amenities, ensuring the landmark



remains a cultural touchstone while meeting contemporary needs.

Additionally, plans to construct a mini stadium at Dwarbond in Dholai were announced, which aims to invigorate the local sports landscape. Designed to nurture emerging talent, this facility is expected to inspire a new generation of athletes.

Further emphasising the impor-

tant role of sports in community development, the modernisation of the Cachar District Stadium was unveiled under Phase I, funded by the United Fund for 2022-23. This ambitious project aims to elevate the district's sporting facilities to national standards, creating an environment conducive to excellence.

"The collective responsibility of stakeholders in transforming Cachar into a model of inclusive growth. She reiterated the government's dedication to community empowerment through strategic investments in infrastructure and sports," minister Gorlosa remarked.

"Cachar's potential is immense, and with the right vision and collaboration, we are paving the way for a brighter, more prosperous future," she added.

She emphasised the government's focus on aligning heritage with progress, ensuring that development initiatives honor the past while addressing the aspirations of future generations.

The review meeting was attended by a variety of dignitaries, including Dholai MLA Nihar Ranjan Das, Cachar district commissioner Mridul Yadav, district development commissioner Norsing Bey, ADC (Sports) Yubaraj Borthakur, assistant commissioner Lakshyajet Gogoi, and other departmental officials. Their collective presence underscored the collaborative approach driving Cachar's transformation.

NFR strengthens freight operations with key developments

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 16: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has made significant strides in enhancing its freight transportation network, focusing on improving customer interface and boosting economic growth, an official statement said on Monday.

Recent initiatives include the successful transportation of rice from Tufanganj in West Bengal to Jirania in Tripura under the 'Mini Rake Demand' scheme. The consignment, dispatched by Tufanganj Agro Industries Pvt Ltd, was accompanied by seamless online payment processing, reflecting Indian Railways' push towards embracing digital convenience.

The transportation adhered to the highest safety standards, ensuring the reliability and efficiency of the service. This initiative marks



another milestone in NFR's efforts to streamline operations, providing faster and cost-effective solutions for transporting goods.

In another key development, NFR has commenced loading quartzite from Binnaguri railway station to SSPL Siding in West Bengal, marking the first such operation. This new freight route is projected to generate an estimated

₹ 40 lakh per rake, opening new opportunities for revenue generation and regional economic growth.

These efforts demonstrate NFR's commitment to modernising freight logistics, ensuring seamless transportation solutions and reinforcing its position as a trusted partner for businesses across India.

KADHASDCOM delegation heads to Delhi for autonomous state demand

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Dec 16: As the winter session of Parliament continues, a delegation from the Karbi Anglong Dima Hasao Autonomous State Demand Committee (KADHASDCOM), along with its allies, left for New Delhi on Monday.

They will hold a sit-in demonstration at Jantar Mantar on December 18, advocating for the implementation of Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution to grant an Autonomous State comprising the three hill districts of Assam—Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao.

At a press briefing before their departure, KADHASDCOM president Ajit Timung reaffirmed their commitment to the cause, stating that the movement

has persisted for 39 years.

He emphasised that the organisation is non-political and focused on securing an Autonomous State under Article 244(A), despite previous MoUs and settlements with the central government. Timung also urged other political groups not to accept any offers short of full implementation of Article 244(A).

The delegation includes representatives from the Karbi Students Association (KSA), Dimasa Students Union, Karbi Riso Adorbar, Karbi So-arlo Amei (KARSA), and other regional organisations. KSA president Mirjeng Kro expressed optimism, noting that the central government has taken a positive stance on their demand and that the desired autonomous state is within reach.

Akhil Gogoi leads mass joining ahead of Assam polls

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Dec 16: A mass joining program took place on Monday at the Jagun Bazaar Public Auditorium, attended by Rajior Dal chief and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi, in the 83rd Margherita constituency of Tinsukia district.

Approximately 500 members from the Indian National Congress, Bajrang Dal, and Aam Aadmi Party from the greater Jagun region joined Rajior Dal in the presence of Akhil Gogoi, president of Rajior Dal and MLA from the Sivasagar constituency. With only a few days remaining until the upcoming panchayat elections, Rajior Dal is ramping up its preparations for victory.

In his speech, Akhil Gogoi

strongly criticised the BJP-led government of Assam, highlighting the ongoing mass joining programs across the state, which he suggested have put Himanta Biswa Sarma and all BJP MLAs and ministers on edge. Looking ahead to the 2026 assembly elections, Akhil Gogoi warned that he would hold chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma accountable, suggesting that the countdown for the BJP has begun.

He urged the Indian National Congress, Asom Jatiya Parishad, and all regional parties in Assam to unite with a realistic approach for the 2026 assembly elections, aiming to deliver a strong response to what he termed a communal political party.

Orang National Park thrills tourists with wildlife and scenic beauty

HT Correspondent
MANGALDAL, Dec 16: Orang National Park continues to attract both domestic and international tourists with its picturesque landscapes and thriving wildlife.

Swami Tryambakeshanand Maharaj, co-secretary of Ramakrishna Mission, Kharupetia, expressed his joy after a gypsy safari in the park, describing it as peaceful and beautiful.

Despite not spotting a Royal Bengal Tiger this time, he was delighted to see four one-horned rhinoceroses, wild elephants,

Ex-NDFB delegation meets Amit Shah on BTR accord implementation



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Dec 16: A delegation of ex-NDFB leaders, led by Ranjit Basumatary, executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), met Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla, and Intelligence Bureau (IB) Director Tapan Deka in Chhattisgarh to discuss the pending implementation of the BTR Peace Accord of 2020. The delegation, which also in-

cluded members of the ex-NDFB Welfare Association such as general secretary Dilranjan Narzary and vice president Binul Wary, addressed concerns regarding ex-NDFB members who remain jailed in various cases.

During the meeting, the delegation urged the Home Minister to expedite the implementation of the peace accord, emphasising the urgency of addressing the issues faced by ex-NDFB members. Amit

Shah assured the delegation that both the home secretary and IB Director would visit Assam next week to engage with local authorities and explore solutions to the ongoing concerns.

"It was a pivotal day for the people of Bodoland. I had the privilege of interacting with the Home Minister, Home Secretary, and IB Director regarding our brothers who are still incarcerated. As an ex-NDFB member involved in the BTR accord, I urged immediate action in line with the agreement, which has yet to be fully implemented," Ranjit Basumatary stated.

"It was heartening to see representatives from various extremist groups across India who have come forward for peace talks, participating in this important discussion," he added.

Basumatary expressed hope that the upcoming visit by the home secretary and IB director would lead to a resolution, paving the way for the release of jailed members and a brighter future for the region.

Common room inaugurated in Nagaon school

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Dec 16: A girls' common room, dedicated to the memory of Krishnashree Devi, was inaugurated at Raidongia Holiram Saikia Higher Secondary School in Nagaon district.

The common room was donated by former MP Bishnu Prasad in honor of his daughter, Krishnashree Devi. Bishnu Prasad, a veteran politician, officiated the inauguration, highlighting the facility's modern amenities on Saturday. The event was attended by Krishna Mahanta, a senior advocate of the Gauhati High Court, who commended Bishnu Prasad's initiative in creating the common room. Other dignitaries present included Arijit Prasad, Krishnashree's brother and an advocate at the Delhi High Court; Chena Ram Saikia, a retired government official; and Munindra Saikia, the president of the school's governing body, along with local residents, teachers, and students of the school.

AAMSU Hojai hosts 10th biennial conference

HT Correspondent
HOJAI, Dec 16: The 10th biennial conference of the Hojai District Committee of the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) took place at the Jugal Kishore Kendriya Bhawan in Hojai.

It was featured on Sunday which included a full day of programs, featuring a discussion session focused on communal harmony and national integrity. Prominent social workers from Hojai, including Kamal Dutta and Faizul Hoque, highlighted the importance of fostering communal harmony and building a healthy society.

The conference resulted in the formation of a 61-member committee, with Monowar Hussain as the chief advisor, Mamun Rashid as advisor, Kabir Ahmed Laskar as president, Shibir Ahmed as working president, Rajib Laskar and Tayyab Ahmed as general secretaries, and Ejazul Haque as the chief organising secretary.

Over the past three years, the AAMSU Hojai district committee, led by Monowar Hussain and Kabir Ahmed Laskar, has actively worked for the welfare of the local population. Their initiatives have included providing aid to flood-affected individuals, protecting the reserved forests of Doboka, ensuring the rights of evicted persons in the Lumding reserved forest, promoting student enrollment, combating child marriage and crimes against children, and organising awareness programs against drug abuse and corruption.

33rd Annual College Meet of BNCA begins

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Dec 16: The 33rd Annual College Meet of Biswanath College of Agriculture (BNCA) commenced with a vibrant inaugural ceremony on Monday.

The event, which will run until December 19, saw the presence of key figures including Pramod Borthakur, MLA of Biswanath, as the chief guest, and Tapan Gohain, Registrar of Assam Agricultural University, and P Kamalbai, director of NERFMTTI, as guests of honour.

The ceremony began with floral tributes to the Swahids, followed by a welcome speech from Kaju Deka, general secretary of the BNCA Students Union. Dr HC Bayan, DDSW, also welcomed the gathering, while Dr RN Barman, Associate Dean, hoisted the college flag.

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Dec 16: The government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) marked its fourth anniversary with a grand celebration featuring a range of programs highlighting the region's cultural and developmental progress.

During the event, notable personalities from various fields, including culture and sports, were honoured on Sunday for their contributions.

Renowned Bodo folk singer and comedian Gunabati Basumatary (Dangkhw Lwdw) was conferred the prestigious Jwhwlo Nileswar Brahma Cultural Award 2024 by the Cultural Affairs Department.

The award, which included a citation, an endi shawl, a memento, and a cheque for ₹ 2 lakh, was presented in recognition of Basumatary's exceptional



contributions to Bodo folk music and culture.

The celebration also recognised various development partners

working toward the welfare of Bodoland. Organisations such as Agastya International Foundation, Azim Premji University, Vyomika

One killed, four injured in Dibrugarh road accident

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Dec 16: A tragic accident occurred on Monday morning when a vehicle (AS 06 AK 8716) veered off the Dibrugarh-Dulajjan road and plunged into the Sessa river, leaving one person dead and four others injured.

The deceased has been identified as Ishan Gogoi and the injured—Akhiraj Gogoi (28), Trideep Gogoi (30), Latu Gogoi (26), and Biplob Gogoi (28)—were rescued by locals and rushed to Assam Medical College and Hospital for treatment.

The vehicle remains stuck in the riverbed, highlighting the severity of the accident. Local residents have expressed concerns about the road's safety and have called for immediate measures to prevent further incidents.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was deployed to recover the body of Ishan Gogoi.

According to police reports, the vehicle was speeding when it lost control and fell into the river. Authorities have recovered the vehicle and are conducting an investigation into the incident.

Jorhat launches awareness campaign on child marriage prevention

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Dec 16: The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Jorhat, launched a week-long awareness campaign on the prohibition and prevention of child marriage on Monday, focusing on 26 Government High and Higher Secondary Schools in the district.

DLSA Secretary-cum-Judicial Officer, Devojyoti Bhuyan, informed that workshops on leadership, public speaking, and advocacy training would be conducted to empower girls and make them ambassadors of change.

The awareness programs were held at five schools, including Kokojan Girls' High School and Teok Girls' Higher Secondary School. The programs were attended by nominated advocates, Para Legal Volunteers, officials from the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPO), local officials, teachers, students, and school management committees.

The campaign focused on the roles of various stakeholders in preventing child marriage and child sexual abuse. Girl students who spoke on the subject were selected as 'Ambassadors of Change,' and they will advocate in their localities post-campaign. A district-level award ceremony will recognise the best speakers and select a 'District Ambassador of Change.'

BTR takes major step in aquaculture with pearl cultivation initiative

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Dec 16: In a bid to boost aquaculture and promote pearl cultivation in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), the Department of Cooperation, BTC, handed over 5,000 pearl mussels to Jwngthi Pearl Production Co-operative Society Ltd in North Chekadani, Kokrajhar district.

The programme was inaugurated by Ukil Mushahary, Executive Member for Cooperation, BTC, alongside CHD Cooperation Jayanta Kherkatary. The mussels were ceremoniously released into a specially prepared 2-bigha pond, expected to yield pearls after 15 months.

Speaking at the event, EM Mushahary emphasised the economic potential of pearl farming, pledging full support for market linkages to ensure fair demand and value for the pearls. Farmers were encouraged to work diligently to make the initiative a success.

Earlier in September, BTC chief Pramod Boro inaugurated a state-of-the-art pearl cultivation lab in Titaguri, Kokrajhar, to support this innovative practice. The initiative is set to empower cooperative societies, particularly women-led groups, and strengthen the rural economy in BTR.

With this pilot project gaining traction, pearl cultivation is expected to become a sustainable model for aquaculture development in the region.

Forest protection training starts at Raimona National Park

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Dec 16: A three-day training program aimed at enhancing the capabilities of forest protection workers and improving security measures has been launched at Raimona National Park, a UNESCO heritage site in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

The program, which focuses on forest and wildlife conservation, skill development, and physical fitness, has attracted over 100 forest protection workers, with 44 participating in the first phase of the training camp at Kachugaon in Kokrajhar district.

The initiative is being led by Bhanu Sinha, the divisional forest officer of Kachugaon Forest Division, Sanatan Deka from the Wildlife Trust of India, and renowned conservationist Bhubendra Nath Talukdar. The training covers vital topics, including forest protection laws, wildlife conservation strategies, and the ecological importance of maintaining forest cover.

During the program, Talukdar highlighted the alarming ecological changes in the Kachugaon area, once celebrated for its biodiversity, stressing the severe consequences of deforestation and climate change. He called for urgent action to preserve Assam's dwindling forest cover to avoid dire impacts on both the environment and local communities.

The training initiative underscores the region's commitment to safeguarding its natural resources and enhancing the skills of those tasked with protecting them.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

People fall forward to success
-Mary Kay Ash

Changing dynamics in Syria

The fall of Assad-regime in Syria has given birth to antagonisms amongst its earlier allies like Iran, Turkey, and Russia. On the other hand, the leverage gained by Israel, ostensibly on American support, does not augur well for the region. The striking developments in Syria over the 13 days preceding the fleeing of the Syrian President to Russia have transfixed the world. Thousands are already trying to make their way back to Syria after years in exile. It turns out the answer to the refugee crisis that sent millions of Syrians into neighbouring countries and Europe may simply be the removal of a dictator. Though in reality during recent months, more countries were trying to normalise ties with Assad. Italy even sent an ambassador back to Damascus. However, the Syrian situation and a decrease of Iran's influence in Syria may have profound implications for the middle east's geopolitical landscape, power dynamics, and strategic alignments.

Regional actors including Iran, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf states may compete to find a toehold during the transitional period in Syria to realign their efforts to safeguard their regional interests. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, may through calculated engagement with the diverse Syrian political factions and reconstruction efforts may attempt to gain leverage by trying to counter Turkish and Iranian aspirations. Moreover, the turmoil in Syria could also exacerbate sectarian tensions as Sunni Arab states may seek to prevent Iran from regaining influence, while various militant groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) could try to rebuild their operational presence in the region. The Syrian conflict is now proving to be the Achilles heel of the Iranian axis. An ally of the Islamic Republic since its founding in 1979, the Assad regime called on Tehran to help quash the uprising. Hezbollah deployed thousands of men in Syria, transforming from a Lebanese political party and militant group into an Iranian expeditionary force. But Hezbollah's fighting in the open in Syria for a decade exposed it to Israeli surveillance. This helped Israel's recent military campaign, which decimated the group's leadership and destroyed much of its capabilities. Iran's hubris grew as it added another Arab capital under its control. But helping Damascus also stretched Tehran's capabilities, siphoned off resources and exposed its vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, Israel may take more assertive positions against Iran-affiliated organisations in the region, including Lebanese resistance groups active in Syria, with the aim to prevent Tehran from reconstituting its sphere of influence in Israel's north. The list of challenges for Syria is long, including deep apprehensions about rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) vision for the future, the possibility of violent retributions after five decades of authoritarian rule and the danger of a resurgence of Isis. Syrians do not need to be reminded of this, instead an end to foreign meddling in the country is the need of the hour, but no regional player is going to exercise constraint. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, has accused the United States, Israel, and Turkey of trying to overthrow the Assad's government in Syria. He claims this is part of a joint "American-Zionist" plan, with Turkey also involved. These developments also highlight the complex geopolitical situation of the region.

He further stressed the importance of helping Syria in this challenging time. The situation remains tense as these accusations unfold. Despite years of collaboration - particularly on Turkey's economic support to circumvent international sanctions on Iran - relations between Iran and Turkey appear to be tattering. Turkey has long provided support for anti-Assad rebel groups, including the HTS which led the march to Damascus.

Judiciary in resolving disputes over religious places

By-Privanka Saurabh

The judiciary plays a vital role in resolving disputes over religious places while safeguarding the principles of secularism, equality, and justice enshrined in the Indian Constitution. However, this task is fraught with challenges such as balancing historical claims with contemporary rights, maintaining public order, addressing emotional sensitivities, and ensuring compliance with legal frameworks such as the Places of Worship Act, 1991. These complexities demand a careful and impartial approach to uphold constitutional values. If you want to destroy a country, destroy its cultural identity. The country will automatically perish. This is what the foreign invaders who attacked India did. The Islamic invaders not only looted wealth but also demolished temples and religious places on a large scale to destroy India's cultural and religious identity. The aim of the British was also to weaken India and exploit its resources. Therefore, they also made every possible effort to weaken India's cultural identity. The religious places destroyed by the invaders are not just religious symbols.

As an ancient civilization, India's identity is not complete without them. Ayodhya, Kashi, and Mathura are some examples of this. After hundreds of years of slavery, Sanatan culture is being revived today. In the Kashi, Mathura, Sambhal, and Ajmer Dargah cases, there is an attempt to acquire the symbols of India's cultural identity based on evidence and documents. Challenges faced by the judiciary in addressing disputes over religious places, such as ambiguity in the legal framework. Although the Places of Worship Act, 1991 aims to stabilize the 1947 status of religious places, its provisions leave room for different interpretations, weakening its enforcement. The Allahabad High Court allowed cases like the Gyanvapi Masjid in 2022, interpreting the Act as allowing a survey to determine religious character. Revisiting age-old grievances runs the risk of increasing communal tension, disrupting public order, and harming social unity. Judicial rulings in religious disputes often become tools for political mobilization, challenging the judiciary's ability to maintain neutrality.

Balancing religious rights with the secular character of the Constitution is a significant challenge,

especially when judgments are perceived to favor one community. Allowing cases involving disputed religious places to proceed undermines the basic principle of the Act, setting a precedent for future conflicts over places of worship. There is an urgent need to ensure adherence to constitutional principles and safeguard secularism. The judiciary often balances competing religious claims to uphold the secular character of the Constitution (Articles 25-28). For example: In *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court declared secularism a fundamental feature of the Constitution, which strengthened the neutrality of the state in religious matters. This ensures that religious freedom (Article 25) does not infringe on the rights of others or public order. Courts examine disputes over religious places through historical records and evidence, focusing on constitutional principles over religious sentiments. In the *Ayodhya dispute* (*M. Siddique vs. Mahant Suresh Das*, 2019), the Supreme Court relied on historical and archaeological evidence to deliver a balanced verdict while allocating alternative land to the affected party to maintain fairness. The judiciary protects religious structures recognized as cultural or heritage sites while ensuring constitutional compliance.

