

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- North Korea's Kim vows toughest anti-US policy before Trump takes office
- Musk vows to 'go to war' to defend H-1B visa programme; Trump sides with him
- Akhilesh pitches for ballot voting, says EVMs not trustworthy
- Cong leader's death: CPI(M) wants to invoke abetment charges against MLA

Total voters 1.8 cr, new electors to be added

Final electoral rolls for Panchayat polls published

GUWAHATI, Dec 29: Altogether 1.8 crore voters, including 89.54 lakh women, have been named in the final electoral roll of the 2025 Panchayat election in Assam, according to an official statement issued on Sunday.

The Final Electoral Rolls for the Panchayat Election 2025 have been published after taking into account the delimitation of Gaon and Anchalik panchayat and Zilla Parishad constituencies in 2024 across 27 districts, excluding areas under the Sixth Schedule and municipal bodies.

"After disposal of all claims and objections received from 27 districts, there are 1,80,14,913 electors. Among them, 90,60,640 are males, 89,53,865 are females and 408 are other gender voters," the official statement said.

These electors will vote for 397 Zilla Parishad constituencies, 181



Anchalik Panchayats, 2,192 Gaon Panchayats and 21,920 wards, it added. The final electoral rolls will be available for the public for their

information on the notice board of the offices of the Gaon Panchayat, block development, Zilla Parishad and district commissioners as well

as on the website of the district administrations and the State Election Commission.

"Further, the commission has decided to continue the process of addition of new electors with the date of eligibility of electors as on 01.01.2025 in the Panchayat electoral roll as per rules," the statement said. The Assam government had earlier announced the panchayat elections with newly delimited constituencies would be completed by February 10 next year.

However, the Gauhati High Court on December 18 directed the Assam State Election Commission not to issue any notification regarding holding of panchayat polls without its permission.

The Court was hearing a bunch of writ petitions, mainly challenging the delimitation of panchayats across the state. The next hearing has been fixed on January 9, 2025. (PTI)

'DJ Lockup' drive against drunk driving back in Assam

'Drink responsibly and avoid ending up in jail'

GUWAHATI, Dec 29: The 'DJ Lockup' campaign against drunk driving is back in Assam, supporting the state police in the 'No Regret New Year' drive focusing on road safety during the festive season.

After debuting in Assam Police's social media campaign in 2022, 'DJ Lockup' is again urging partygoers to drink responsibly and avoid ending up in jail.

"Party responsibly or meet the ultimate party crasher: #DJLockup. He's spinning behind the bars, and trust us, it's not the vibe you want. Don't drink and drive," goes a social media post by Assam Police.

In another post, it says, "Join us for the #DJLockup Night! Where the beats are hot, but the bars are cold. Stag entry allowed."

It includes a 'line-up' of 'DJ Lockup, DJ Breathalyzer, MC Seatbelt & DJ No-Drunk-Driving, DJ Sober Rider feat. The Safe Squad'.

It specifies a 'dress code' of 'helmets, seatbelts & good decisions', appealing the public to 'party smart, stay safe'.

"Hottest New Year Deal! Drive sober, regret nothing, and wake up without handcuffs or a hangover," goes another post by the state police.



"The whole idea behind this campaign is to reach out to the young in their own language, so that the message of following road safety measures and avoiding drunken driving goes out to them," special director general of police (SDGP) Harmet Singh told PTI. "An entire campaign to ensure that roads remain safe is being run by police and transport departments as envisioned and directed by the chief minister, who is very concerned about ensuring the safety of all citizens," he added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Two held with drugs worth ₹ 15 crore in Cachar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 29: Assam Police has seized 50,000 Yaba tablets worth ₹ 15 crore and apprehended two persons at Ghoongur Bypass in Cachar district, said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday.

The tablets were seized during a special operation where the police intercepted a vehicle from a neighbouring state.

"Narcotics worth ₹15cr seized. Based on credible inputs, @cacharpolice conducted a special operation at Ghoongur Bypass and intercepted a vehicle coming from a neighbouring state," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X. Upon searching the vehicle, 50,000 Yaba tablets which were kept in five pockets were recovered.

"Upon search, 50,000 YABA tablets concealed in 5 packets were recovered. Two have been apprehended and the vehicle has been seized," the Sarma added. Over this achievement, the chief minister also appreciated Assam Police.