In *Aruna Roy v. Union of India* (2002), the Court emphasized the promotion of composite culture under Article 51A(f), which is relevant in disputes over heritage religious sites. Courts settle religious disputes with procedural fairness, ensuring that all parties are heard without prejudice. In the *Gyanvapi Masjid-Kashi Vishwanath Temple dispute*, the judiciary emphasized procedural compliance in the collection and evaluation of evidence, thereby ensuring the principles of a fair hearing. In resolving disputes over religious sites, the judiciary must act as the guardian of the Constitution, ensuring that secularism and communal harmony remain paramount. By reinforcing the principles of the Places of Worship Act, delivering timely and impartial judgments, and promoting conflict resolution mechanisms, the judiciary can build public confidence and prevent historical grievances from disrupting social peace. A forward-looking approach that safeguards India's secular fabric is vital to maintaining unity in its diverse, pluralistic society.

Zakir Hussain: The Tabla's Immortal Maestro

The passing of Zakir Hussain marks the end of an era in the world of music. Revered as the greatest tabla player of his time, Zakir Hussain was not merely an artist but a cultural phenomenon who transformed the way the world perceived rhythm and percussion. His unparalleled contributions to music, both within and beyond the realm of Indian classical traditions, made him a universal figure of artistic brilliance. As a musician, collaborator, and ambassador of Indian culture, Zakir Hussain's life was a testament to the boundless possibilities of music. His legacy, like the rhythms he created, will resonate far beyond his lifetime.

Zakir Hussain was born into a family where rhythm was a way of life. As the son of Ustad Allah Rakha, the legendary tabla virtuoso who accompanied sitar maestro Ravi Shankar, Zakir inherited not only a legacy but also an extraordinary sense of rhythm that seemed almost innate. From a young age, it was evident that Zakir was destined for greatness. His hands moved across the tabla with a precision and fluidity that defied belief, and his keen ear for the subtlest nuances of sound set him apart from his peers. Yet, what made Zakir truly extraordinary was not just his technical mastery but his ability to infuse life and emotion into every beat.

For Zakir Hussain, the tabla was not just an instrument; it was a medium of expression, a storyteller, and a bridge between cultures. While his roots were deeply embedded in the classical traditions of Indian music, he was never confined by them. Zakir believed in the universality of rhythm, seeing it as a language that could transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. This philosophy became the cornerstone of his career, shaping his approach to music and making him a pioneer in the field of cross-cultural

collaborations. Zakir's role as a collaborator was unparalleled. His partnership with guitarist John McLaughlin in the fusion band Shakti was groundbreaking, blending Indian classical music with jazz to create a new and electrifying soundscape. Similarly, his work with Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead on the Grammy-winning album *Planet Drum* showcased his ability to merge Indian rhythms with global percussive traditions. These collaborations were not mere experiments but profound dialogues between different musical worlds, with Zakir serving as the rhythmic heart of every project. Through these endeavors, he not only expanded the possibilities of the tabla but also brought Indian music to an international audience in a way that was both authentic and innovative.

Despite his global success, Zakir Hussain remained deeply committed to preserving and promoting Indian classical music. He was a torchbearer of the Punjab gharana, a tradition he inherited from his father, and he dedicated his life to ensuring that this rich heritage was passed on to future generations. As a soloist, Zakir elevated the tabla to a position of prominence, demonstrating its versatility and emotional depth. His performances were not merely technical showcases but spiritual journeys, filled with improvisation and creativity that left audiences spellbound. Whether performing a classical solo, accompanying a sitar maestro, or collaborating with Western musicians, Zakir brought the same level of passion, dedication, and artistry to his craft.

Zakir Hussain's artistry was rooted in his deep understanding of rhythm as both a science and an art. He was a master of tala, the intricate rhythmic cycles that form the foundation of Indian classical music, and his improvisations within these cy-



cles were nothing short of genius. Yet, his music was never about complexity for its own sake. Zakir believed in the emotional power of rhythm, using it to convey joy, sorrow, love, and spirituality. His tabla was not merely an accompaniment but an equal partner in the musical dialogue, capable of eliciting as

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

much emotion as the melody it supported.

As an ambassador of Indian culture, Zakir Hussain played a pivotal role in shaping global perceptions of Indian music. Through his performances, lectures, and collaborations, he introduced audiences around the world to the beauty and depth of Indian rhythms. He was a charismatic performer, effortlessly engaging audiences with his wit, humility, and infectious enthusiasm for his craft. Zakir had a unique ability to demystify the complexities of Indian classical music, making it accessible to those unfamiliar with its traditions without compromising its integrity. This gift for communication, combined with his

unparalleled talent, made him a beloved figure in the global music community.

Zakir Hussain's influence extended far beyond his performances. As a composer, he created music that transcended genres, seamlessly blending traditional and contemporary elements. His work for films, including notable scores for Indian and international productions, demonstrated his versatility and creativity as a musician. As an educator, Zakir was equally impactful, mentoring countless students and inspiring a new generation of tabla players to carry forward his vision. Through his teaching, he emphasized the importance of discipline, creativity, and emotional connection in music, ensuring that the traditions he cherished would continue to evolve.

Throughout his illustrious career, Zakir Hussain received numerous accolades, including the Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, and Grammy Awards. Yet, these honors were mere reflections of his immense contributions to the world of music. Zakir's true achievement lay in the way he touched lives through his art. His music was a celebration of

life, a reminder of the beauty and interconnectedness of the human experience. For Zakir, every performance was an offering, a moment of connection between the artist and the audience, the individual and the universal.

The loss of Zakir Hussain is immeasurable, but his legacy endures in the rhythms he created and the countless lives he inspired. His music was more than an art form; it was a philosophy, a way of understanding and engaging with the world. Zakir's tabla spoke a language that transcended words, conveying truths that are both timeless and deeply personal. In his hands, rhythm became a force of unity, bridging divides and celebrating the diversity of human experience.

As we remember Zakir Hussain, we celebrate a life dedicated to the pursuit of beauty, the perfection of craft, and the universal language of music. His rhythms will continue to resonate, echoing through time as a testament to the power of art to connect, inspire, and transform. Zakir Hussain may have left this world, but his spirit lives on in every beat of the tabla, in every note of the music he loved, and in the hearts of those who had the privilege of experiencing his genius. His legacy is not confined to his recordings or accolades; it is a living, breathing force that will inspire generations to come.

Zakir Hussain was more than a maestro; he was a phenomenon, a bridge between worlds, and a beacon of artistic excellence. In celebrating his life and music, we honor not just an individual but the timeless power of rhythm to bring us closer to one another and to ourselves. His tabla, his voice, and his spirit will remain eternal, a reminder of the boundless potential of human creativity. (*The Writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK*)

Assad downfall alters old regional alliances

By: Asad Mirza

The striking developments in Syria over the past 13 days leading to the rapid fall of the Assad regime have transfixed the world. Thousands are already trying to make their way back to Syria after years in exile. It turns out the answer to the refugee crisis that sent millions of Syrians into neighbouring countries and Europe may simply be the removal of a murderous dictator. Though in reality during recent months, more countries were trying to normalise ties with Assad. Italy even sent an ambassador back to Damascus.

However, the Syrian situation and a decrease of Iran's influence in Syria may have profound implications for the middle east's geopolitical landscape, power dynamics, and strategic alignments.

Regional actors including Iran, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf states may compete to find a toehold during the transitional period in Syria to realign their efforts to safeguard their regional interests. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, may through calculated engagement with the diverse Syrian political factions and reconstruction efforts may attempt to gain leverage by trying to counter Turkish and Iranian aspirations.

Moreover, the turmoil in Syria could also exacerbate sectarian tensions as Sunni Arab states may seek to prevent Iran from regaining influence, while various militant groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) could try to rebuild their operational presence in the region.

The Syrian conflict is now proving to be the Achilles heel of the Iranian axis. An ally of the Islamic Republic since its founding in 1979, the Assad regime called on Tehran to help quash the uprising. Hezbollah deployed thousands of men in Syria, transforming from

a Lebanese political party and militant group into an Iranian expeditionary force. But Hezbollah's fighting in the open in Syria for a decade exposed it to Israeli surveillance.

This helped Israel's recent military campaign, which decimated the group's leadership and destroyed much of its capabilities. Iran's hubris grew as it added another Arab capital under its control. But helping Damascus also stretched Tehran's capabilities, siphoned off resources and exposed its vulnerabilities.

Meanwhile, Israel may take more assertive positions against Iran-affiliated organisations in the region, including Lebanese resistance groups active in Syria, with the aim to prevent Tehran from reconstituting its sphere of influence in Israel's north.

The list of challenges for Syria is long, including deep apprehensions about rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) vision for the future, the possibility of violent retributions after five decades of oppression and the danger of a resurgence of Isis. Syrians do not need to be reminded of this, instead an end to foreign meddling in the country is the need of the hour, but no regional player is going to exercise constraint.

The sudden collapse of Bashar Assad's regime in Syria changed the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East overnight. Iran and Turkey, who for years maintained a delicate geopolitical balance, are now faced with competing interests in a post-Assad Syria.

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, has accused the United States, Israel, and Turkey of trying to overthrow the Assad's government in Syria. He claims this is part of a joint "American-Zionist" plan, with Turkey also involved. These developments also highlight the complex geopolitical situation of the region.

Zakir Hussain: A life in music

By: Satvabrat Borah

Ustad Zakir Hussain is one of the most celebrated musicians in the world. He is a master of the tabla, an Indian percussion instrument, and is known for his exceptional talent, dedication, and contribution to the world of music. Born on March 9, 1951, in Mumbai, India, Zakir Hussain is the son of the legendary tabla maestro Ustad Alla Rakha. From a very young age, he was immersed in the world of rhythm and melody, which shaped him into the extraordinary artist he is today.

Zakir Hussain's journey in music began when he was just a child. His father recognized his natural talent and started teaching him the tabla. Under his father's guidance, Zakir practiced diligently every day. He showed great promise, and his skills developed quickly. By the age of seven, he was already performing on stage, astonishing audiences with his mastery of the instrument. His early exposure to classical music and his father's teachings helped him build a strong foundation. As Zakir grew older, his love for music deepened. He dedicated himself entirely to learning and perfecting the art of tabla playing. He spent hours practicing complex rhythms and compositions, constantly challenging himself to improve. His hard work paid off, and he became known as a prodigy in the world of classical music. Musicians and listeners were amazed by his speed, precision, and creativity. Zakir's ability to play intricate rhythms with ease set him apart from others.

In addition to his technical brilliance, Zakir Hussain brought a unique sense of cre-

ativity to his music. He did not simply follow traditional patterns; he experimented with new ideas and styles. His improvisations were fresh and innovative, making his performances captivating. Audiences were drawn to his energy and passion for music. He had the rare ability to connect with people through his art, making them feel the rhythm and emotions in every beat.

Zakir Hussain's talent soon gained international recognition. In the 1970s, he began collaborating with musicians from different parts of the world. He worked with artists from various genres, including jazz, rock, and world music. One of his most famous collaborations was with the sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar. Together, they performed at prestigious venues around the globe, introducing Indian classical music to new audiences. Zakir's work with international musicians helped bridge cultural gaps and bring people together through the universal language of music.

Over the years, Zakir Hussain has been a part of many iconic music projects. He formed the band Shakti with guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L. Shankar, and other talented musicians. Shakti blended Indian classical music with jazz, creating a unique sound that captivated listeners worldwide. The group's performances were dynamic and electrifying, showcasing Zakir's versatility as a musician. He also collaborated with George Harrison of The Beatles, showcasing his ability to adapt to different styles while maintaining the essence of his music.

Zakir Hussain's contribution to the field of music extends beyond his performances. He has been a teacher and mentor to many as-

piring musicians, sharing his knowledge and inspiring them to pursue their dreams. His workshops and lectures have helped people understand the intricacies of Indian classical music and the art of tabla playing. Through his efforts, he has ensured that the rich tradition of Indian music continues to thrive and evolve. In recognition of his remarkable achievements, Zakir Hussain has received numerous awards and honors. He has been awarded the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan, two of India's highest civilian honors. He has also won Grammy Awards for his outstanding contributions to world music. These accolades are a testament to his dedication and excellence in the field of music. Despite his fame and success, Zakir remains humble and continues to inspire others with his artistry and passion.

Zakir Hussain's life is not just about music; it is also about spreading joy and harmony. Through his performances, he has brought people from different cultures and backgrounds together. His music transcends boundaries and speaks to the heart. He believes that music has the power to heal, unite, and uplift, and he has dedicated his life to sharing this gift with the world. His journey is a testament to the fact that with hard work, dedication, and a love for what you do, anything is possible.

Today, Zakir Hussain is not just a musician; he is a cultural ambassador who represents the richness of Indian heritage. He continues to perform at concerts and festivals, mesmerizing audiences with his talent. He has also worked on film soundtracks and collaborated with contemporary artists, proving that his music is timeless. Whether he is

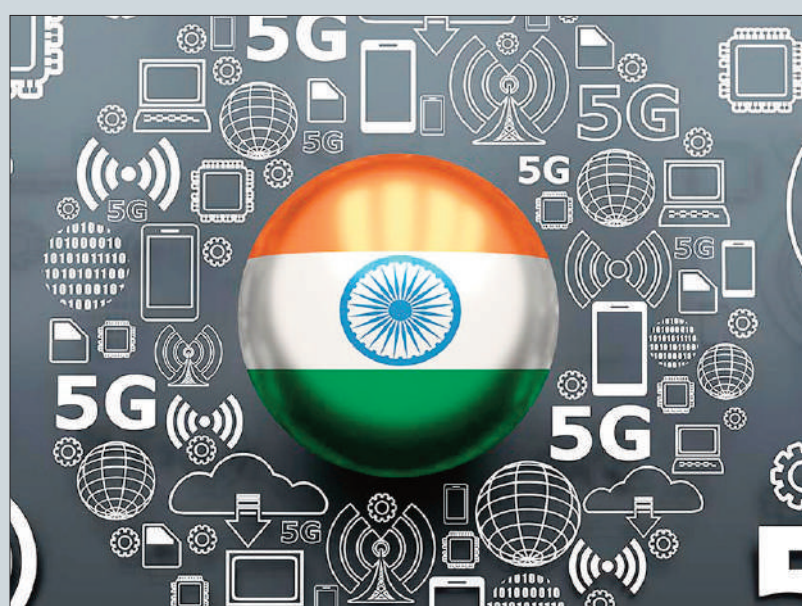
playing a traditional composition or experimenting with modern sounds, Zakir's artistry remains unmatched.

Zakir Hussain's impact on the world of music is immeasurable. He has taken the tabla to new heights, making it a global instrument. His work has inspired countless musicians to explore the beauty of rhythm and melody. His legacy will continue to influence generations of artists and music lovers. Zakir Hussain's story is one of passion, perseverance, and the pursuit of excellence. It reminds us that music is not just a form of entertainment; it is a way to connect, express, and celebrate life.

Through his dedication to his craft, Zakir Hussain has shown us the true meaning of artistry. His music is a reflection of his soul, filled with emotion, creativity, and brilliance. Listening to him play the tabla is a magical experience, one that leaves a lasting impression on the heart. He is a true maestro, a living legend whose contributions to music will be remembered for years to come. Zakir Hussain is a shining example of how one person can make a difference in the world through their passion and talent.

As we celebrate Zakir Hussain's life and achievements, we are reminded of the power of music to inspire and transform. His journey is an inspiration to all, showing us that with dedication and love for what we do, we can achieve greatness. Zakir Hussain's music is not just a collection of rhythms; it is a celebration of life, a tribute to the beauty of the human spirit, and a gift to the world. His story is a reminder that art has the power to bring people together, transcend barriers, and create a better world.

Will India's innovation ecosystem address AI-ready 'memory safety'?



By: Chaitanya Giri

Recently, three important Indian government authorities made startlingly simple but important statements about Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The first statement was made by S. Somanath, chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). He said that "AI is set to change the space technology (SpaceTech) sector with potential use in the design of rockets and satellites".

Samir Kamat, chairman of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) made a similar comment, "The government wants startups to focus on deep tech areas like artificial intelligence, robotics, cyber security, unmanned systems, and advanced materials, including dual-use technology, where rapid innovation can significantly enhance capabilities".

"It is essential to ensure these (AI) systems not only work as intended but are also resilient to attacks from adversaries," an alarming statement made by the Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Anil Chauhan.

While there are a lot of buzzwords currently surrounding AI rhetoric, these rather simple claims by key policymakers often go unnoticed, leading to inaction from the AI innovation ecosystem, which can expand on the multitude of possibilities presented by these statements. In all the excitement about AI, three crucial questions have still not been addressed:

Has the Government of India thought through whether C and C++ will continue to be the preferred programming languages for the strategic laboratories of ISRO, DRDO, the Department of Atomic Energy or even the Indian Armed Forces?

Are these programming languages safe-enough when it comes to the 'memory safety' of equipment that these institutions use for national security purposes? Can these institutions be assured to have secure AI-readiness if they are not addressing the memory safety threats inherent in yesteryear programming languages, that are becoming apparent with the critical need for AI tools.

Memory safety is the attribute of certain programming languages that protects them from detrimental software bugs and vulnerabilities that affect the intrinsic memory of a software system. Memory safety has a direct impact on the quality, security and cost of operating a system. The better a language fares in memory safety, the higher its demand in critical computing systems.

Where the Indian AI ecosystem is singing paeans to large language models, about stacks and AI-powered applications, it has not taken any visible steps to convert legacy systems running on C and C++ languages to AI-ready languages like 'Swift', 'Rust' and 'Go.' India's flagship AI initiative, IndiaAI, which is managed by the Ministry of Electronics, and Information Technology (MeitY), seems to have not yet invested in this direction, since it does not appear in its mission pillars. Memory safety does not even appear once as an issue in the so-called India's AI 'Readiness Assessment Methodology' prepared by UNESCO and MeitY. Readiness is only measured on 'Ethical' parameters. Not taking security vulnerabilities into account while using superficially all-encompassing terms like 'Readiness Assessment' does not help India at all; rather, it promotes complacency.

This transition to new AI-ready programming languages has been identified as the next big step for the global software industry, as all the legacy languages have been found to falter on various AI-critical parameters, especially memory safety. The US's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency stated in 2023 that almost 70 per cent of Microsoft and Google's security updates have been due to memory safety issues, which have emerged because the two use C and C++ extensively. For a long time,

the inherent limitations of C and C++ led to the creation of numerous 'bug-bounty' jobs in the information technology industry.

This issue has implications for India. The country's strategic, atomic, telecom, cyber and intra-government networks may not yet be running entirely on memory-safe programming languages. Imagine the consequences of the Indian government's strategic assets running on memory-unsafe programming languages. An adversarial state actor or its proxy could use 'adversarial AI' or other means to identify vulnerabilities in code crucial for the strategic asset's operations and carry out a devastating 'memory safety attack' that would lead to both the destruction of vast amounts of critical data and the denial of services.

The American Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), in July 2024, commenced a new program called TRACTOR (Translating All C to Rust) to convert all the legacy C language code to a memory-safe Rust programming language. One can assume the legacy C language code could be part of numerous Department of Defense installations and mobile assets. The US has time and again warned against the failure to secure memory safety. Early in February 2024, the US White House Office of the National Cyber Director released a report to address the root cause of many disastrous cyberattacks - memory safety. In 2022, the US National Security Agency released a cybersecurity information sheet on Software Memory Safety, in which it recommended users to transition to memory-safe languages to avoid the compromise of critical systems.