Seven illegal immigrants deported from South Delhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: At least seven illegal immigrants were deported from south Delhi, police said on Sunday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Ankit Chauhan said on Saturday a team apprehended seven nationals of Bangladesh, including five women, near the Arjanagarh Metro Station in Fatehpur Beri area. He said raids were conducted in slums, labour camps, and unauthorised colonies, leading to the capture of the illegal immigrants.

The detained individuals were identified as Mohammad Umor Faruk (33), Riyaj Miyam (20) and five women, all hailing from Bangladesh, he added. During interrogation they revealed that they had illegally crossed the border and were residing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jeju Air plane crashes due to landing gear failure ● Close shave for 2

Plane tragedy in South Korea kills 179 passengers

SEOUL, Dec 29: A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in one of the country's worst aviation disasters.

The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 kilometres south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 am.

A total of 179 people — 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immedi-

ately identifiable — died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.

Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals. Thailand's Foreign Ministry said its embassy in Seoul received confirmation from South Korean authorities that the two Thai passengers were among the fatalities.

The fire agency deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to



contain the blaze. About 1,570 firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other officials were also sent to the site, according to the fire agency and transport ministry.

Footage of the crash aired by

South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility, triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames.

Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognisable among the wreckage. Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM highlights ayurveda's growing global resonance

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: In the 117th episode of his monthly radio broadcast "Mann ki Baat", Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the growing global resonance of ayurveda, citing the inspiring work being done in Paraguay.

"There is a country in South America called Paraguay. The number of Indians living there would not be more than 1,000. A wonderful effort is being made in Paraguay. At the Indian embassy in Paraguay, Erica Huber offers ayurveda consultation. A large number of local people are reaching out to her to get ayurveda-based advice," the prime minister said. This recognition underscores the unwavering commitment of the Ministry of Ayush to promoting ayurveda as a global system of health and wellness.

Union Minister of State (independent charge) for Ayush Prataprao Jadhav said, "We express our heartfelt gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his visionary leadership in promoting ayurveda globally. The Ministry of Ayush remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing

ayurveda as a universal health solution and strengthening its global presence."

The ministry has been spearheading initiatives that have significantly expanded ayurveda's footprint worldwide. In a statement, the ministry said it has signed 24 country-level and 48 institute-level memoranda of understanding (MoUs), fostering collaborative research and education.

Additionally, 15 academic chairs have been established globally to promote ayurveda education and research. Ayush information cells operate in 39 locations across 35 countries, serving as knowledge hubs. As far as strategic agreements are concerned, the milestones include the Donor Agreement with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the MoU in Medicinal Plants Cooperation with Vietnam and the landmark Agreement on Ayurveda with Malaysia and Mauritius. These partnerships advance India's vision of holistic health for all, the statement said.

The establishment of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre in Gujarat's Jamnagar and the inclusion (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tripura sees tenfold growth in solar energy generation: Union Minister

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 29: Appreciating Tripura's remarkable progress in the renewable energy sector, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi informed that state has achieved a tenfold increase in solar energy generation.

Joshi, who is the minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, and New & Renewable Energy, is on a two-day visit to the state.

"Tripura has achieved a tenfold increase in solar energy generation, growing from 2.5 MW to over 20.5 MW within the last six and a half years," he said on Sunday.

During his visit from December 28 to 29, Joshi participated in several programs and reviewed the implementation of central schemes. On the morning of December 29, he visited the Maa Tripura Sundari temple for a divine darshan, followed by attending Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mann Ki Baat broadcast at Chandrapur Colony Higher Secondary School in Matabari, Gomati district.

Later, the minister toured Charilam village in Sepahijala district to inspect a centrally sponsored renewable energy project implemented by the Tripura Renewable Energy De-



velopment Agency (TREDA). He also reviewed various schemes under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).

The minister noted that under the PM-KUSUM Scheme (Component B), 27 SPV pumps covering 54 acres of agricultural land have been installed, along with 35 LED-based SPV street lighting systems under MNRE initiatives.

Highlighting the broader achievements of the Modi government, the minister said India has made significant progress in ensuring food security. Under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, free

food grains are being provided to 81 crore beneficiaries, equivalent to twice the population of the European Union. In Tripura, over the last five years, 1.2 lakh metric tons of rice worth ₹360 crore have been procured under the Decentralised Procurement mode, directly benefiting 94,000 farmers.