Not just the US, China too has started to adopt new programming languages. China's Huawei is the only Asian founding member of the Rust Foundation, along with Amazon, Google, Meta, and Microsoft. The ongoing Chips Act-driven sanctions by the US against China have not impeded the Chinese company from becoming a part of the foundation overseeing this programming language. It could be possible that Huawei's Ascend AI chips will use memory-safe languages like Rust. Co-founder of the cryptocurrency Ethereum, Vitalik Buterin, and many like him are placing their bets on using AI to find bugs in their core business software code. Ethereum uses both Rust and Go for its code.

It is not known whether Indian strategic agencies have recognised this growth of memory-safe programming languages like Swift, Rust, and Go. If they had taken any steps, however, a nationwide governmental initiative to convert memory-unsafe code in critical infrastructure to memory-safe code would have been announced or at least talked about. The Chairman of ISRO once said that his space agency experiences over 100 cyberattacks every day. But this begs the question, do these attacks have roots in memory-unsafety, and what systemic measures has ISRO taken beyond warding off the attacks? If ISRO, or similar strategic agencies in the country are content finding bugs, fighting one battle at a time and not tackling the memory safety issue, India is going to have a tough time keeping its legacy mission-critical infrastructure safe, especially with the advent of adversarial AI hunting for bug bounties.

New Delhi must give an unwavering diktat to all of its agencies to explore transitioning from unsafe C, C++-based mission-critical code to code written in more AI-stable programming languages. Or, they can fine-tune their hardware for memory-safe AI-readiness. This could also include the development of alternative memory-safe C++ code. Unless the National Security Council Secretariat and other agencies that are part of the strategic establishment make 'memory safety' India's priority in strategic domains, our effort to leverage the transformative potential of AI would only remain half-hearted. (Courtesy: ORF)

Eye exercises: Some tips and techniques

By Shannon Johnson

Many people believe that eye exercises can help improve vision or treat eye conditions. Although there is limited evidence to suggest that eye exercises can actually enhance vision, eye exercises can help with eye strain, certain eye conditions, and overall well-being.

Eye exercises can be particularly helpful for people who experience digital eye strain, which is related to the prolonged use of computers.

Eye exercises and their potential benefits

Looking away from a computer screen every 20 minutes may help people with digital eye strain.

Eye exercises can be helpful for the following conditions:

- nystagmus, which is an eye movement condition
- strabismus, which is also an eye movement condition
- amblyopia
- myopia
- visual field defects
- dyslexia
- vergence problems
- ocular motility conditions
- accommodative dysfunction
- asthenopia
- convergence insufficiency
- visual field deficits following brain injury
- motion sickness
- learning difficulties

It is important to note that people with eye conditions such as retinopathy, cataracts, or glaucoma are unlikely to benefit from trying the eye exercises below.

The following are seven eye exercises that people may wish to try for the conditions listed above:

1. The 20-20-20 rule

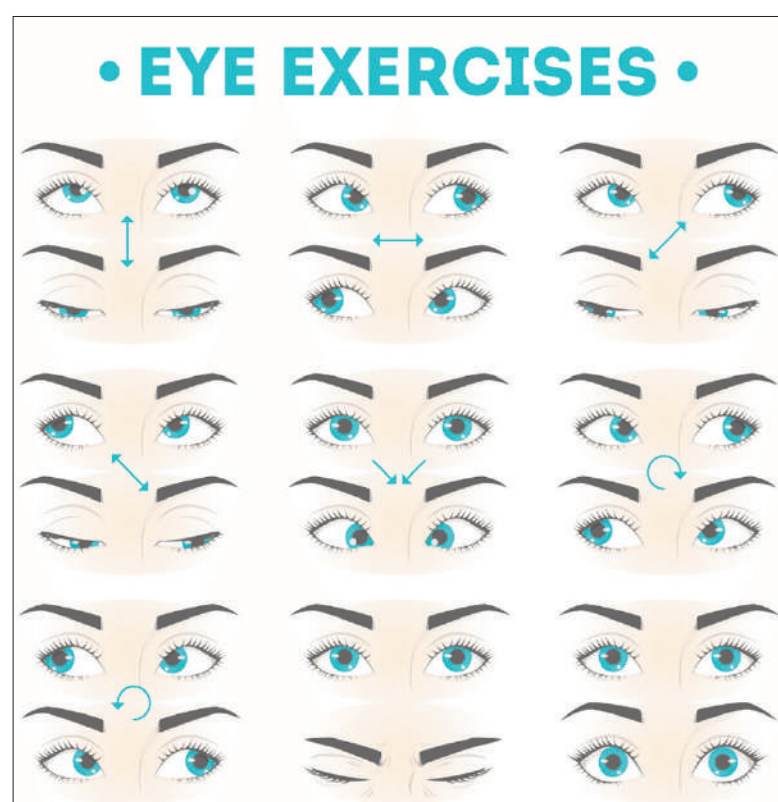
Digital eye strain can become a problem for people who need to focus on a computer screen all day while working.

The 20-20-20 rule helps ease digital eye strain. The rule is easy: a person needs to look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes while working on a computer.

2. Focus change

The focus change exercise can also help with digital eye strain. People should perform this exercise while sitting.

- Hold one finger a few inches away from one eye.
- Focus the gaze on the finger.
- Move the finger slowly away from the face.
- Focus on an object farther away, and then back on the finger.
- Bring the finger back closer to the eye.
- Focus on an object farther away.



3. Eye movements

This eye movement exercise also helps with digital eye strain.

- Close the eyes.
- Slowly move the eyes upward, then downward.
- Repeat three times.
- Slowly move the eyes to the left, then to the right.
- Repeat three times.

4. Figure 8

The figure 8 exercise can also help ease digital eye strain.

- Focus on an area on the floor around 8 feet away.
- Move the eyes in the shape of a figure 8.

Trace the imaginary figure 8 for 30 seconds, then switch direction.

5. Pencil pushups

Pencil pushups can help people with convergence insufficiency. A doctor might recommend this exercise as part of vision therapy.

- Hold a pencil at arm's length, situated between the eyes.
- Look at the pencil and try to keep a single image of it while slowly moving it toward the nose.
- Move the pencil toward the nose until the pencil is no longer a single image.
- Position the pencil at the closest point where it is still a single image.

Repeat 20 times.

6. Brock string

The Brock string exercise helps improve eye coordination. To complete this exercise, a person

will need a long string and some colored beads. They can complete this exercise either sitting or standing.

- Secure one end of the string to a motionless object, or another person can hold it.
- Hold the other end of the string just below the nose.
- Place one bead on the string.
- Look straight at the bead with both eyes open.

If the eyes are working correctly, a person should see the bead and two strings in the shape of an X.

If one eye is closed, one of the strings will disappear, which means that the eye is suppressing. If the person sees two beads and two strings, the eyes are not converged at the bead.

7. Barrel cards

Barrel cards is a good exercise for exotropia, which is a type of strabismus.

- Draw three red barrels of increasing sizes on one side of a card.
- Repeat in green on the other side of the card.
- Hold the card against the nose so that the largest barrel is farthest away.
- Stare at the far barrel until it becomes one image with both colors and the other two images have doubled.
- Maintain the gaze for about 5 seconds.
- Repeat the exercise with the middle and smallest images.

Can eye exercises help improve

vision?

There is currently little reliable evidence to suggest that eye exercises really work to improve the eyes and vision.

One study found that eye exercises can help with convergence problems. Another study suggested that eye exercises improved visual field deficits and stereoscopic skills following brain injury.

In one 2013 study, participants who completed eye exercises were more accurate in a rapid serial visual presentation exercise than the control group. These results suggest that eye exercises may enhance cognitive performance in tasks that involve attention and memory.

The pencil pushups exercise appears to be an effective therapy for symptomatic convergence insufficiency.

Aside from these few cases, researchers have not proven that eye exercises are an effective treatment for other types of visual or intellectual conditions.

Vision therapy

Vision therapy is like rehabilitation therapy for a person's eyes. A doctor can prescribe vision therapy, which they will tailor to each person, to help improve visual skills and processing. Vision therapy may use both sensory- and movement-related activities.

Vision therapy typically involves a range of different tools, including computer programs, special instruments, lenses, and prisms.

When to see a doctor

Certain eye symptoms can indicate a more serious condition. A person should contact a doctor if they experience any of the following symptoms:

- red eyes
- loss of vision
- blurred vision
- eye pain
- double vision
- eyelid swelling
- sensitivity to light
- headaches associated with eye symptoms

Summary

There is not much scientific evidence to suggest that eye exercises help improve vision in general. However, eye exercises and vision therapy can help with digital eye strain and certain eye conditions.

A person can easily perform eye exercises such as the 20-20-20 rule, figure 8, and pencil pushups at home.

If a person experiences blurred vision, red eyes, or eye pain or has concerns about their vision, they should contact their doctor. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Around the world, new mobile internet subscribers are plateauing

By: Khadija Alam & Russell Brandon

When Facebook hit 1 billion users in 2012, CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that when it comes to getting another billion users, "The big thing is obviously going to be mobile." In an interview at the time, Zuckerberg told Bloomberg, "As more phones become smartphones, it's just this massive opportunity."

Clearly, he was correct. A recent survey from Global System for Mobile Communications Association Intelligence, or GSMA, the research wing of a UK-based organisation that represents mobile operators around the world, found that 4.6 billion people across the globe are now connected to mobile internet - or roughly 57% of the world's population.

Now, the rate of new mobile internet subscriber growth is slowing. From 2015 to 2021, the survey consistently found over 200 million coming online through mobile devices around the world each year. But in the last two years, that number has dropped to 160 million.

Rest of World analysis of that data found that a number of developing countries are plateauing in the number of mobile internet subscribers. That suggests that in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Mexico, the easiest populations to get online have already logged on and getting the rest of the population on mobile internet will continue to be a challenge. GSMA collects data by surveying a nationally representative sample of people in each country, and then it correlates the results with similar studies.

Max Cuvellier Giacomelli, the head of the Mobile for Development program at GSMA, said that large swaths of the world's population still don't have access to mobile internet primarily because of affordability. Although the cost of data has dropped radically in recent years, the International Telecommunication Union, a UN agency focused on information and communications technologies, notes that huge disparities between regions persist. The cost of data in Africa, for example, is more than twice that of the Americas, the second most expensive region.

"You get this peak of adoption in the beginning because it's new. The people who can afford it definitely see the value. They knew what the internet was and suddenly you get the internet in your pocket," he said.

In countries including China, the U.S., and Singapore, a high share of the population is already connected to mobile internet - 80%, 81%, and



93%, respectively. So it's no surprise that the rate of mobile internet subscriptions has slowed.

But the rate of new users has also slowed in countries including Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Pakistan - where only 37%, 34%, and 24% of the population currently use mobile internet.

Coverage continues to be a challenge, although data suggests that the issue is improving relatively quickly. Just 350 million people across the world, or 4% of the global population, still live in areas that are not covered by a mobile broadband network. According to GSMA, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest coverage gap of any global region. But between 2021 and 2023, mobile coverage in this area expanded from 83% to 87%.

Furthermore, recent advances in satellite technology have the potential to close this coverage gap by bringing mobile internet networks to rural or remote areas that lack mobile infrastructure. SpaceX's Starlink, for example, is now available in over 100 countries and provides a roaming plan.

Although the data suggests relatively steady rates of adoption over time, it also highlights how unique products can drive a sudden surge in access to mobile internet. In 2016, for example, the Indian telecommunications giant Reliance Jio introduced a welcome package that included 4 gigabytes of free data per day for customers. Be-

tween 2015 and 2016, mobile internet subscriptions in India increased by nearly 58%. GSMA's Giacomelli attributes that surge directly to Reliance Jio's programme. The telecom continued to offer free mobile internet through early 2017, which continued to attract new subscribers.

"The thing you see in India is just this accelerated growth that would otherwise have been flattened over maybe [a period] twice as long," Giacomelli said. "But once you've captured the population who can afford it, then suddenly you start getting slow growth again."

But despite the surge in the late 2010s, India's growth rate for mobile internet subscribers has slowed in the past few years. And as of October 2024, almost half, or 46%, of the population is still not connected to mobile internet.

Even in countries with high rates of mobile internet subscription, there are still stubborn pockets of people with no mobile internet access. In China, for example, 80% of the population has access to mobile internet. But subscription rates among the remaining 280 million people are slowing. Recent advances in satellite technology could bring mobile internet to new users in the country, especially in rural areas. In August, China began launching a satellite internet network, set to rival SpaceX's Starlink, in an effort to bring everyone online. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

'B'desh might hold next election in late 2025 or first half of 2026'

India's historic victory led to the liberation of Bangladesh

DHAKA, Dec 16: Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on Monday said the next general election in the country could take place by the end of 2025 or the first half of 2026.

He, however, said the timing of the election will largely depend upon the political consensus and the extent of the reforms that must be carried out prior to it.

"Broadly speaking, the election can be scheduled between the end of 2025 and the first half of 2026," he said in a televised speech to the nation on Vijay Diwas.

Vijay Diwas commemorates the Pakistan military's surrender to Indian forces. India's historic victory led to the liberation of Bangladesh.

Yunus said he has repeatedly appealed to all to hold the polls after completing all the major reforms. "However, if, due to politi-



cal consensus, we have to hold the election on the basis of a flawless preparation of the voter list with minor reforms, then it may be possible to hold the elections by the end of 2025," United News of Bangladesh quoted Yunus as saying.

"And if we add to this the expected level of reforms in the elec-

toral process and in light of the recommendations of the Election Reforms Commission and based on the national consensus, then it may take at least another six months," said Yunus.

Yunus, who heads the caretaker government installed after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's government on August 5 following a stu-

dent-led uprising, highlighted the extensive work required to update the voter list, a critical step in the election process.

"From now on, the responsibility has been entrusted to them to start the process of forming the future government. They have started their preparations. They have a lot of work to do," he said. Yunus said no one has had the opportunity to verify the voters' list.

"We have to make sure that the names of all those who have become eligible to vote in the last 15 years are included in the voters' list. This is a big task," he said.

After the student uprising, there is no room for making any mistake as after a long time, many young people will vote for the first time, he said, adding that in the past, they were deprived of that right and joy. (PTI)

Filipino woman who was on death row in Indonesia will return home after almost 15 years in prison

YOGYAKARTA (INDONESIA), Dec 16: A Filipino woman who was on death row in Indonesia — and was nearly executed by firing squad in 2015 — was moved late Sunday to a female prison in Indonesia's capital, from where she will be flown back to her home country.

Mary Jane Veloso, who spent almost 15 years in an Indonesian prison for drug trafficking, was allowed to return home after Indonesia and the Philippines signed a "practical arrangement" deal on December 6, after a decade of pleading from Manila.

In a tearful interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday, Veloso described the decision as being "like a miracle when I have lost all hope."

"For almost 15 years I was separated from my children and parents, and I could not see my children grow up," she said. "I wish to be given an opportunity to take care of my children and to be close to my parents."

Veloso, who will turn 40 next month, was arrested in 2010 at an airport in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta, where officials discovered about 2.6 kilograms (5.7 pounds) of heroin hidden in her luggage. The single mother of two sons was convicted and sentenced to death.

Veloso has maintained her innocence throughout her 14 years of incarceration. She has spent her time in prison designing Indonesian batik clothing, painting, tailoring and learning other skills.

Just before midnight on Sunday, she was escorted through a crush of reporters outside a female prison in Yogyakarta into a waiting van that took her to Jakarta, about 460 kilometres away.

Wearing a black T-shirt and dark pants, she made only a brief comment to reporters, saying, "I'm so happy... Thank you so much and Merry Christmas!" from behind the vehicle's window.

Veloso's case caused a public outcry in the Philippines. She travelled to Indonesia in 2010 where her recruiter, Maria Kristina Sergio, reportedly told her a job as a domestic worker awaited her. Sergio also allegedly provided the suitcase where the drugs were found.

In 2015, Indonesia moved Veloso to an island prison where she and eight other drug convicts were

scheduled to be executed by firing squad despite objections from Australia, Brazil, France, Ghana and Nigeria.

Indonesia executed the eight other convicts, and Veloso was granted a stay of execution because Sergio was arrested in the Philippines just two days ahead of her scheduled execution.

The reprieve provided an opportunity for Veloso's testimony to expose how a criminal syndicate duped her into being an unwitting accomplice and courier in drug trafficking.

Yogyakarta female prison's chief warden, Evi Loliancy, said Veloso was involved in various prison activities arranged by correctional officers, including organising fashion shows featuring designs by inmates and learning how to dance.

"Mary Jane loves helping her fellow inmates, and she is able to motivate them to be creative," Loliancy said. "She will miss us so much and so do we here."

She said Veloso was very happy when she learned that she would be reunited with her family, but also a bit nervous and sad when she was about to leave. "But we all cheered her on and wish all the best for her," Loliancy said.

Veloso will need to stay for a few days at the Pondok Bambu female prison in Jakarta while waiting for her flight tickets and travel documents, said Sohibur Rachman, an official at the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections.

Rachman said his ministry was coordinating with the Philippine Embassy in Jakarta on repatriating Veloso. He has not said when her return will take place but unconfirmed reports said her flight to Manila is scheduled for early Wednesday.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime says Indonesia is a major drug smuggling hub despite having some of the strictest drug laws in the world, in part because international drug syndicates target its young population.

Indonesia's last executions were carried out in July 2016, when an Indonesian and three foreigners were shot by firing squad.

About 530 people are on death row in Indonesia, mostly for drug-related crimes, including 96 foreigners, the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections' data showed as of last month. (AP)

France rushes help to Mayotte, where hundreds or even thousands died in Cyclone Chido

CAPE TOWN, Dec 16: France was rushing help by ship and military aircraft to its poor overseas territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean on Monday after the island was shattered by its worst storm in nearly a century.

Authorities in Mayotte fear hundreds and possibly thousands of people have died in Cyclone Chido, although the official death toll on Monday morning stood at 14. Rescue teams and medical personnel have been sent to the island off the east coast of Africa from France and from the nearby French territory of Reunion, as well as tons of supplies.

French television station TF1 reported Monday morning that Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau had arrived in Mamoudzou, the capital of Mayotte. "It will take days and days to establish the human toll," he told French media.

French authorities said more than 800 more personnel were expected to arrive in the coming days as rescuers comb through the devastation caused by Chido when it hit the densely populated archipelago of around 300,000 people on Saturday.

Mayotte Prefect François-Xavier Bieuville, the top French government official in Mayotte, told local TV station Mayotte la Iere on Sunday that the death toll was several hundred people and could even be in the thousands.

He said Mayotte's poor slums of metal shacks and other informal structures had suffered terrible damage and authorities were struggling to get an accurate count of the dead and injured after the worst cyclone to hit Mayotte since the 1930s.

Entire neighbourhoods have been flattened, while public infrastructure like the main airport and hospital have been badly damaged and the electricity supply has been knocked out, French authorities said. The damage to the airport control tower means only military aircraft can fly into Mayotte, complicating the response.

Mayotte is France's poorest department and is regarded as the poorest territory in the European Union, but it is a target for economic migration from even poorer countries like nearby Comoros and even Somalia because of a better standard of living and the French

Germany, France launch direct high-speed train between Berlin and Paris

BERLIN, Dec 16: Germany and France on Monday launched a direct high-speed train between Berlin and Paris, a connection hailed as a symbol of a close friendship between the two countries and a sign of Europe's potential to attract more travellers to the rails.

The bullet train, however, is unlikely to be a game-changer. At about eight hours, the once-a-day service with German operator Deutsche Bahn's ICE trains offers an increase in convenience rather than any major time saving compared with other, indirect connections.

The launch comes as Deutsche Bahn works to shed its reputation for the unreliability it has built up over recent years. Last month, only 60 per cent of its long-distance trains arrived at their destination punctually — defined as under six minutes late.

The state-owned operator has embarked on a drive to improve the situation by 2027 and is aiming for punctuality of more than 75 per cent. A key part of that is a campaign to modernise dozens of stretches of railway. The first part of that programme was completed when one of the country's busiest routes, a 70-kilometre stretch between Frankfurt and Mannheim, reopened Sunday — on time — after five months of closure for an overhaul of tracks, stations and other infrastructure.

The government blames long-term underinvestment by its predecessors for problems with the railway.

South Korean investigators push to summon impeached president as court set to determine his fate

SEOUL, Dec 16: South Korean law enforcement authorities are pushing to summon impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol for questioning over his short-lived martial law decree as the Constitutional Court began its first meeting Monday on Yoon's case to determine whether to remove him from office or reinstate him.

A joint investigative team involving police, an anti-corruption agency and the Defense Ministry said it plans to convey a request to Yoon's office that he appear for questioning on Wednesday, as they expand a probe into whether his ill-conceived power grab amounted to rebellion.

Son Yeong-jo, an investigator with the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, said the team plans to question Yoon on charges of rebellion and abuse of power. He declined to provide

specifics when asked how investigators would respond if Yoon refuses to appear.

Son said the team tried to deliver the summons request to the presidential office but was rerouted to Yoon's personal residence after presidential secretarial staff claimed they were unsure whether conveying the request to the impeached president was part of their duties.

Yoon was impeached by the opposition-controlled National Assembly on Saturday over his Dec 3 martial law decree. His presidential powers will be suspended until the Constitutional Court decides whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Yoon has justified his martial law enforcement as a necessary act of governance

against the main liberal opposition Democratic Party that he described as "anti-state forces" bogging down his agendas and vowed to "fight to the end" against efforts to remove him from office.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters have poured onto the streets of the country's capital, Seoul, in recent days, calling for Yoon's ouster and arrest.

It remains unclear whether Yoon will grant the request by investigators for an interview. South Korean prosecutors, who are pushing a separate investigation into the incident, also reportedly asked Yoon to appear at a prosecution office for questioning on Sunday but he refused to do so. Repeated calls to a prosecutors' office in Seoul were unanswered.

Yoon's presidential security service has also resisted a police attempt to search

EU seeks assurances about peaceful future from Syria's new leaders

BRUSSELS, Dec 16: European Union nations want guarantees from Syria's new leaders that they are preparing for a peaceful political future involving all minority groups, and where extremism, Russia and Iran have no place, top diplomats said on Monday.

Since Damascus fell on December 8, and President Bashar Assad fled to Moscow, Syria's transition has been surprisingly smooth. Few reports have surfaced of reprisals, revenge killings or sectarian violence. Most looting or destruction has been quickly contained.

But the new leadership has yet to lay out a clear vision of how Syria will be governed. The interim government was set up by former opposition forces led by the Islamic militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, which the EU and US consider to be a terrorist organisation.

It is set to rule until March. Arab foreign ministers have called for UN-supervised elections based on a new constitution. To understand more, the EU is sending an envoy to Damascus for talks with those at least temporarily in charge.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the bloc wants a "stable, peaceful and all-comprising government in place," but that it will probably take weeks, if not months, for Syria's new path to be clear. "Syria faces an optimistic, positive, but rather uncertain future, and we have to make sure that this goes to the right direction," she told reporters at a meeting of EU foreign ministers. "For us, it's not only the words, but we want to see the deeds."

Syria has been shattered by five decades of Assad family rule. Its economy has been destroyed,



poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high and corruption seeps through daily life. Millions of people have fled the country.

Hundreds of thousands of them live in Europe, and while some EU countries have suspended asylum applications from Syrian refugees, only those willing to return will be helped to get home, for now.

In 2011, the EU began imposing asset freezes and travel bans on Syrian officials and organisations in response to Assad's crackdown on civilian protesters. The sanctions have been slapped on some 316 people and 86 entities accused of backing Assad.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said that before any sanctions are lifted or EU development aid sent to Syria, "a certain number of conditions must be met." They include, he said, "a political transition that allows all Syrian minority groups to be represented, the respect of human rights, the rights of women in

Syria, (and) the rejection of terrorism and extremism."

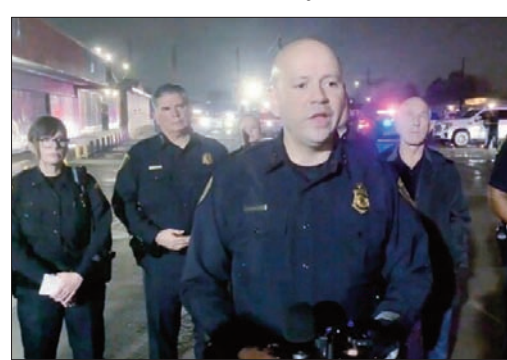
His Spanish counterpart, Jose Manuel Albares, said Syria's new leaders must understand that the EU has some "red lines" which should be respected before support comes.

"We must guarantee the territorial integrity of Syria and we must make sure that there (is) no foreign interference," he said. "If those questions are correctly addressed by the new authorities, then we can have a second conversation about sanctions."

Dutch Foreign Minister Caspar Veldekamp also told reporters that "regarding the Russian military bases in Syria, we want the Russians out."

In a message aimed at Syria's new leaders, Kallas said: "Russia and Iran are not your friends, are not helping you if you are in trouble. They left Assad's regime, and that is a very clear message showing that their hands are full elsewhere and they are weakened." (AP)

2 teens killed, 4 injured in shooting at makeshift club in Houston



HOUSTON, Dec 16: Two teens were killed and four were injured — including a 13-year-old girl — in a shooting at a makeshift club in Houston, police said Sunday. Officers arriving at the site of the shooting late Saturday night found "a very hectic scene — a large crowd of people running out of a makeshift club," Assistant Chief Luis Menendez-Sierra said at a news conference.

Police have not yet identified a suspect and have

asked those who were at the event to call police with any information. Police said some witnesses told detectives that they saw a man wearing all black, including a hooded sweatshirt and a black mask covering his face, shoot a pistol into a crowd of people at the venue.

Police said a 16-year-old male died at the scene and a 14-year-old female died at the hospital. Their identities are pending verification by the medical examiner. The four who were injured, all females, were hospitalised. The injured 13-year-old was in critical condition, while an 18-year-old and 19-year-old were both in stable condition, police said.

Menendez-Sierra said most of those attending the event, which appeared to be organised on social media, were juveniles. He said they were gathered in an empty business. Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said in a post on X that "makeshift, unlicensed pop-up parties can quickly lead to chaos and violence." "Pop-up parties raise public safety concerns and teens need to stay away from their own safety," he said. (AP)

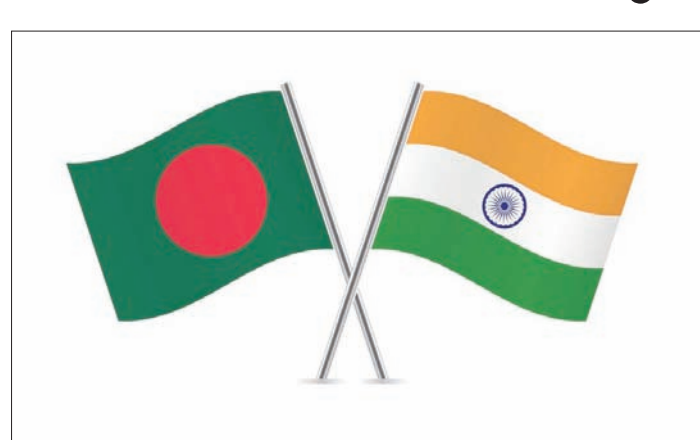
India, Bangladesh 1971 war veterans' exchange visit to mark Vijay Diwas

DHAKA, Dec 16: Eight Indian military veterans of Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War reached Dhaka while eight officers of Bangladesh Army arrived in Kolkata to join the Vijay Diwas celebrations in the two countries, officials said.

Bangladesh officials and Indian high commission in Dhaka said two serving officers from both sides comprised the delegations that will attend the celebrations in Dhaka and Kolkata. They reached their destination cities on Sunday.

The Bangladesh delegation comprised Mukti Jodhas, who were part of the guerrilla resistance force in East Pakistan opposing the Pakistan rule there.

The Vijay Diwas celebration and the visit of the two countries' delegations comes amid strains over the alleged violence against the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh since the ouster of premier Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime in a student-led uprising on August 5. Hasina fled the



country and has since taken refuge in India.

The interim government of Muhammad Yunus has firmly rejected any major communal violence. Hindus constitute around eight per cent of Bangladesh's population.

"The exchange of veterans' visits is a reminder of friendship forged in 1971," a political analyst in Dhaka said.

He said Indian external affairs secretary Vikram Misri's one-day Dhaka visit on December 9 for foreign office consultations with his counterpart Jashim Uddin partly eased the tensions in bilateral ties as he also met Yunus and his de facto foreign minister Touhid Hossain.

"Now the exchange of the veterans' visits is expected to manifest the goodwill of both the

countries for each other," the analyst said.

Both India and Bangladesh celebrate the victory over Pakistan on December 16, 1971, and every year invite each other's war veterans and serving officers to participate in the celebrations in two countries.

Bangladesh celebrates its Independence Day on March 26 but Dhaka emerged as the free capital of a free country on December 16 after nine months of Liberation War with crucial Indian assistance.

"These annual bilateral visits provide a platform for Mukti Jodhas and Liberation War veterans to celebrate the unique friendship of the two countries," Indian high commission said in a statement.

It added that the occasion renews memories of the Liberation War "which epitomises the shared sacrifices of the armed forces of India and Bangladesh for the cause of Bangladesh's freedom from occupation, oppression and mass atrocities". (PTI)

Members of militant outfit face interrogation over migrant labourers assassination

Manipur CM condemns killing, ₹ 10 lakh ex-gratia announced

IMPHAL, Dec 16: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Monday said that seven members of a militant outfit have been picked up for interrogation in connection with the recent killing of two migrant labourers from Bihar.

Two teenage construction workers from Bihar were shot dead in Kakching district of Manipur on Saturday evening, police said. Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar has expressed grief over the killings and announced ex gratia of ₹ 2 lakh each for family members of the deceased.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of Vijay Diwas celebrations here, Singh said, "We strongly suspect the involvement of politically motivated groups behind the killings. Seven members of an outfit have been picked up and their interrogation is underway to ascertain whether they were involved in the incident. Definitely we will find out the culprit."

On Vijay Diwas, he said, "I salute all martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of Bangladesh. Many sepoy and officers from Manipur had taken part in the campaign. I send my best wishes to all the families of the martyrs and the Bangladeshis who



were liberated by the Indian Army. Being an Indian, we are proud of it." Later, in a post on X, he wrote, "Today, at the observance of Vijay Diwas at 1st MR Banquet Hall, Imphal, I pay my heartfelt tributes to the brave soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice in the 1971 war." "Their valour and dedication ensured India's historic victory and the liberation of Bangladesh. As we remember their sacrifices, let us also reaffirm our commitment to uphold the unity, integrity, and progress of our nation. Jai Hind," Singh added.

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh has strongly condemned the killing of two migrant labourers from Bihar in Kakching district

and announced an ex-gratia of ₹ 10 lakh for the next of kin of the two deceased.

He said every possible effort is underway to identify, apprehend, and prosecute those responsible for killing the two migrant labourers.

Singh in a post on X said, "I strongly condemn the brutal killing of young brothers, Sunalal Kumar (18) and Dasharat Kumar (17), from Bihar in Kakching district, Manipur. This act of terrorism is a direct assault on our values, and my deepest condolences go out to their grieving families." "In this crucial juncture, we cannot ignore the possibility that this horrific crime is part of a larger conspiracy to destabilise our state and push it

further towards chaos. We must stand together against these destructive forces and ensure that they do not succeed in creating fear and insecurity," Singh added.

The Manipur CM also announced

₹ 10 lakh ex gratia for the bereaved family and said the case would be transferred to NIA, if needed.

"An ex gratia of ₹ 10 lakh will be provided to each bereaved family, and every possible effort is underway to identify, apprehend, and prosecute those responsible. If required, the case will be transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to ensure a fair and thorough inquiry," Singh said.

Two migrant workers from Bihar were shot dead from point blank range in Manipur's Kakching district on Saturday evening. The incident happened near the panchayat office in Keirak on Kakching-Wabagai Road around 5.20 pm.

Those behind the incident are yet to be identified, police said. The deceased hailed from Bihar's Gopalganj district and were construction workers who lived in a rented accommodation in Kakching. (PTI)

Nagaland Gov commemorates Vijay Diwas

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 16: On the momentous occasion of Vijay Diwas a commemorative event was held at the Zakhama Military Station with a series of heartfelt tributes and vibrant festivities orchestrated by the Red Shield Division of the Indian Army wherein Governor, La Ganesan was the chief guest.

The ceremony commenced with a solemn wreath-laying at the Orchid War Memorial, where the Governor paying

homage to the valiant soldiers who laid down their lives for the nation. On the occasion a display of cultural richness and patriotic fervour by the students of Loyola School, Zakhama captivated the attendees with a mesmerizing traditional Galo dance and an evocative mime performance. An exhilarating Khukri dance was also performed by the brave soldiers, showcasing an unwavering spirit.

As the Chief Guest of this

illustrious event, Ganesan was warmly welcomed by the station commander, Zakhama Military Station. In a moving gesture of gratitude and respect, the Governor honoured veterans of 1971 Indo-Pak War and paid tribute to the parents of Kargil war hero Capt N Kenguruse, MVC (Posthumous), along with Veer Naris from Nagaland. The day also provided an opportunity for the Governor to engage with serving soldiers and their families.

Arms, ammunition seized in Kangpokpi

IMPHAL, Dec 16: Security forces seized a cache of arms and ammunition during search operations in Manipur's Kangpokpi district, a police statement said on Monday.

A combined team of central and state security forces seized the arms and ammunition at L Jangnongphai and Freedom Hill on Sunday, it said.

One 7.62 mm self-loading rifle, one 9mm pistol, one single barrel gun, one double barrel gun, one pompi gun, four hand grenades, four stardyne explosives, four electric detonators, were seized during the search operation by security forces.

The seized arms and ammunition were handed over to the Kangpokpi district police station for further legal actions, the statement added. (PTI)

Dimapur Press Club celebrates silver jubilee

DIMAPUR, Dec 16: Dimapur Press Club (DPC) celebrated silver jubilee on Monday at the Dimapur Government College Auditorium, bringing together notable personalities, journalists, and distinguished guests to observe 25 years of journalistic excellence and community service.

The celebration featured Shringain Longkumer, Speaker of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly as the special guest, alongside Yirmiyar Arthur Yhome, deputy news director for Asia-Pacific at The Associated Press, who served as the theme speaker. The theme for the event was "Harnessing Media Vibrancy, Embracing New Frontiers". The program was chaired by Kekhriesenuo Kiewhuo, with recordings managed by Prasanjit Dutta and Henly Phom.

Briefing on the history of DPC, Dilip Sharma, convener of Planning Committee said that Dimapur Press Club (DPC) was established in 1999 to provide a common platform for journalists in Dimapur, Nagaland to foster solidarity, support and professionalism within the media community. Over the past 25 years, the club has played a significant role in promoting ethical journalism, ensuring press freedom, and serving as a voice for the people.

The DPC has been instrumental in organising various workshops, training sessions, and events to enhance the skills and knowledge of journalists in the region. It has also served as a bridge between the media and society, addressing critical issues while promoting transparency and accountability.

As the largest hub for media professionals in Dimapur, the club



continues to inspire upcoming journalists and remains committed to its core values of "Truth and Justice," as reflected in its motto. The Silver Jubilee celebration marks a milestone in DPC's journey, celebrating its contributions to journalism and its role in shaping informed public discourse in Nagaland.

Theme speaker of the programme, the deputy news director for Asia-Pacific at The Associated Press, Yirmiyar Arthur Yhome spoke on the theme "Harnessing Media Vibrancy, Embracing New Frontiers" with profound insights into the evolving landscape of journalism. Yhome emphasized the growing need for the media to adapt to technological advancements and changing audience behaviours. She underscored the importance of vibrant media practices, urging journalists to leverage digital platforms, data-driven storytelling, and innovative approaches to ensure credibility, speed, and accuracy in reporting.

Highlighting the theme's relevance, Yhome spoke about "embracing new frontiers" by

addressing challenges such as misinformation, declining public trust, and the pressures of 24/7 news cycles. She stressed the role of the media as a bridge between the truth and the people, particularly in regions like Nagaland, where local stories often hold global significance.

In his address, special guest Longkumer commended the Dimapur Press Club for its unwavering commitment to upholding the principles of journalism over the past 25 years. He highlighted the vital role the press plays in shaping public opinion, holding authorities accountable, and bridging the gap between the government and the people.

"The press is the backbone of democracy, and organizations like the Dimapur Press Club are integral in ensuring that the voice of the people is heard," he said. The Speaker also emphasised the importance of ethical journalism in an era of misinformation and encouraged journalists to continue their dedication to truth and integrity. (NNN)

**GOVT. OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL
DIPHU GOVERNMENT COLLEGE
DIPHU: KARBI- ANGLONG**

Website: diphugovernmentcollege.com Email: diphugovtc@gmail.com

No. DGC/VI-54/2024-25/952 Dated, Diphu the 13th December, 2024.

NOTICE

This is for information to the students of TDC (Non CBCS) Examinations (Special chance) for the session 2015-16 & 2016-2017 and (Backlog papers) for the session 2017-2018 that the examination form fill up will commence be issued and the same may be submitted from 16th December to 24th December, 2024. The Examinations will be commenced from February, 2025 tentatively. No examination form will be entertained after this date.

Examination Form Fee : Rs.10
Venue : Boys Common Room.
Time : 10.30 am to 2.00 pm.

NB: Documents to be attached alongwith the examination form

1. Photocopy a Last Examination Admit Card, Arrcar Mark Sheets.
2. Photocopy of Registration.

Sd/-
Principal i/c
Diphu Government College, Diphu.

Memo.No. DGC/VI-54/2024-25/ 952 Dated, Diphu the 13th December, 2024.

343 Divyangjan to compete in Khelo Tripura Para Games

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 16: A total of 343 Divyangjan players from across Tripura's eight districts are set to showcase their talents at the state-level 'Khelo Tripura Para Games-2024,' scheduled to be held at Swami Vivekananda Maidan on December 18-19.

Youth affairs and sports minister Tinku Roy announced this during a press conference at the Secretariat on Monday. He highlighted the event as a significant initiative in celebration of Divyangjan Diwas 2024, aimed at promoting inclusivity in sports. The games are jointly organized by the Social Welfare and Social Education Department and the Youth Affairs and Sports Department.

According to the minister, 14 sporting events will feature in the competition, including a cricket match for visually impaired players. Two teams have been formed for the cricket match: the Uttaranchal team (comprising players



from North Tripura, Unakoti, Dhalai, and Khowai districts) and the Dakshinchal team (with participants from West Tripura, Sepahijala, Gomati, and South Tripura districts).