Commenting on the renewable energy, Joshi emphasised India's ambitious goal of achieving 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030. With the current installed capacity at 214 GW, initiatives such as the National Green Hydrogen Mission, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP accuses AAP of trying to register 'illegal voters' in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: The BJP on Sunday accused the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP of trying to register "illegal voters", fearing defeat in the Delhi Assembly polls.

The BJP's city unit chief Virendra Sachdeva said in a press conference that his party would not allow "fake votes" to be cast in Delhi.

"We have provided multiple pieces of evidence but Kejriwal is merely attempting to cover up his 'wrongdoings' by creating confusion among the people," he charged.

Electors to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due in February.

Earlier in the day, Kejriwal had claimed that the BJP was manipulating changes in electoral rolls of his New Delhi constituency by filing applications to delete more than 5,000 votes since mid-December.

Sachdeva charged that applications submitted after December 23, when updating electoral rolls was frozen, reflected Kejriwal's ongoing



"manipulation plan" in the 70 constituencies.

He also responded to AAP leader Sanjay Singh on his allegation that the BJP was trying to delete his wife's name from the electoral roll.

Sachdeva claimed that the two women who applied to cancel Singh's wife's vote had family ties with him. He said the updation of electoral rolls was frozen on December 23, with the updated voters' list set to be released on January 6.

Despite this, applications for new voters have been submitted in every assembly constituency, he charged.

In Narela alone, more than 2,000 people applied for new voter registrations on December 24. Similar applications were observed in various constituencies on December 25, 26 and 27, he added. "What is most surprising is that none of these applications belonged to 18-20-year-olds and most of the applicants were in the 30-48 age group. Who brought them (here) and what is their background?" Sachdeva asked.

The BJP has filed complaints with the Election Commission in this regard, he said.

BJP leader Pravesh Verma, the party's probable candidate from New Delhi, accused AAP and Kejriwal of creating "drama". He said Kejriwal's "Operation Lotus" charge was a reflection of his "desperate attempt to distract people from the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'This Summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation'

India to host WAVES Summit in February: Modi

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: India will host the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) for the first time in February next year which will be a global platform for its creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke extensively about the WAVES Summit in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' Radio address on Sunday.

Comparing the WAVES to global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos, Modi said the leaders from the media and entertainment industry as well as creative minds from across the globe will gather in Delhi for the Summit being held from February 5-9.

"This Summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation," he said.

The prime minister emphasised the pivotal role of young creators in the preparations for WAVES, reflecting the dynamic spirit of India's creative community.



He expressed pride in the enthusiasm of the country's youth and their contribution to the burgeoning creator economy, a key driver of India's growth.

"Whether you are a young creator or an established artist, associated with Bollywood or regional cinema, a professional from the TV industry, an expert in animation, gaming, or an innovator in entertainment technology, I

encourage you to be a part of the WAVES Summit," Modi said. He urged all stakeholders in the entertainment and creative industries to actively participate in the WAVES.

"The WAVES Summit is poised to serve as a global platform for India's creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation," Modi said.

The Summit will also highlight India's advancements in animation, gaming, entertainment technology, and regional and mainstream cinema, he added.

Modi also paid heartfelt tributes to ace director Raj Kapoor and singer Mohammed Rafi on their 100th birth anniversaries.

Raj Kapoor's role in showcasing India's soft power through his timeless films and Mohammed Rafi's mesmerizing voice that continues to resonate with all generations, he said.

Modi also recalled Akkineni Nageswara Rao's contributions in elevating Telugu cinema while reflecting the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

High employee attrition of 25% in private banks pose operational risk: RBI

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Employee attrition in private sector banks has witnessed an increase to about 25 per cent and this high turnover rate poses significant operational risk, according to the latest Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24.

Employee attrition rates are high across select private sector banks and small finance banks (SFBs), the report, which was released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said. The total number of employees of private banks surpassed that of public sector banks (PSBs) during 2023-24, but their attrition has increased sharply over the last three years, with average attrition rate of around 25 per cent, it said.

"High attrition and employee turnover rate pose significant operational risks, including disruption in customer services, besides leading to loss of institutional knowledge and increased recruit-



ment costs. In various interactions with banks, the Reserve Bank has stressed that reducing attrition is not just a human resource function but a strategic imperative," it said.