Other events include football, wheelchair races, shot put, chess, 50-meter race, long jump, carrom, tug-of-war, ring throw, musical ball (men), musical chair (women), standing board jump (boys and girls), and buchi game.

The minister also announced the

opening of 50 exhibition stalls at Swami Vivekananda Maidan during the event. These stalls will showcase developmental initiatives undertaken by various government departments.

Additionally, the social welfare and social education department will provide mobility aids, such as wheelchairs, to differently-abled individuals. A medical camp will also operate on-site to cater to the healthcare needs of participants.

In a special initiative, the social

welfare and social education department will ensure social allowances for eligible Divyangjan (those with 60% or more disabilities) who are yet to receive them. Stalls will be set up during the event for on-the-spot registrations, with two eligible individuals receiving allowances on stage. A total of 2,779 new beneficiaries will be added under this scheme.

Furthermore, five meritorious Divyangjan students who excelled in their secondary examinations will receive the Chief Minister's Divyangjan Merit Award of ₹ 24,000 each, while another five who performed well in higher secondary exams will be awarded ₹ 54,000 each.

The event will also see the distribution of Unique Disability ID (UDID) cards to the Divyangjan participants. These cards, with a unique identification number, will enable them to access disability-related benefits and facilities across India.

No. ACEH/TBCH/CS/21/2024-25/2

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
(E-Procurement)

The Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD(R&B), Hills, Assam, Haflong invites bids on behalf of the Governor of Assam for 01 (One) No. of Building Works "Construction of Teachers Quarter at Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Dima Hasao (UDISE: 18200104902)" under P.W.D, Haflong Territorial Building Division, Haflong from approved and eligible contractors Class-I (A), (B) and (C) registered with Public Works Department (Building), Assam for a total amount

Rs. 1,19,74,896.00 (Approx).

Details may be seen from 20/12/2024 at the website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-
Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD
(R&B), Hills, Assam, Haflong

Janasanyog/CF/2780/24/ 17-Dec-24

No. ACEH/TBCH/CS/20/2024-25/2

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
(E-Procurement)

The Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD(R&B), Hills, Assam, Haflong invites bids on behalf of the Governor of Assam for 01 (One) No. of Building Works "Construction of New School Building for upgradation from Upper Primary to High School under Samagra Shiksha, Assam at Angbong MES (UDISE 18200503604)" under P.W.D, Haflong Territorial Building Division, Haflong from approved and eligible contractors Class-I (A), (B) and (C) registered with Public Works Department (Building), Assam for a total amount

Rs. 1,52,50,086.00 (Approx).

Details may be seen from 20/12/2024 at the website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-
Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD
(R&B), Hills, Assam, Haflong

Janasanyog/CF/2779/24/ 17-Dec-24

Demise of Zakir Hussain mourned

ITANAGAR, Dec 16: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday mourned the demise of table maestro Zakir Hussain. "Deeply mourn the loss of Ustad Zakir Hussain, a true maestro whose tabla beats wove magic that resonated across the world," Khandu said in a post on X.

Hussain died in a San Francisco hospital in the US from complications arising out of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, the family said in a statement. He was 73.

He had been in hospital for the past two weeks and was shifted to the intensive care unit (ICU) after his condition deteriorated. "A recipient of the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Vibhushan, along with four Grammy Awards, and honoured by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, his legacy will forever echo in the annals of Indian classical music," the chief minister said in another social media post. (PTI)

No. KDB/BTC/SYD-01/2023-24/1007 Dated Kokrajhar the 16th Dec/2024.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders are invited on behalf of Sports & Youth Welfare & Cultural Deptt., BTC, Kokrajhar, from the intending Contractors/Suppliers/Firms for the work mentioned below:-

Sl. No.	Name of activity	Estimated Value (InRs.)	EMD/Bid Security (InRs.)	Tender Fees
1.	Land development with Installation of Iron Goal Post at Chandamani village playground under Dhauliguri VCDC in Kokrajhar District.	Rs. 8,00,000.00	Rs. 8,000/- (1% for ST/SC/OBC) & Rs. 16,000/- (2% for Gen)	Rs.250.00
2.	Land Development with Installation of Iron Goal Post at North Narabari playground.	Rs. 7,00,000.00	Rs. 7,000/- (1% for ST/SC/OBC) & Rs. 14,000/- (2% for Gen)	Rs.250.00
3.	Const. of Community Hall at Gudi Bathou Bijisali, Karigaon Kokrajhar.	Rs. 10,00,000.00	Rs. 10,000/- (1% for ST/SC/OBC) & Rs. 20,000/- (2% for Gen)	Rs.300.00

Last date & time of bid Submission :- 07-01-2025 upto 14.00 hrs.
Date and time of bid opening :- 07-01-2025 at 14.20 hrs.

Details NIT may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent from 17-12-2024 to 07-01-2025 in the office of the undersigned. The tender documents can be seen/obtained from <http://sppp.assam.gov.in> from 17/12/2024 (10.30 hours). A pre-bid meeting will be held on 23-12-2024 (11.30 Hrs). The address for the meeting is o/o the B.D.O., Kokrajhar Development Block, Titaguri.

Sd/-
Name of the TIA :- BDO, Kokrajhar Dev. Block, Titaguri.
Address of the TIA :- BDO, Kokrajhar Dev. Block, Titaguri.

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1110

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

No ACEH/CS/Spl. G. KAAC/03/2024-25/07 Date: 16.12.2024.

EXTENSIONNOTICE

It is for information to all concerned that the last date for submission of Bid for "Special Grant To Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council " for the year 2024-25 in Karbi Anglong District and West Karbi Anglong District. Published vide Press Notice No. ACEH/CS/Spl. G. KAAC/03/2024- 25/03. dtd.19/11/2024 is extended upto 2.00 P.M of 18-12-2024. (Tender ID 2024_KAAC_40620_1 and Tender ID 2024_KAAC_40613_1)

Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal www.assamtenders.gov.in.

All other terms and conditions will remain the same.

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

Memo No ACEH/CS/Spl. G. KAAC/03/2024-25/07-(A) Date: 16.12.2024.

SP members hold protest in UP Assembly premises

LUCKNOW, Dec 16: Opposition Samajwadi Party members on Monday held a protest in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly premises over the Sambhal violence and various other issues.

The protest was held ahead of the start of the Winter session of the state assembly.

Carrying placards in their hands, the SP members raised slogans against the state government over the issue of non-fulfilment of the promise of providing MSP for crops, unemployment, and "atrocities" being committed by the police.

The SP leaders also sought justice for the families of those killed in the recent violence in Sambhal.

Four people had died in the violence during the protest against the court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal recently.

Earlier, Member of the Legislative Council Ashutosh Sinha (SP) came to the assembly riding a bicycle to protest against inflation. (PTI)

There is video showing ex-Minority Panel chief accusing Vijayendra of trying to 'bribe' him: CM



BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA), Dec 16: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said that there was video footage showing former state Minority Commission Chairperson Anwar Maniappad accusing state BJP president B Y Vijayendra of attempting to "bribe" him by offering ₹ 150 crore, to hush up his report on the Waqf encroachments.

The chief minister's statement came in response to Maniappad on Sunday denying such an offer was made to him by Vijayendra, and instead alleging that Congress leaders had tried to bribe him.

Maniappad, as the chairman of the Karnataka State Minority Commission, had prepared the report and submitted it to the then BJP government in March 2012. It was tabled in the legislature in 2020, when the BJP was again in power.

"Maniappad had himself said it in the past. Which (statement of his) is right and which one is wrong? Maniappad is the one who said it first, based on which we reacted. If he now says no, what should be done, tell me. According to me, our reaction is right," Siddaramaiah said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "He (Maniappad) is the one who had claimed that ₹ 150 crore was offered to him. There is a video recording. He said it at a press meet. Now, after many years, he is denying it. What should be done, tell me." Asked if he would order a CBI probe into alleged claims by Maniappad, the CM said, "he (Maniappad) has said it. Let's see. The issue will be raised and discussed."

Siddaramaiah, earlier in a state-

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: In a show of support for the people of Palestine, Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra Monday carried a bag to Parliament that had "Palestine" emblazoned on it.

The Congress general secretary has been raising her voice against Israel's actions in Gaza and expressing solidarity with Palestinians.

Gandhi was seen carrying a handbag emblazoned with the word "Palestine" and Palestinian emblems, including a watermelon -- seen as a symbol of Palestinian solidarity.

Hitting out at the Wayanad MP over the bag issue, the BJP's Lok Sabha member Anurag Thakur wondered what message she wanted to send across.

"She did not speak a word on atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh but wants to make a fashion statement with the Palestine bag," he claimed.

Asked about BJP leaders raising

-In solidarity with Palestinians-

Priyanka carries bag emblazoned with 'Palestine' to Parliament



the 'Palestine' bag issue, Priyanka Gandhi said, "Tell them that they should do something about the atrocities that are happening on minorities -- Hindus and Christians -- in Bangladesh. Talk to the Bangladesh government and stop these atrocities."

Abed Elrazeg Abu Jazer, the Charge d'affaires of the Palestine Embassy in New Delhi, last week

called on Gandhi to congratulate the Congress leader on her recent Lok Sabha bypoll victory from Kerala's Wayanad.

In June, Gandhi slammed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over what she had said was the Israel government's "genocidal actions" in Gaza, as she accused him and his government of "barbarism".

light of the allegations, Venugopal asked.

"Does the ministry believe that retaining the chairperson under such circumstances send a wrong signal to India's commitment to corporate governance and regulatory transparency?" he said.

"The finance minister's failure to act decisively not only tarnished the credibility of the government but also jeopardised the national financial governance framework. What is the implicit interest of the government and the SEBI chairperson?" Venugopal said.

Why the government is not taking any action, he asked.

He alleged that the name of Adani group figured in stock manipulation and questioned how the SEBI chairperson can investigate that when "she is part of the scandal".

He demanded that a JPC inquiry be initiated in the entire matter.

In the country, 11 crore people are dependent on stock markets, most of them from middle income groups, he said.

The SEBI is entrusted with safeguarding the hard earned money of the Indian middle class, he said.

Any lapse or misconduct within SEBI is a direct reflection on the government, he said.

The finance minister is directly responsible for ensuring that individuals with unimpeachable integrity and ethical standards are appointed to this crucial regulatory bodies, Venugopal said. (PTI)

'Plot to murder me politically', UP minister refutes 'irregularities'

LUCKNOW, Dec 16: Senior Apna Dal (Soneylal) leader and Uttar Pradesh Technical Education Minister Ashish Patel has alleged that a conspiracy is being hatched to "murder" him politically over reported irregularities in the promotion of teachers.

Patel also said that the day the prime minister orders, he will resign from his post as minister without a second's delay.

Apna Dal (Soneylal) is a constituent of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance.

The minister's reaction came

amid allegations that more than 100 lecturers in the technical education department were promoted in violation of reservation norms.

In a series of posts on X in Hindi late on Sunday night, Patel said, "Baseless and unfounded allegations are being made in the media and social media as part of a conspiracy to murder me politically. Entire Uttar Pradesh knows how the interests of staff coming from the deprived classes are protected in the technical education department during my tenure as minister."

"Truth cannot be harmed! If the honourable chief minister deems it

necessary, he should get the allegations investigated by the CBI. He should also get each and every decision taken by me as a minister probed by the CBI.

"Everyone knows who is behind this. There will be more such allegations in the future. There will be others who will be scared of such false charges. Apna Dal (S) is not going to back down from the fight for the rights of the deprived," Patel added.

In another post, the minister said, "For the fight for social justice, @ApnaDalOfficial became a part of NDA in 2014 under the leader-

Don't blame EVMs if you don't know how to fight polls: BJP to Rahul



NEW DELHI, Dec 16: The BJP on Monday latched onto Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's sharp take on the Congress over a host of issues to attack Rahul Gandhi, saying if he does not know how to fight elections then he should not blame Electronic Voting Machines.

"Leadership is not earned and not demanded. You have to have the qualities of a leader. You cannot impose yourself," BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said at a press conference, targeting the Congress leader.

He said the National Conference leader has conveyed his message bluntly to Gandhi due to the conduct of the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha.

Patra said even Congress allies have realised the legacy of the Gandhi family and the main opposition party. The BJP spokesperson claimed that the INDIA bloc was the "biggest scam" and that its allies fight polls separately and project different leaders as the face of the opposition alliance.

EVM protest: Fadnavis asks Congress to look within over poll defeat

NAGPUR, Dec 16: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday asked Congress to introspect and stop blaming others for the party's defeat in various elections. The Congress would continue to be routed in polls until the party introspects and stops blaming others, he added.

Fadnavis also said the government would answer all questions raised by the Opposition in the legislature provided they don't politicise issues. Earlier in the day, Opposition members demonstrated on the steps of the Vidhan Bhawan in Nagpur and raised slogans against EVMs in elections on the opening day of the winter session of the state legislature.

"Whenever Congress party loses (elections) it blames others rather than introspecting. Until they introspect, they will keep losing," Fadnavis told reporters. A day earlier,

In an exclusive interview to PTI, Abdullah had asked the Congress to justify its leadership role in the alliance instead of taking it for granted. The National Conference leader emphasised that leadership "has to be earned" and cannot be taken for granted.

He also dismissed the Congress party's vehement objection to Electronic Voting Machines and echoed the BJP's defence -- you can't accept election results when you win, and blame EVMs when you lose. "When you get a hundred plus members of Parliament using the same EVMs, and you celebrate that as sort of a victory for your party, you can't then a few months later turn around and say... we don't like these EVMs because now the election results aren't going the way we would like them to," Abdullah had said.

Patra also cited the NC leader's rejection of doubts over EVMs as the chief minister had noted that his party won the assembly polls in the Union Territory after losing in the Lok Sabha elections. (PTI)

Fadnavis said the opposition should raise issues in the legislature instead of speaking through the media, inviting rebuke from the Leader of the Opposition in the legislative council Ambadas Danve.

Danve had said that the opposition was ready for discussions but expected the government should not lie. Responding to Danve's barb, Fadnavis said, "Danve or any other member of the opposition can initiate debate and discussion on any issue they like, the government is capable of answering their questions. My government has nothing to hide".

However, if opposition parties want to play politics, they will get political answers only, the chief minister added.

Fadnavis said tabla maestro Zakir Hussain gave a global identity to tabla and that his demise has created a huge vacuum. (PTI)

regularities in the technical education department.

It has been alleged that instead of direct recruitment of department heads in the government polytechnic colleges under the technical education department, lecturers working in colleges have been promoted and made department heads.

It has also been alleged that if the posts were filled through direct recruitment, candidates from backward and Dalit communities would have benefited from reservation, but they were allegedly deprived due to promotion of 177 lecturers against the rules. (PTI)

President Murmu, PM Modi pay homage to heroes of 1971 war

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: President Droupadi Murmu on Monday led the nation in paying tributes to the fallen heroes of the 1971 war that led to the redrawing of the political map of South Asia with the birth of Bangladesh as an independent country.

The stupendous victory in the war following the surrender of over 90,000 Pakistani soldiers on December 16, 1971 ended horrific violence unleashed by the Pakistani army on millions of Bangladeshis.

India commemorates December 16 as Vijay Diwas.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, paying his heartfelt tributes to the brave soldiers, said their sacrifices will inspire generations and remain deeply embedded in India's history.

"Today, on Vijay Diwas, we honour the courage and sacrifices of the brave soldiers who contributed to India's historic victory in 1971. Their selfless dedication and un-



wavering resolve safeguarded our nation and brought glory to us," he said in a post on 'X'.

"This day is a tribute to their extraordinary valour and their unshakable spirit. Their sacrifices will forever inspire generations and remain deeply embedded in our nation's history," he said.

In her tribute, President Murmu,

who is also the Supreme Commander of the armed forces, said the ultimate sacrifice of the soldiers shall remain a source of national pride.

"On Vijay Diwas, I pay homage to our valiant soldiers who displayed indomitable courage during the 1971 war, securing victory for India," she said.

"A grateful nation remembers the ultimate sacrifice of our bravehearts whose stories inspire every Indian and shall remain a source of national pride," Murmu said on 'X'.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh laid a wreath and paid homage to the fallen heroes at the National War Memorial to mark the day.

"Today, on the special occasion of Vijay Diwas, the nation salutes the bravery and sacrifice of India's armed forces," Singh said.

"Their unwavering courage and patriotism ensured that our country remained safe. India will never forget their sacrifice and service," he said.

Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan too paid rich tributes to the fallen heroes of the war.

Gen Chauhan also conveyed his compliments to all serving personnel, veterans and 'Veer Naris' for their dedication, resolve and "enduring commitment" towards the nation. (PTI)

Cong demands PM's apology for 'twisting' facts on Nehru: Kharge

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of misleading the country by "twisting facts" about Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's letter on reservation to states and demanded an apology.

Participating in a discussion on 'Glorious Journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India' in the Upper House, Kharge also accused the BJP leaders of indulging in 'bhakti' of Prime Minister Modi, asserting that it was leading the country towards dictatorship.

The Congress President cited Modi's speech in which he had said there was no elected government between 1947-1952 and the Congress had illegally amended the Constitution.

Kharge said the first amendment was carried out by the Constituent Assembly members which included Syama Prasad Mookerjee and was undertaken to provide reservation to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, fix problems related to education, employment and abolish Zamindari system.

"I want to inform the House that the Supreme Court had rejected Madras state's decision on reservation."

He said that the other aspect of this amendment was to stop communal propaganda and Sardar Patel in a letter on July 3, 1950 had suggested to Nehru that constitutional amendment was the only remedy for this problem.

"Therefore, Nehru wrote a letter to chief ministers.

This has been mentioned in PM's speech after twisting facts to defame Nehru for which he should apologise to the nation. This is my demand. If you twist the facts before the nation and attempt to defame, then you should apologise in this House and other House and before people of this country," Kharge said.

He said the prime minister lives in past, not in present and it would have been better had he listed present achievements that strengthened democracy.

He said erstwhile leaders of RSS were against the Constitution.

"In 1949, the entire country knew that RSS leaders opposed the Constitution because it was not based on Manusmriti. RSS mouthpiece Organiser in the edition of November 30, 1949 had written about it," he said.

Kharge said that it is clear from debates of the Constituent Assembly that erstwhile leaders of RSS were against the Constitution.

"Those who hated the flag, Ashok Chakra and the Constitution are today giving lessons to us on the Constitution."

Kharge said that even when many powerful countries were not practising universal adult franchise, women and all sections of societies in India were given the right to vote during the Congress regime through the Constitution.

He said that government leaders cut-paste information and present them as per their convenience to twist facts. (PTI)

Will continue defending Bangla monk Chinmoy Krishna Das despite receiving life threats: Lawyer

Ghosh believes the monk has been framed on false charges because of his efforts to unite the Hindu community

KOLKATA, Dec 16: Rabindra Ghosh, a prominent Bangladeshi lawyer defending jailed Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das, on Monday asserted that he would continue his fight for justice despite receiving life threats.

He alleged that the interim government in Bangladesh was targeting Das as he had been vocal against atrocities on Hindus and was uniting the persecuted minority community.

"I am aware that false cases could be filed against me, but that will not stop me. All my life, I have fought against injustice. I have also fought cases for Muslims and helped them get justice. Death will come one day, but I will continue the fight," the 74-year-old lawyer of Bangladesh Supreme Court told PTI in a telephonic interview.

Ghosh, while highlighting the role played by the Hindu minority in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, lamented that the ongoing atrocities against minorities in Bangladesh defeat the "very principles" of the war, which was fought to end the unequal treatment of subjects of West Pakistan and East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

Speaking from Barrackpore,



near Kolkata, where he has come for medical treatment, Ghosh said, "Since the day I declared that I will be fighting for Chinmoy Krishna Das, I have been receiving life threats. I get regular threat calls and messages, but that will not deter me from performing my duty. I will continue to fight against the injustice meted out to Das and other Hindus."

Chinmoy Krishna Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested earlier this month from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport while en route to Chattogram for a rally.

Denied bail, Das has been sent to jail until January 2 by a Bangladeshi court. Ghosh believes the monk has been framed on false charges because of his efforts to unite the Hindu community.

"The monk's large public gatherings unnerved the administration. That is why fundamentalists and the interim government targeted him. Death will come one day, but I will continue the fight," Ghosh said.

Ghosh arrived in Barrackpore on Sunday evening, accompanied by his wife, for medical treatment and is staying with his son Rahul Ghosh, who has lived in the area

for several years.

Ghosh, who is also the president of Bangladesh Minority Watch, an NGO advocating for minority rights, described a chaotic incident in the Chittagong court where around 40 lawyers created unrest and attempted to assault him physically.

"How can you frame all the Hindu lawyers who tried to represent Das with false cases? Is this not a travesty of justice? Fundamentalists are beating up lawyers, and the administration is silent. There is no guarantee that I won't be killed in the future for defending Das," he said.

Highlighting the plight of minorities in Bangladesh, Ghosh said the condition of the Hindu community has worsened since the interim government, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, took charge.

"Under the previous regime, minorities faced attacks but the situation has now crossed all limits," he said.

On the occasion of Vijay Diwas, which marks the victory of Indian armed forces against Pakistan in the 1971 war and the formation of Bangladesh, Ghosh expressed deep disappointment with the current

state of his country.

"I fought for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, and I want to uphold those values. I am a muktijoddha, and it is really painful to see the present condition of my country. The interim government in Bangladesh has failed the minorities," he said.

Reflecting on the principles of the Liberation War, Ghosh said the ongoing atrocities against minorities go against the very ideals the war was fought for.

"The Liberation War was fought to establish equality and end the unequal treatment of East Pakistanis by West Pakistan. By denying minorities their rights and not allowing proper judicial assistance to Das, it seems the very purpose of establishing equality in Bangladesh stands defeated," he said.

Ghosh also underscored the role played by the Hindu minority in the Liberation War.

"Hindus made significant sacrifices during the Liberation War. They fought shoulder-to-shoulder with Muslims for an independent Bangladesh. Today, their contributions are forgotten, and they are treated as second-class citizens," he lamented. (PTI)

Tight security near Jharkhand SSC office as candidates plan protest over 'irregularities' in exam



RANCHI, Dec 16: A large number of security forces have been deployed and barricades erected at all entry points to the Jharkhand Staff Service Commission (JSSC) office here in view of a proposed agitation by candidates over alleged malpractices in a recruitment examination held in September.

The Ranchi administration imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of BNS within the 500-metre radius of the SSC office from 5.30 am on Saturday to 8 pm on December 20.

The candidates, under the aegis of Jharkhand State Students' Union (JSSU), had announced that they would gherao the SSC office on Monday to stop the document verification exercise of the recruitment examination.

The JSSC has called 2,231 shortlisted candidates for document verification between December 16 and 22.

They qualified the Jharkhand General Graduate Level Combined Competitive Examination (JGGCLCC) in which 3.04 lakh candidates had appeared.

JSSU leader Devendra Nath Mahto said, "Despite the heavy security cover and prohibitory orders, the students are gathering near the SSC office. Our prime objective is to stop the document verification exercise by the commission."

He said thousands of candidates

from all 24 districts have reached Ranchi and they would gherao the SSC office.

Checking is being ensured at all entry points, and no one is being allowed to enter without checking, a police officer said.

Ranchi administration, in an official statement on Sunday, said that it was ready to deal with the agitation.

The administration also urged the students to avoid participating in any kind of aggressive demonstration.

"Such activities not only create law and order problems but can also have a deep impact on their (agitating students) education, future and career," the release said.

Students have been protesting over the JGGCLCC examinations, through which recruitment will be made in mostly junior-level posts in the government, alleging that widespread malpractices took place in the examinations.

A mega demonstration happened outside the SSC office on September 30, demanding the cancellation of the examination.

The JSSC had set up a three-member committee to probe the allegations of malpractices, taking cognisance of the students' complaints.

Dismissing the allegations, JSSC secretary Sudhir Gupta said the examination was conducted in a free and fair manner. (PTI)

Days after Sambhal temple's reopening, BPSK orders re-exam at Patna centre which saw protests

SAMBHAL (UP), Dec 16: Three damaged idols were found inside the well of the Bhasma Shankar temple in Sambhal that was reopened last week after being shut for 46 years, officials said on Monday.

The Shri Kartik Mahadev temple (Bhasma Shankar temple) was reopened on December 13 after the authorities said they stumbled upon the covered structure during an anti-encroachment drive. The temple housed an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivaling. It had remained locked since 1978. The temple also has a well nearby which the authorities had planned to reopen.

District Magistrate of Sambhal, Rajender Pensiya, told reporters that the ancient temple and the well were being excavated.

"Around 10 to 12 feet of digging has been done. During this, today, first an idol of Parvati was found with its head broken. Then Ganesh and Lakshmi idols were found," he said.

Asked if the idols were damaged and then put inside, Pensiya said, "All this is a matter of investigation."

"Right now, these idols have come out. How did they get inside? What happened and what did not happen, will be known after a detailed investigation," he added.

To a question on encroachments around the temple, the district magistrate said some people removed encroachments on their own while others were requested to remove them.

Further due process will be followed and then these will be removed through the nagar palika, he said.

Asked if the temple would also be beautified, Pensiya said, "First the temple's 'praecheentaa' will be ensured."

Sanjeev Sharma, who was present at the site during the excavation, said a damaged Lakshmi idol was found in the well along with a Parvati idol.

Satendra Kumar Singh said the Parvati idol was found about 15-20 feet inside the well.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate Vandana Mishra told PTI that information was received through the local SHO that idols had been found.

The temple is situated in the Khaggu Sarai area, just over a kilometre from the Shahi Jama Masjid where violence took place on November 24 during a protest over a court-ordered survey of the mosque. Four people were killed and several, including police personnel, were injured in the violence.

The district administration has written to the Archaeological Survey of India for carbon dating of the temple, including the well.

Carbon dating is a method used to determine the age of archaeological artefacts from ancient sites. Worshipers have started visiting the temple and it is being guarded round the clock.

Meanwhile, BJP's Sambhal district unit chief Chaudhary Harendra Singh, who offered prayers at the temple late on Sunday evening, told reporters that "there is enthusiasm in the Hindu society due to the opening of the temple."

"Today I performed puja and read Hanuman Chalisa (at the temple) for which I would like to thank the administration. Just like the opposition, we also want the truth of Sambhal to come before the whole country. People should know how Hindus migrated from Sambhal, how they were forced to leave," Singh said.

"This temple is a big proof of this. If there was a temple, there must have been Hindus in the locality. Under what circumstances did they migrate? The truth should come out before the people," he added.

Singh also said that everyone has heard about the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits, and now the pain of the Hindus of Sambhal should also come out before the country.

"When we talk to the elderly people, we get to know what the scene must have been like. We had a government that did not talk about the Hindu society at all, and the Hindus migrated due to its bad thinking. (PTI)



PATNA, Dec 16: The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSK) on Monday ordered re-examination for nearly 6,500 candidates who last week wrote a competitive test at a centre in Patna, where protests had erupted over an alleged question paper leak.

One official on duty at the examination centre also died of heart attack during the ruckus created by a section of the candidates on December 13.

BPSK Chairman Ravi Manubhai Parmar, while making the announcement, also made it clear that re-examination was being ordered only for those who had appeared at Bapu Pariksha Parisar, which was one of the more than 900 centres across the state where examinations were held on December 13.

The BPSK conducted the Combined (Preliminary) Competitive Examination (CCE) on that day. Nearly 5 lakh candidates appeared for the exam held for hiring people in Group A and B posts.

"We are cancelling the exams for Bapu Pariksha Parisar. Fresh dates will be announced for the nearly 6,500 candidates in due course," the chairman told reporters here.

He also said that all those who are found to have been involved in disrupting the exams shall be debarred by the Commission from appearing in any test in future.

"So far, 30-40 such people have been identified and the police are at work to identify more," he said.

The announcement came a day after the district administration submitted a strongly worded report of inquiry before the Commission, blaming the ruckus on a group of "anti-social elements posing as examinees.... hell-bent upon causing some disruption which could lead to cancellation" of the exams.

The report, which took a grim view of the death of an official on duty at the exam centre, who suffered a heart attack but could not be taken to hospital in time because of the protests, also called for slapping of murder charges on those found guilty of unruly behaviour.

The BPSK Chairman said, "Examinations were held in a free and fair manner in more than 900 centres, where close to five lakh candidates appeared on December 13."

"The BPSK's CCE 70th preliminary examination was held in a single shift from noon to 2 pm. The examination was held in 912 centres across the state, and of those, free and fair exams were held in 911 centres," he said.

However, CCTV footage of Bapu Pariksha Parisar has revealed that some of the candidates snatched question papers from the invigilators and stormed out of the examination hall screaming that the paper had been leaked, he said.

"Snatching question papers from invigilators and showing those to outsiders are tantamount to looting public property. Police action will be initiated against these persons who seem to have acted as a part of a conspiracy," he said.

The police have so far registered two FIRs in this connection, Patna District Magistrate Chandrashekar Singh said on Sunday. (PTI)

Himachal govt plans to build underwater tunnel in Govind Sagar Lake: Minister

BILASPUR (HP), Dec 16: The Himachal Pradesh government is exploring a proposal for building an underwater tunnel in Govind Sagar Lake to connect Bilaspur city to four-lane road between Kiratpur and Manali, said Technical Education Minister Rajesh Dharmani on Monday.

Interacting with a group of reporters here, he said the tunnel will be built from Luhn Maidan to the four-lane road. If the plan becomes fruitful, it will not only prove to be a lifesaver for Bilaspur city but will also be the first bridge in the country to be built inside a lake.

Govind Sagar Lake reservoir in Una and Bilaspur districts of Himachal Pradesh is about 56 km in length and 3 km in breadth.

After the construction of Kiratpur-Manali four-lane road, Bilaspur city has lost its connection with the main road. This has resulted in the slowing down of economic activities here. Construction of the bridge will also provide a new path to traders and industrialists.

The underwater tunnel bridge will not only connect the city directly to the four-lane road but it will also become a centre of attraction for tourists. If there are possibilities

of bridge construction, experts and consultants from Germany will be hired for the ambitious project, he said.

"The bridge will be constructed using Germany's advanced immersion tunnel technology and tunnel boring machine. In immersion tunnel technology, parts of the tunnel will be built on land and installed under the lake.

"It will be made safe and durable by digging below the lake bed with a tunnel boring machine," he said.

A team of experts will be formed to assess the possibilities of the project. If the

plan is found to be feasible, it will be proposed for budget under the Setu Bharatam scheme of the central government. Several hundred crore rupees are estimated to be spent on the project, the minister said.

Keeping in mind the environmental balance, advanced and sustainable German technology will be used in this project which will write the story of the revival of Bilaspur, Dharmani.

If this project comes to fruition, it will become an example not only for the state but also for the entire country, he added. (PTI)

Born in anger or out of deliberate devotion to music, many stories credit origin of tabla

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Legend has it that a competition was held in a Mughal court between two pakhawaj players. The losing maestro was so enraged that he smashed his pakhawaj, a two-sided percussion instrument, into two. And so was born the tabla.

Such was the dramatic birth of the tabla, the two pieces of wood, metal and bound leather, which today are the primary percussion accompanying instruments of any Hindustani classical performance.

For ages, the tabla largely played second fiddle to the vocalist or the main instrumentalist -- until the holy trinity of Pandit Samta Prasad, Pandit Kishan Maharaj and Ustad Alla Rakha Khan gave it prominence.

However, it was left to Alla

Rakha's son, Zakir Hussain, to put it on the global stage when he collaborated with Western performers such as John McLaughlin, Yo-Yo Ma and George Harrison of the Beatles.

Much like the diverse sounds it produces, the stories behind the invention of the tabla are also numerous. The smashing of the pakhawaj by Sudhar Khan Dadi in the court of Mohammed Shah Rangelala in the 18th century is just one legend.

"The origin of the Tabla is one of the most controversial aspects of Indian classical music and nothing can be said with any degree of certainty," says musicologist Pandit Vijay Shanker Mishra in his book "Art and Science of Playing Tabla."

"On regaining his calm, Sudhar Khan placed the two severed pieces of the Pakhawaj with their faces (drumheads) up, much like today's Tabla and began playing on them. As the Pakhawaj could still produce sounds in spite of being sliced into two, the people exclaimed: 'Tab bhi bola' (It still speaks!)" (which) turned into 'Tab-bola' and finally, 'Tabla,' hold the proponents of this view," according to Mishra's book.

Many also credit the invention of the tabla to a drummer named Amir Khusrav Khan in the early 18th century, who was tasked with creating a more refined and melodic percussion instrument to accompany the emerging music style known as 'Khyal.'

The barrel-shaped pakhawaj drum was considered the ancestor of both the tabla and the mridangam, and has been depicted in countless paintings and prints. Although the tabla is a relatively recent addition to Hindustani classical music, the instrument has gained immense popularity, and today it is impossible to imagine a concert without the tabla, whether as a solo instrument or an accompaniment.

There is a more scholarly view of the origins of the name -- it is said to have been derived from the Arabic word 'tabl', meaning 'drum.'

The percussion instrument is made up of two drums, 'daayaan' or right, which produces bass sound, and 'baayaan' or left, which creates higher pitched treble. (PTI)

SC sets aside Karnataka HC order quashing CBI case over illegal iron ore export

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: In a relief to the CBI, the Supreme Court on Monday set aside a judgement of the Karnataka High Court quashing a 2013 criminal case against a company and others in an alleged case of illegal iron ore export.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar asked the Dharwad bench of the Karnataka High Court to decide the case afresh on some counts except the amount of the alleged iron ore exported by M/S MSPL Limited and others.

"We have set aside the (HC) judgement. The parties are directed to appear before the high court on February 3, 2025," the bench said, "we have not expressed any opinion on the merits of the case."

The bench was hearing about 11 appeals of the CBI against the December 12 judgement of Justice M Nagaprasanna of the high court.

The HC judge quashed the pro-

ceedings initiated by the CBI in the case related to the illegal export of iron ore and said the registration of the case and the filing of the chargesheet by the CBI against M/S MSPL Limited and others were contrary to law.

The high court said the apex court had empowered the CBI to investigate cases of export of over 50,000 metric tonne of iron ore without valid permits.

It noted the total quantity alleged in the chargesheet against the company was 39,480 metric tonne, below the threshold set by the apex court. The high court held the CBI lacked jurisdiction to register the case or file the chargesheet, but said it did not mean that MSPL Limited could not be investigated.

The high court said the special investigating team constituted by the Karnataka Lokayukta was empowered to initiate proceedings for cases below the 50,000 metric

tonne threshold, going by the Supreme Court's directions.

It held since the CBI had no jurisdiction, all actions arising from the chargesheet, including the cognisance taken by the trial court, were invalid. On the issue of the role of directors, the high court said their specific roles must be clearly established in the complaint, investigation, and chargesheet.

The directors cannot be arraigned as accused without clear evidence of their active involvement in the alleged illegality, it said.

The company and others were prosecuted before a trial court at Ankola, Uttara Kannada District in the case of the CBI registered on October 24, 2013. The central probe agency filed its chargesheet in 2022, for offences punishable under Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) and sections 379 (theft), 411 (keeping stolen property), 420 (cheating) and 447 (criminal trespass) of the IPC. (PTI)

'Awara' a film that is etched in my mind: Amitabh Bachchan on Raj Kapoor's birth centenary

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Amitabh Bachchan paid tributes to Raj Kapoor on the occasion of the legendary actor-filmmaker's 100th birth anniversary, describing the 1951 classic "Awara" as a shining example of his "incredible showmanship" that left a lasting impression on the megastar.

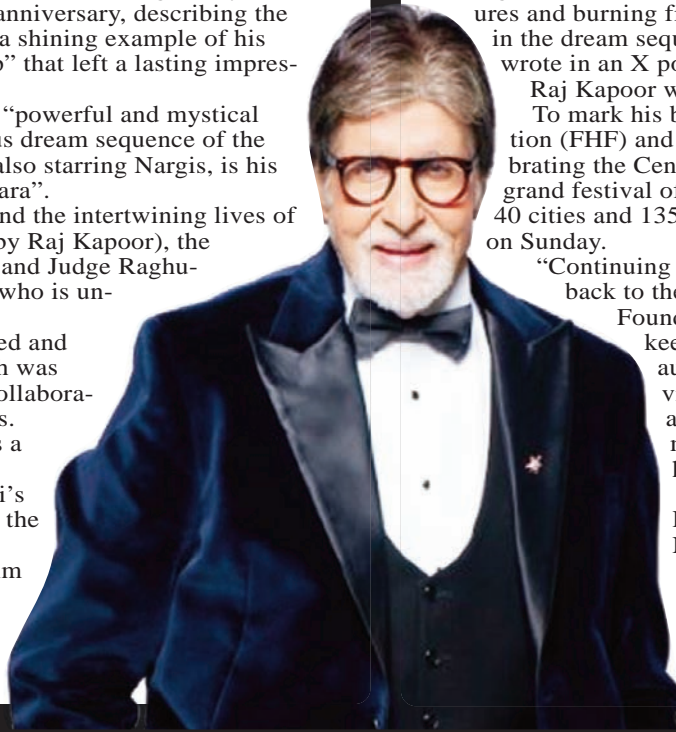
Bachchan, 82, said the "powerful and mystical symbolism" in the famous dream sequence of the black-and-white movie, also starring Nargis, is his favourite part about "Awara".

The film revolves around the intertwining lives of a poor thief Raj (played by Raj Kapoor), the privileged Rita (Nargis), and Judge Raghunath (Prithviraj Kapoor) who is unaware that Raj is his son.

Raj Kapoor also directed and produced "Awara", which was penned by his frequent collaborator Khwaja Ahmad Abbas.

"Even today 'Awara' is a film that is etched in my mind. Talking about Rajji's incredible showmanship, the way he envisioned the dream sequence in the film had never been seen before.

"You are amazed by his fantastical imagina-



tion that visualised the surreal setting, the ethereal Nargisji emerging through thick clouds of smoke, Rajji surrounded by demonic figures and burning fires – there is a powerful, mystical symbolism in the dream sequence, and that is my favourite," Bachchan wrote in an X post.

Raj Kapoor would have turned 100 on December 14.

To mark his birth anniversary, the Film Heritage Foundation (FHF) and RK Films organised 'Raj Kapoor 100 – Celebrating the Centenary of the Greatest Showman', a three-day grand festival of 10 milestone Raj Kapoor films screening in 40 cities and 135 cinemas across the country. It will conclude on Sunday.