Banks need to implement strategies like improved onboarding processes, providing extensive training and career development opportunities, mentorship pro-

grammes, competitive benefits, and a supportive workplace culture to build long-term employee engagement, it said.

Supervised entities were advised to closely monitor their gold loan portfolios and ensure adequate controls over outsourced activities and third-party service providers, it said.

The report said climate change risks are envisaged to impact profitability of financial institutions, growth prospects, and inflation dynamics and, thus, impinge upon financial stability and price stability.

To foster assessment of these concerns by regulated entities, regulatory and supervisory frameworks need to be strengthened with enhanced risk management guidelines, disclosure requirements, periodic stress testing, and stipulating reasonable verification and assurance functions, it added. (PTI)

In view of several irregularities observed in grant of loans against gold ornaments and jewellery, including top-up loans, the Reserve Bank advised supervised entities to comprehensively review their poli-

Indian economy to grow at 6.5-6.8% in FY25 on high consumption: Deloitte

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Indian economy is likely to grow at 6.5-6.8 per cent this fiscal and slightly higher between 6.7-7.3 per cent in FY2026, boosted by domestic consumption, Deloitte said on Sunday.

Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar said the growth in the first half of the fiscal year 2025 turned out to be slower than estimated as election uncertainties followed by disruptions in activity due to heavy rainfall and geopolitical events weighed on domestic demand and exports.

However, India continues to show resilience in certain pockets that are worth noting -- be it in consumption trends, services growth, the rising share of high-value manufacturing in exports, or the capital market. The government's continued focus on infrastructure development, digitisation, and attracting FDI will be the additional growth booster, enhancing overall efficiency.

"We remain cautiously optimistic and expect the growth rate to remain between 6.5 and 6.8 per cent this fiscal year and slightly higher between 6.7 and 7.3 per cent in FY2026," Majumdar told PTI.

Earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India cut its growth forecast for the current fiscal to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent projected in June.

Deloitte said manufacturing exports in high-value segments like electronics, semiconductors, and chemicals reflect India's strengthening position in global value chains.

Meanwhile, capital markets have shown stability despite significant FII outflows over the past two and a half months, thanks to rising participation from retail and domestic institutional investors.

"We anticipate several of these trends to persist through 2025. We believe domestic consumption will remain the cornerstone of India's economic growth, with both rural and urban demand playing key roles. "A myriad of factors, such as improved agricultural incomes, targeted subsidies, social welfare programmes, government employment initiatives, advancements in digitisation, and stronger services sector growth will help broad-base consumption spending," Majumdar said.

India will have to ride out the rough patch, as several global headwinds pose challenges. Geopolitical tensions, trade disputes, supply chain disruptions, and the escalating impact of climate change could weigh heavily on growth and long-term economic stability, she added.

Anticipated policy changes and trade restrictions in the US could impact export demand and capital flows into the country. Besides, central banks in the West may not go for as many rate cuts next year if inflation starts moving north. Tighter global liquidity will likely limit the RBI's ability to manoeuvre monetary policy.

Majumdar said over the next few years, India's growth will hinge on its ability to economically decouple from global uncertainties.

"The Indian economy has the opportunity to turn the lime into lemonade by focusing on three factors. The first would be to build on its own strengths. Harnessing the demographic dividend and growing middle-class wealth through investments in workforce development and employability will drive consumption, reduce skill gaps, boost the labour market, and strengthen capital markets," she said. (PTI)

Adani-backed Dharavi Redevelopment Project changes name to Navbharat Mega Developers

MUMBAI, Dec 29: Dharavi Redevelopment Project Pvt Ltd (DRPPL), the Adani-backed company undertaking the ambitious plan of revamping Dharavi slums, is rebranding itself in line with the company's "promise of building a modern, inclusive and vibrant community", the firm said.

DRPPL will now be called Navbharat Mega Developers Pvt Ltd (NMDPL) in response to the holistic value proposition and renewal of its corporate vision, it said in a statement.

"The name Navbharat Mega Developers is rooted in the company's commitment to growth, change and hope, and the rebranding exercise that has received the affirmation of its Board of Directors and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs," it said.

In Dharavi Redevelopment Project Pvt, Adani Group held an 80 per cent stake while the rest was with the state government. The shareholding in the rechristened firm will remain unchanged.