"Continuing our commitment to bringing classic cinema back to the big screen, I am so happy that Film Heritage

Foundation has joined hands with RK Films to keep the legacy of Raj Kapoor alive and give audiences all over India an opportunity to revisit the films of an artist who lived for cinema and whose films gave voice to the common man," FHF ambassador Bachchan added in his post.

Bachchan's daughter Shweta is married to Raj Kapoor's daughter Ritu Nanda's son Nikhil.

Raj Kapoor also directed films such as "Barsaat", "Shree 420", "Sangam", "Mera Naam Joker", "Bobby" and "Ram Teri Ganga Maili" during his illustrious 40-year career. He died in 1988. (PTI)

DILJIT DEDICATES CHANDIGARH CONCERT TO WORLD CHESS CHAMPION D GUKESH, RECREATES 'PUSHPA' POSE

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Punjabi singing sensation Diljit Dosanjh dedicated his Chandigarh concert to D Gukesh, praising the newly crowned world chess champion for turning his dream into a reality. Indian Grandmaster Gukesh on Thursday became the youngest world chess champion at 18 years after beating title-holder Ding Liren from China. Diljit, who performed a show in Chandigarh on Saturday as part of his "Dil-Luminati India Tour 2024", shared a video from his speech on his official Instagram page.

"Tonight's concert is dedicated to the world chess champion Gukesh. Do you know why it is dedicated to him? Because whatever you dream of in life, Gukesh has already dreamt of it and made it a reality. He became the world champion," the actor-singer said in the clip. At the concert, Diljit also recreated Telugu superstar Allu Arjun's signature pose from his blockbuster film franchise "Pushpa". The 40-year-old singer asked the audience if they had seen "Pushpa 2: The Rule", the recently released sequel to 2021's "Pushpa: The Rise".

"Did you watch the film 'Pushpa'? I seen the first film, but haven't watched the second part yet. There is this famous dialogue 'Jhukega nahi saala'. Saala nahi jhukega toh kya jeeja jhuk jayega?" he quipped, referencing Arjun's popular catchphrase from the movie. Diljit then assured the concert goers that they will have a lot of fun during the show. "I promise you today's night will be the best," he added. The singer will next perform in Mumbai on December 19. "Dil-Luminati India Tour 2024", which began on October 26 in New Delhi, will come to an end on December 29 in Guwahati. (PTI)



Tabla will never sound like this ever again: Shankar Mahadevan remembers Zakir Hussain

NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Zakir Hussain was a rare combination of knowledge, expertise and stage presence, says Shankar Mahadevan who remembers his Shakti bandmate for being the "biggest inspiration" in his musical career.

It was just earlier this year that they were celebrating their Grammy win on the international stage for their collaboration on "This Moment", which won the best global music album award.

Hussain, credited as the musician who gave tabla a global identity, died on Monday morning in a San Francisco hospital in the US.

Mahadevan, 57, said it is hard to believe that he is gone.

"I have lost somebody who's been my biggest inspiration, a teacher and a human being who has influenced my music. He played a huge role in my musical career. He was the great-

est in the world.

"I've never seen a rhythm artist with so much musicality and there will never be one more like this. Either there will be knowledge or expertise... It is impossible for an artist to be born of this calibre or to have knowledge, expertise and stage presence. Tabla is never going to sound like this ever again," Mahadevan told PTI in an interview.

The musician said they had already planned a series of shows in India and the UAE but that was not to be.

"This is a loss that is going to be felt for a long time because he was actively playing and he was not a musician who (had retired). We had concerts planned for next month... The live album of Shakti is being mixed and mastered now and we were going to release it soon," he added. The composer-vocalist, who credited Hussain for bringing him

into Shakti, said he has been fortunate to have collaborated and toured extensively with the tabla maestro.

"I am very lucky that I got to live with him, eat with him and share moments... He has given us so much in the past few years to celebrate it in the years to come."

Shakti formed in 1973 with John McLaughlin, violin player L. Shankar, Hussain and ghatam player TH "Vikku" Vinayakram as founding members. In 1997, McLaughlin and Hussain brought Vinayakram's son and ghatam player V Selvaganes, mandolin player U Shrinivas and Mahadevan into the fold of Shakti.

Such was the mastery of Hussain on tabla that he would always surprise not just the audience but even bandmates, recalled Mahadevan.

"We used to do 30 concerts in 40 days. After a point, if you listen to a person again and again, you start pre-

dicting things, but he used to always surprise me... My association has been for over 30 years with him, out of which 25 years we have toured extensively."

He also credited Hussain for encouraging musicians like him, Niladri Kumar, Selvaganes, U Srinivas, and Ranjit Barot when they were just starting out.

"You learn so much from just being with people like Zakir bhai. These people, they don't die. They are beyond regular ways of living. You learn from people like him how to remain humble.

"You learn how to encourage other artists and put them forward while you remain in the backdrop, because you are not insecure about what kind of artist you are. There are innumerable artists whom he gave wings to fly," the 57-year-old Grammy winner said. (PTI)

Being a father to a daughter a unique experience: Varun Dhawan



NEW DELHI, Dec 16: Bollywood star Varun Dhawan, who welcomed daughter Lara with wife Natasha Dalal earlier this year, says embracing fatherhood has been a part crazy, part wonderful experience for him.

The actor said he is a changed man after Natasha gave birth to their first children on June 3.

"Being a father to a daughter is a unique experience. It shakes you completely, making you realise how much your thinking changes. All the things your mother used to teach you during childhood start coming back to your mind. When Natasha gave birth to the baby, the first thought that I had was how could I ever be mean to my mother.

"How can anyone be rude to their mother, especially after they nurture their child for nine months, after seeing what Natasha has done for the baby. It's a crazy, wonderful experience. Having a daughter teaches you a lot about life and what actually being a man is," Varun told reporters here.

The actor was in the national capital to promote his upcoming film "Baby John".

The action drama is directed by Kalees and marks the Hindi production debut of director Atlee of "Jawan" fame. It also stars Wamiqa Gabbi, Keerthy Suresh and Jackie Shroff in key roles with a cameo by Bollywood superstar Salman Khan. Working with Salman in "Baby John" was a "wonderful" experience, said Varun. "Whenever we get a chance to work with such a superstar, it's amazing. It's a completely original character crafted for him. We have never seen any character like this before. I don't want to divulge much about the role but no matter the amount of time he is on the screen for, the impact of his role will be longer," he added.

During his Delhi visit, the actor also met Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

"Inke Saamne Toh Hum Sab 'Baby' Hai :) It was an absolute pleasure to meet the Honourable Home Minister amitshah ji in Delhi " Varun captioned a picture with Shah on Instagram.

"Baby John" is produced by Atlee and his wife Priya Mohan's banner A For Apple Studios, Jio Studios and Murad Khetani's Cine1 Studios. It is slated to hit the big screens on December 25. (PTI)

Jayanta Madhab Dutta's 'Yakasik Omede' selected for 21st Third Eye Asian Film Festival

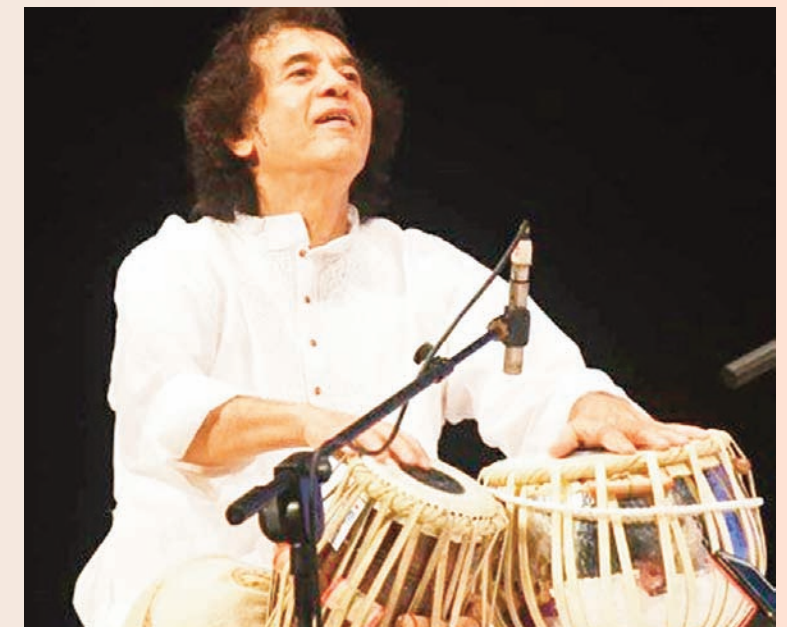
HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 16: 'Yakasik Omede' (Yakasik Daughter), a film directed by Dr. Jayanta Madhab Dutta, has been selected for the 21st Third Eye Film Festival (Asian Spectrum), scheduled to take place from January 10 to 14 in Mumbai.

The film tells a story based on the Missing community, highlighting the degeneration and degradation faced by the tribe. It is presented in the Missing dialect and produced by Rajeswar Saikia under the banner of Kaziranga Pictures.

Renowned sound designers Amrit Pritam, Debajit Changmai, and Bhagwat Pritam also contributed to the film.

Notably, director Dr. Dutta, the founder and general secretary of the Assam Film Society, has been serving in this role since its inception. Previously, he directed 'Gana Silpi Moghai Ojha,' a documentary on the life and works of the legendary folk artist Moghai Ojha.



INDIA LOOK TO IRON OUT FLAWS IN FIELDING AGAINST WEST INDIES IN 2ND WT20I

NAVI MUMBAI, Dec 16: A comprehensive 49-run win in the series opener in the bag, India will look to iron out their perpetual flaws in fielding when they take on the West Indies in the second women's T20I here on Tuesday.

Give a short turnaround time between their final ODI in Australia and the opening T20I here on Sunday, India produced a near-perfect performance to extend their winning streak to nine wins against the Caribbean side in T20Is.

But the persistent issue of being ordinary in the field came forth once again when each of Jemimah Rodrigues (73), Smriti Mandhana (54) and Saima Thakor spilled a regulation catch

each.

Thakor dropped Qiana Joseph (49) when she was on 34 and the dangerous Deandra Dottin, who smacked a 28-ball 52 (4x4s, 3x6s), was dropped once each by Rodrigues and Mandhana when she was on a flourish.

The dropped catches somewhat marred excellent efforts in the field by Minnu Manu, who had substituted Harmanpreet Kaur as the Indian captain missed most of India's fielding innings due to an unspecified issue.

While the team did not specify what kept Kaur out of the field, the Indian captain did not look troubled in any manner during her 14-ball 13 not out.

Shortly after India's win, the

coaching staff got working with youngsters Priya Mishra, Raghvi Bisht and Nandini Kashyap for a session of catching practice even though the nip in the air made their task difficult. But as the team keeps putting their efforts to improve fielding, regular mistakes drag them down.

Nevertheless, India's batters gave a fine example of themselves by producing a unified effort. At the top, Uma Chetry (24) played some spectacular drives through cover region in her first game as opener and Mandhana followed up her 105 in third ODI at Perth with her sixth fifty of the year.

But it was Rodrigues who showed her skills beyond leg-



side region stroke-play in making a 35-ball 73 with nine fours and two sixes, producing a terrific knock which was indeed one of her best in the formats.

The West Indies were disappointed having not done justice to the preparations made for this tour, but the likes of Joseph, Dottin and Karishma Ramharack (2/18) showed the promise of this side which has won most of their games in this format this year.

Both Joseph and Dottin used the long handle to an excellent effect but wickets fell at the wrong time for West Indies' liking, who will certainly have to do better with the ball, having bowled 10 wides in the first game.

Squads:

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana, Nandini Kashyap, Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh (wk), Uma Chetry (wk), Deepti Sharma, Sajeevan Sajana, Raghvi Bist, Renuka Thakur, Priya Mishra, Titus Sadhu, Saima Thakor, Minnu Mani, Radha Yadav.

West Indies: Hayley Matthews (c), Shemaine Campbell (vc), Aaliyah Alleyne, Shamilia Connell, Nerissa Crafton, Deandra Dottin, Afy Fletcher, Shabika Gajani, Chinelle Henry, Zaida James, Qiana Joseph, Mandy Mangru, Ashmini Munisar, Karishma Ramharack, Rashada Williams. Match starts at: 7:00pm IST. (PTI)

3rd Test: Williamson makes 156 as NZ set Eng 658 to win

HAMILTON (NEW ZEALAND), Dec 16: Kane Williamson made 156 as New Zealand amassed a lead of 657 runs before both England openers were dismissed to leave the hosts in a commanding position at the end of the third day of the third cricket test on Monday.

To compound an already dismal day for the tourists, England captain Ben Stokes limped from the field with a recurrence of a hamstring injury.

Williamson's 33rd test century was his seventh at Seddon Park and his fifth in consecutive tests on a home ground on which he averages more than 100. New Zealand finally was dismissed for 453 after leading by 204 on the first innings and in five overs before stumps England slumped to 18-2.

Tim Southee bowled Ben Duckett (4) off an inside edge in the second over of the England innings as the opener charged the veteran seamer who is playing his final test.

Zac Crawley (5) was dismissed by Matt Henry for the sixth time in the series, trapped lbw one over before stumps. Jacob Bethell 9 not out and Joe Root had yet to score were at the crease at the close.

"Whenever you take a wicket for New Zealand it's special,"



said Southee who now has 390 test wickets. "Playing for New Zealand has been such a big part of my life and it's been such an honor to do what I've been able to do. "Hopefully the next couple of days will be a good couple of days but an emotional couple of

days too." Stokes was bowling the second ball of his 13th over when, on his follow-through, he clutched at the hamstring of his left leg. He immediately walked from the field with his hand covering the lower half of his face on which

was etched both pain and distress. Stokes suffered a serious injury to his left hamstring while playing in The Hundred in August for the Northern Superchargers against the Manchester Originals. He was on crutches for some time and forced to miss

England's test series against Sri Lanka and the first test of the subsequent series against Pakistan. Ollie Pope took over the captaincy in Stokes' absence.

During his six-hour innings, Williamson overtook South Africa's Graeme Smith to move up to 17th place on the list of leading test run-scorers six behind another South African, Hashim Amla.

He shared partnerships on Monday of 107 with Rachin Ravindra (44) and 92 with Daryl Mitchell (60). His century came from 137 balls and his 150 from 196 balls, the third 50 from 59 runs as New Zealand stepped up its scoring towards an expected declaration.

The entire first session on the third day was lost to rain and a damp outfield. Play resumed at 1.30 with New Zealand 136-3, Williamson 50 not out and Ravindra 2.

Williamson scored fluently throughout the day, hitting 14 fours and a six in his century. He was typically powerful square of the wicket, particularly in his use of the cut shot.

Ravindra was sometimes bogged down, at the start of the day when he added only a handful of runs in the first hour and later when he found his scoring options limited. (AP)

MANCHESTER, Dec 16: Amad Diallo struck a 90th-minute winner as Manchester United staged a stunning late comeback to beat Manchester City 2-1 in the Premier League.

Four-time defending champion City led the Manchester derby 1-0 going into the 88th minute at the Etihad Stadium. But the game was turned round in dramatic fashion as Bruno Fernandes leveled from the penalty spot and Diallo sealed victory for United — prompting head coach Ruben Amorim to declare "something magic happened."

"It was a very tough match but we believe until the end. We managed to score. We needed that win. It was important for us and for our fans," Amorim said. City fans jeered at the final whistle as their once dominant team's woeful run of form extended to one win and eight losses in 11 games.

"I'm the boss, I'm the manager and I'm not good enough. It's as simple as that," Guardiola said.

It was a first derby victory for new United head coach Ruben Amorim, who led Sporting Lisbon to a 4-1 win against City in one of his last games in charge of the Portuguese club in November. But for a long time it looked like being a third-straight league loss for United after Josko Gvardiol's headed goal in the 36th.

Fernandes was guilty of missing the target when through on goal in the second half and United struggled to create chances against a City team that rarely looked like adding to its lead.

But in a dramatic end to the match, Diallo raced after an underhit backpass from Matheus Nunes. Nunes then brought down the United forward in the box and referee Anthony Taylor pointed to the penalty spot.

Fernandes made no mistake this time — sending Ederson the wrong way. Moments later, Diallo ran onto a long pass from Lisandro Martinez, flicked the ball high

and past Ederson before rolling it into the net from a tight angle.

"We have a lot to do but it was massive for our fans," Amorim said. United is 13th and five points behind fifth-place City, which has seen its title defense unravel during its losing run.

"This is a big club and in a big club when you lose eight in 10 (11) something wrong is happening," Guardiola said.

Chelsea, in second, closed the gap on Liverpool to two points after a 2-1 win against Brentford. It's now seven straight wins in all competitions for Enzo Maresca's team, which is unbeaten in 10. It's last league defeat was in October — a 2-1 loss to Liverpool.

Marc Cucurella scored in the 43rd and Nicolas Jackson made it 2-0 in the 80th for his ninth goal of the season.

Bryan Mbeumo scored for Brentford in the 90th and Cucurella was sent off for a second yellow card in added time.

Chelsea is four points ahead of third-place Arsenal.

Southampton fired manager Russell Martin after being routed 5-0 by Tottenham.

Last-place Southampton is nine points from safety and appears to be heading straight back to the second tier after earning promotion to the top flight last season. The decision came on the same day as another relegation-threatened team, Wolverhampton, fired head coach Gary O'Neil. Wolverhampton is second to last in 19th.

Spurs scored all five goals against Southampton before half-time at St Mary's Stadium, with James Maddison getting two. Son Heung-min, Dejan Kulusevski and Pape Sarr also scored.

Tottenham moved up to 10th and is five points off the Champions League places. Ismaila Sarr scored twice as Crystal Palace beat Brighton 3-1 in the Premier League on Sunday. (AP)

Top goal-scorer Deepika attributes success to teammates

BENGALURU, Dec 16: The architect of India's Women's Junior Asia Cup triumph, Deepika has attributed the success to the collective effort of the side, saying it would not have been possible without the support of her teammates.

Deepika ended the tournament as the top-scorer with 12 goals to her name, five of which came from penalty corners.

"Really happy that I managed to score as many goals but it wouldn't have been possible without the help of my teammates," Deepika, who recorded 11 goals in the opening four matches, said in a Hockey India release.

"Every player in the camp has worked extremely hard and without everyone's effort we wouldn't have been able to win the title. Thanks to the other forwards, we won a lot of penalty corners and I was able to convert them into goals."

Reflecting on the potential of the younger players in the squad, Deepika, who opened the tournament with back-to-back hat-tricks, said, "Some of the young players have incredible potential and I am sure they will build on the team's

success." India overcame three-time champions China 3-2 (1-1) in the penalty shoot-out to clinch their second consecutive Women's Junior Asia Cup hockey title in Muscat.

Elated with her team's performance, captain Jyoti Singh said: "I am happy that the team's hard work in training has finally paid off. We hardly put a foot wrong throughout the tournament and I am proud of my teammates for performing at such a high level."

India had finished second in Pool A, also consisting of China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Bangladesh.

Their only loss in the tournament came in a 1-2 defeat against China, in which Deepika was the lone goal-scorer for India.

In the final, China drew first blood courtesy of an unfortunate penalty stroke in the second quarter.

India, however, bounced back with Kanika Siwach scoring the crucial equaliser in the third quarter.

The game went into a penalty shootout, which India won 3-2 to be crowned champions. (PTI)

'Completely and utterly blindsided': Gillespie slams PCB for lack of communication

SYDNEY, Dec 16: Former Australia pacer Jason Gillespie on Monday slammed the PCB, revealing that he stepped down as Pakistan's Test head coach after being "completely and utterly blindsided" by the country's cricket board.

Gillespie, whose contract was set to expire in 2026, resigned last week and he expressed his frustration over the lack of communication, which led him to feel that the Pakistan Cricket Board no longer wanted him in the role.

"There were certainly challenges. I went into the job eyes wide open. I want to make that really clear. I knew that, you know, Pakistan had cycled through a number of coaches in a pretty short space of time."

"The straw that broke the camel's back, I suppose, was, as a head coach, you like to have clear communication with your employer," Gillespie told ABC Sport.

"I was completely and utterly blindsided by a decision to not have a high-performance coach," he added.

The PCB didn't review the contract of Tim Nielsen, who was brought in on the recommendation of the former Aussie coach, as the high performance coach of the team.

"Tim Nielsen was told that his services were no longer required and I had absolutely zero communication from anyone about that."

"And I just thought after a number of other things that had gone on in the previous few months, that was probably the moment where I thought, Well, I'm not really sure if they actu-

ally want me to do this job or not."

Adding to Gillespie's frustration was the fact that the feedback given to him regarding Nielsen and the team's performance was positive.

"I developed a really close relationship with the Test captain, Shan Masood, and felt we were certainly going in the right direction and things were going really well," he said.

"All the feedback that I'd got or the feedback the PCB got was just how effective, you know, Tim had been in his role as well and the players were getting a lot out of him."

Gillespie guided Pakistan to a 2-1 win against England in October, after losing the first match by an innings and 47 runs.

However after the loss in the first Test, he was informed that a new selection panel would be introduced, and he would not be a part of it.

He felt his role as head coach was diminished and even suggested that he often didn't know the team lineup until the day before a match.

This lack of clarity and communication only deepened his frustration with the PCB's handling of his position.

"I felt I was basically hitting catches and that was about it on the morning of a game," he said.

"You want to be able to have clear communication with all stakeholders, with selectors, for instance, knowing what the team is as head coach well before the game, or before at least the day before the game," he said. (PTI)

It's not just about chess, there's lot of emotional pressure too: Gukesh

CHENNAI, Dec 16: His history-scripting world title was not just a result of good strategy on the chess board, said Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh on Monday, crediting mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton for helping him tame the "emotional pressure" of competing at the biggest stage.

The 18-year-old Gukesh, who defeated China's Ding Liren to become the youngest ever owner of the world title, arrived here on Monday to a rousing welcome from enthusiastic fans and officials.

"In a world championship, it's not only about chess. There is a lot of mental and emotional pressure to deal with. Paddy's teachings helped me in that regard," Gukesh said in a press meet organised by Velammal Vidyalaya, his childhood school.

Upton, a renowned mental conditioning coach, worked with Gukesh in the run-up to and during the 14-game marathon event in Singapore.

"The suggestions and the conversations I have had with him, have been very important for me and my development as a player," he said.

Gukesh also detailed how his association started with the South African, who has the experience of working with the 2011 cricket World Cup-winning Indian cricket team and the national men's hockey team that bagged a bronze at the Paris Olympics.

"Paddy has been a very important part of my team. After I won the Candidates (April), I asked Sandeep sir (Sandeep Singhal of Westbridge Capital) for a mental trainer," Gukesh recalled.



"He immediately put me in touch with Paddy Upton, who has a lot of experience working with high-performance athletes," said the youngster.

In an interview to PTI a day after Gukesh's win, Upton had lauded the teenager's 'self-awareness'.

"I think that's the thing that's really stood out, his ability to recognise his thoughts and manage his mind and his understanding of how to do so," Upton said. "...he is a world champion because he was able to manage himself and remain focused and stay in the game even though he's 0-1 down right from the beginning. So that really is a mark of a champion," he had stated.

Gukesh also thanked Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin for supporting him in his chess journey.

"Definitely, there was a lot of support from the Tamil Nadu government. Honorable Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister invite me home and encour-

age me whenever I achieve something."

"The Tamil Nadu government sponsored me during the Chennai Grandmasters last year. They made all the arrangements. That's how I won the tournament and qualified for the Candidates."

"If we get more support like this, I believe more chess players will come. I am very thankful to the Tamil Nadu government," he said.

Gukesh is only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to claim the world title. Anand played a pivotal role in shaping the teenager at his academy here.

Gukesh's father Dr Rajnikanth, who is an ENT surgeon by profession, said he encouraged his son to join chess sessions in the school as a hobby.

"You have to have interest and hard work, otherwise nothing will happen. We did not plan to make him a chess player, but enrolled him in Velammal school chess class as part of the extracurricular activity. (PTI)

Batters botch up again; India in trouble at 51/4 on rain-marred day

BRISBANE, Dec 16: The Indian batters' inability to grind it out against a relentless Australian pace attack in testing conditions left the team precariously placed at 51 for four at the end of a rain-marred day three of the third Test here on Monday.

On a stop-start day, India bowled out Australia for 445 in their first innings, the hosts adding 40 runs to their overnight total, as the peerless Jasprit Bumrah continued to do the heavy lifting to finish with excellent figures of 6/76.

Alex Carey chipped in with an entertaining 70 off 88 balls after contrasting hundreds by Steve Smith and Travis Head on the second day laid the foundation for a total which looked more than enough just 14 overs into the Indian first innings.

With the exception of the gutsy KL Rahul (33 batting), who was willing to hang in there, none of the Indian top-order batters showed the stomach to fight.

Playing the red Kookaburra has become tougher since they changed their ball in 2020 by adding extra lacquer on a reinforced seam, making it firmer

and ensuring more movement off the pitch.

Under the circumstances, the Indians needed to be patient and play out the first 25-30 overs when bowlers of the calibre of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood were in operation.

But the visiting top-order batters did not do what was required of them. The likes of Virat Kohli once again fell to deliveries in the channel just outside the off-stump.

There is no doubt that the conditions were challenging but the Indian batters could have taken a leaf out of Smith's book as he initially negotiated testing spells of fast bowling from Akash Deep and Bumrah on way to a drought-breaking hundred.

After Australia racked in nearly 450 runs, left-arm pacer Starc struck twice and Josh Hazlewood once as the two teams took an early lunch with the visitors reeling at 22 for three.

Pat Cummins got the big wicket of Rishabh Pant in the second session to make matters worse for the Indians.

Returning to the middle after the lunch break, Rahul and Pant faced some hostile fast bowling from the duo



of Starc and Hazlewood before heavy showers interrupted the proceedings, one of the many on the day.

Cummins kept three slips and a gully for Pant, as opposed to the four men in the slip cordon, and a gully for Rahul, when Hazlewood was operating.

Starc had three slips, and two gullies when he had the red cherry in his hand.

The only fielder in front of the wicket during that phase of play in the second session was the man stationed at mid-off, reflecting the Australian bowlers' dominance.

Starc removed Yashasvi Jaiswal in the second ball of the India innings and then dismissed Shubman Gill before Hazlewood accounted for Kohli as the visitors once again stared down the barrel after their failures in Adelaide.

Jaiswal was out caught by Mitchell Marsh at short mid-wicket while he tried to clip a Starc half-volley off his pads.

Gill was sent back when Marsh pulled off a brilliant catch in the slip cordon off the bowling of Starc after the India number three played away from the body.

Kohli was dismissed in what has now become a familiar scene as he once again chased a length delivery outside off before nicking it to Alex Carey.

Starc too had a hand in the wicket of Kohli. After KL Rahul pulled a short ball from Hazlewood to long leg, Starc dived to save what seemed like a certain boundary, bringing the former Indian captain back on strike. Kohli was dismissed off the very next delivery.

This was after Hazlewood delivered a full-length ball outside off-stump to Kohli, who, instead of leaving the ball,

attempted a drive, resulting in an out-side edge.

This is the fourth time Kohli has been dismissed in such a fashion. Former India player Sanjay Manjrekar has already advised him to explore an alternate route to tackle his weaknesses against deliveries on the fourth and fifth stump.

Earlier, with two slips and a gully, Bumrah started the proceedings with a 21-over old ball.

Batting on 45 overnight, Carey swept Ravindra Jadeja for a boundary towards fine-leg to reach his half-century off just 53 balls.

Bumrah came back to bowl another maiden over before Mitchell Starc decided to get down on one knee to slog sweep Jadeja for a six over square leg.

For someone who is known for keeping one end tight with his accurate bowling, Jadeja was going at five runs an over, and the seasoned left-arm spinner's profligacy put additional burden on a strained pace attack.

The surface at Gabba offered a bit of turn and bounce but Jadeja was guilty of bowling too straight to the left-handers. (PTI)

World champion returns: Gukesh lands in Chennai to rapturous welcome



CHENNAI, Dec 16: Newly-crowned world chess champion D Gukesh returned home to an enthusiastic reception as hundreds of eager fans, and officials from the Tamil Nadu government and the national federation lined up to receive him at the airport here on Monday.

The 18-year-old defeated China's Ding Liren 7.5-6.5 in Singapore last week to become the youngest ever world champion, overhauling the long-standing mark set by Russian icon Garry Kasparov as a 22-year-old back in 1985.

Upon his arrival, Gukesh thanked everyone for supporting him and was

"It's amazing. Your support gave me a lot of energy. It's a great feeling to win the world championship," said Gukesh as media and fans jostled to get a closer view of the youngster.

"It means a lot to bring back trophy to India. Thank you for this reception. I hope we will have a great time in the next few days celebrating together," he added.

Once he touched base at the Kamaraj airport, the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu and his school Velammal Vidyalaya staff greeted him with a bouquet before draping a shawl around him at the airport lounge. Gukesh started his chess journey at the Ve-

lammal school.

After greeting the waiting fans, Gukesh left for his home in a car decorated with flowers, and his photo.

He is scheduled to speak to the media later in the day at the Velammal School in Mogappair, before settling at home to celebrate with his parents, relatives and friends. His father -- ENT surgeon Dr Rajinikanth -- was with him during the entire competition, while his mother -- microbiologist Padmavathi -- joined him in Singapore after the final round.

On Tuesday, he will be given a grand reception at the Kalaiavanar Arangam at Wallahjah Road and he will be taken to the iconic auditorium in a specially-arranged parade.

Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin is expected to be present during the function to present Gukesh with a cheque of ₹ five crore.

"To honour the monumental achievement of Gukesh, the youngest-ever World Chess Champion, I am delighted to announce a cash prize of 5 crore!"

"His historic victory has brought immense pride and joy to the nation. May he continue to shine and achieve greater heights in the future," Stalin had written on X soon after Gukesh's historic triumph.

Gukesh is only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to claim the world title. Anand played a pivotal role in shaping the teenager at his academy here.

Gukesh has enjoyed a stellar year, starting with his win in the Candidates Tournament in Toronto that made him the youngest challenger to the world crown.

He later spearheaded India's first-ever gold-winning campaign in the Chess Olympiad in Budapest. The world champions win also fetched Gukesh a whopping cash prize of USD 1.3 million (approx ₹ 11.03 crore). (PTI)

Kohli needs to look at his hero Tendulkar's 241 in Sydney to end batting woes, says Gavaskar

BRISBANE, Dec 16: The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Monday urged India superstar Virat Kohli to draw inspiration from Sachin Tendulkar's monumental 241 against Australia in Sydney in 2004 and refrain from playing cover drive in order to end his persistent struggle against deliveries outside off-stump.

On a rain-marred third day of the ongoing Brisbane Test, Kohli copped yet another failure when Josh Hazlewood had him caught behind for 3 as a struggling India ended at 51 for 4 when the stumps were drawn.

Gavaskar said Kohli, who has scores of 5, 100 not out, 7, 11 and 3 so far on this tour, need not look beyond "his hero" Tendulkar, who responded with an exceptional 436-ball 241 including 33 fours at the SCG when he too was going through a similar phase of getting caught behind during the Australia tour of 2003-04.

Tendulkar's knock, for which he batted more than 10 hours, is widely considered as one of his best-ever as the legendary batter curbed his instinct to drive and scored the majority of his runs on the on-side.

"He (Kohli) only needs to look at his hero, Sachin Tendulkar. The way in which he (Tendulkar) had kept his patience and control on his off-side game, scoring those 241 runs at Sydney,"



Gavaskar told Star Sports.

"He did not play any shot on the off-side, or at least in the cover (region) because before that he was getting dismissed while attempting to play in covers."

"The shots that he played were pretty much straight or on the on-side," he added.

Gavaskar said Kohli, who has been caught behind the wickets thrice on this tour, must look to defend every single delivery in the channel of the off-stump and find other scoring areas like Tendulkar did.

"Similarly, he (Kohli) should keep a control on his mind and on his game. If the ball is on the off-stump, (he should think that) 'I would defend it. I would not try to score of it'," Gavaskar said.

The legendary batter said Kohli should trust his bottom-hand play more than going in his drives in order to banish his troubles.

"He has such a wonderful bottom hand play, with that he can play in that area, straight or towards midwicket," Gavaskar said. (PTI)

Sky's limit for Prithvi Shaw if he gets his work ethics right: Shreyas Iyer



BENGALURU, Dec 16: Prithvi Shaw's fall from prodigy to prodigal has been swift and seemingly irreversible, but Shreyas Iyer feels the Mumbai batter can touch the deserved heights if he "gets his work ethics right."

Shaw gave glimpses of his immense talent in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, which Mumbai bagged under Shreyas, while making 197 runs over nine matches but he could not even make a fifty.

"I think personally he is a God gifted player. The amount of talent he possesses as an individual, no one has it. It's just that he needs to improve his work ethics," said Iyer after Mumbai's 5-wicket win over Madhya Pradesh here in the SMAT final.

"He needs to get his work ethics right. And if he does that, sky's the limit for him," he said.

However, Iyer said the desire to embrace redemption should stem within Shaw himself.

"We can't babysit anyone, right? He has played so much of cricket. Everyone has given him inputs. At the end of the day, it's his job to figure out things for himself. And he has also done it in the past. It's not that he hasn't," he said.

Detailing his point, Iyer said: "He has to focus. He has to sit back, put a thinking cap on. He will get the answer by himself. No one can force him to do anything."

Iyer's appreciation of Ajinkya Rahane's contribution to Mumbai's SMAT victory should work as a guide for Shaw.

"He is that sort of a character who will give 110% for the team. He started at number 4, where he knew that there were two openers. So, he sacrificed his position and then after that when Surya came in, he became an opener. So he is a fantastic team-man

"But irrespective, salute to him, the way he approached each and every game, match by match. I am a firm believer of someone who has a certain type of routine and he is one of them," he said.

It came as a little surprise then that Rahane emerged as the top run-getter in this edition of SMAT with 469 runs at an average of 58.62, and at a strike-rate of 165.

Mumbai's cupboard is brimming with young talent, and Iyer underlining that fact might just also have been a mild warning to Shaw to buckle down.

"All the youngsters who have come up and the way they showcase their talent is simply phenomenal. You should see their character and their approach outside the dressing room and also on the field.

"They're fearless in their approach and this is the kind of players we need to back. And for me personally, whenever I go out there I want to win. It doesn't matter who we play, winning is something that makes me feel happy and it is everything for me," he explained. (PTI)

It's a team in transition, won't point fingers at each other: Bumrah explains India's Oz struggles

BRISBANE, Dec 16: Jasprit Bumrah on Monday defended the struggling Indian team in Australia and played down talk of additional pressure on him, saying it's a side in transition and given his experience, it's his "job" to shoulder extra responsibility.

Having taken a seemingly erroneous call of bowling first in the third Test at the Gabba here, India conceded a huge first-innings total of 445 despite Bumrah returning 6/76.

In response, the visitors were 51/4 on a rain-hit third day with questions being raised about batters' technique and the quality of bowling, save for Bumrah.

"We don't, as a team, point fingers at each other and we don't want to get into that mindset where we are pointing fingers at each other that 'you should do this, you should do that,'" Bumrah told media after stumps when asked for his assessment of India's batting.

"We, as a team, are going through a transition, new players are coming here and it's not the easiest place to play cricket. Over here, it's a different atmosphere with this wicket being a different challenge so yeah, we are not looking at that."

Bumrah, who leads the bowling chart in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with 18 wickets so far, defended the Indian attack amid chatter that he is not getting adequate support from fellow bowlers.

"As a bowling unit, as I said, we are in transition so it's my job to help the others. I have played a little more than them so I am trying to help them," said the owner of 191 Test wickets in just 43 Tests.

"Everyone will learn through it, will get better and eventually will find different ways so this is the journey that you'll have to go through," he added.

Bumrah rejected suggestions that India's poor first innings scores were putting more pressure on the bowlers and on him.

"We have 11 players, it's not like that. I don't look at it that I have to do extra (work). As I said, we are a new team, a lot of new players have come into the side. We have to be considerate and give them that cushion that they will learn from experience," he said.

"Nobody is born with all the experiences, nobody is born with all the skills. You keep



learning, you keep finding new ways (and) you keep learning about your own game," he continued.

The Indian vice-captain said he has enjoyed the challenge of bowling on different pitches in Australia.

"I always find different challenges very interesting. Because in the Test match that we played in Perth, the wicket was different. (At) Adelaide (with the pink ball) was different, the wicket behaved different, the ball behaved differently," he said.

"Here it is a little different because the wicket is at a level and the run-up is low. In India we are not used to that," he explained.

Bumrah said his primary target on encountering a challenge is to tackle it instead of looking at others to come up with the solutions.

"...I look at how do I solve it, what can I do in this scenario rather than whinging or com-

plaining or looking at someone else or pointing fingers that I need this from this person," he said.

Bumrah reiterated he wants to remain level-headed in dealing with success and failures and that he cannot carry the "baggage of expectations."

"When I was a youngster, yes, maybe I used to take extra baggage of fans and opinions. But I don't take any opinions seriously," he said.

"I look at myself. I look at answers what I have to do. I give it my absolute best. If I have given it my absolute best, I will accept the results. (But) I cannot carry someone else's energy or baggage that people are expecting me to do the heavy-lifting," he gave a peak into his mindset.

"There will be days when I will not get wickets. Somebody else will do, so I will have to do a holding job," Bumrah added. (PTI)

Siraj bowling with a nigggle, reveals Bumrah

BRISBANE, Dec 16: India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Monday revealed that Mohammed Siraj has been bowling with a nigggle and praised him for fighting through pain during the ongoing third Test against Australia here.

Siraj claimed two wickets in his 23.2 overs in the first innings, and Bumrah, who once again emerged as the best bowler with figures of six for 76, credited his colleague for supporting the team despite the discomfort.

"We (Siraj and I) have had conversations but this was the conversation he had with me before we came here (Brisbane). When we came here in Perth, as well as the last game, he looked in very good spirits," Bumrah told reporters after day three.

"He was bowling well and he has picked up a fair few of the wickets. In this game, I will give him credit that he had a little bit of a nigggle but he still kept on bowling and still helped the team because he knew if he goes inside and he doesn't bowl, then that team will go under pressure.

"So I think he has got a great attitude and he has got a fighter spirit that the team loves," he said.

Siraj looked in discomfort when he clutched his hamstring after bowling the second ball of the 37th over of Australia's first innings. The physio was called onto the field and Siraj then left the field as Akash Deep completed the over.

The 30-year-old, however, returned to the field on Day 2 and ended up taking the wickets of Australia skipper Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon.

"I personally love that as well, that he is up for a fight and he always gives it all for the team. So I think that is the biggest positive for any cricketer going forward." (PTI)