Adani plans to turn 620 acres of prime land, about three-quarters of



the size of New York's Central Park, into a glitzy urban hub. About 1 million people live in rickety shanties with open sewers and shared toilets in the densely populated slums, close to Mumbai's international airport.

Eligible residents will be given flats free of up to 350 sq ft free of cost as part of the USD 3 billion redevelopment of rubbish-strewn Mumbai slum of Dharavi into a "world-class" district.

The change, the statement said, reflects the company's fresh out-

look and obligation to create a broader and brighter future for everyone associated with or beneficiary of the gigantic and historic task of rehabilitating slums across the nation.

"The name Navbharat, which means 'New India', reflects the massive potential this project holds in shaping a better tomorrow. Mega highlights the sheer scale and impact of the work being undertaken, while Developers points to the role the company intends to play in building a thriving commu-

Foodgrain output set to scale new peak in 2025 as farm sector eyes 4 pc growth

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: India is poised to achieve new heights in foodgrain production in 2025, driven by favourable monsoon, though significant challenges persist in pulses and oilseeds production as the country's agricultural sector shows signs of robust recovery.

The Agriculture Ministry's initial projections paint an optimistic picture, with kharif (summer) foodgrain production estimated at a record 164.7 million tonnes for the 2024-25 crop year ending June 2025.

Winter crop planting has maintained steady progress, with wheat sown across 29.31 million hectares as of mid-December 2024, while total rabi (winter) crops cover 55.88 million hectares.

"We had a good kharif crop because of normal rainfall," Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi told PTI.

"Overall, the crop prospect for the whole year looks promising," he added, though cautioning against potential heat waves in February-March that could affect the winter wheat harvest.

The agricultural sector is projected to bounce back strongly, with growth projections of 3.5-4 per cent in 2024-25, up from 1.4 per cent in the previous fiscal year.

Agri-economist S Mahendra Dev attributes this improvement to "good monsoon and rise in rural demand".

This growth comes despite localised floods and droughts affecting crops in parts of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Climate change-induced weather anomalies have particularly impacted onion and tomato yields in certain regions.

However, the path ahead isn't without hurdles. To address the persistent challenge of self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, the government will roll out the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds) in 2025, backed by a substantial budget of ₹ 10,103 crore. The initiative aims to reduce

PM Internship Scheme: 6.21 lakh applications received for 1.27 lakh opportunities

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: About 6.21 lakh applications have been received for 1.27 lakh opportunities under the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme and the selection process is continuing, the government said on Sunday.

The scheme, announced in the 2024 Union Budget, aims to provide internship opportunities to 1 crore youth in top-500 companies over five years. A pilot project of the scheme, started on October 3, aims to provide 1.25 lakh internship opportunities during 2024-25.

In a release on Sunday, the corporate affairs ministry said approximately 6.21 lakh applications have been received against 1.27 lakh internship opportunities. "The selection process for internship is ongoing."

Partner companies have posted about 1.27

lakh internship opportunities on the internship scheme portal. About 4.87 lakh individuals have completed their KYC and registered themselves on the portal, the release said. Under the scheme, interns will be provided a monthly financial assistance of ₹ 5,000 for 12 months and a one-time grant of ₹ 6,000. While mentioning about various initiatives taken this year, the ministry said the framework governing cost record and audit will be amended after considering stakeholders' comments and recommendations of the ministry-appointed committee.

From financial year 2023-24, the ministry has issued regular advisories to companies on adhering to the prescribed timelines for filing cost audit reports. (PTI)

A parliamentary committee has suggested doubling the PM-KISAN support to ₹ 12,000 per beneficiary and implementing universal crop insurance for small farmers.

While farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) have expanded with 9,204 registrations, they continue to face challenges, including limited market access and weak managerial capacity, potentially affecting their long-term sustainability.

Looking ahead, the agriculture ministry plans to conduct a benchmarking study comparing its crop insurance scheme PMFBY with similar programs globally, aiming to adopt best practices within the PMFBY ecosystem. (PTI)

The horticulture sector has shown remarkable progress, with record production of fruits and vegetables. The success is attributed to improved farming practices and technology adoption under various government schemes.

The sector is witnessing increased technological adoption, with drones and AI-driven tools gaining traction. "These innovations offer immense potential to enhance productivity," said Ashish Dobhal, CEO of UPL Sustainable AgriSolutions.

The government's flagship PM-KISAN scheme continues to provide crucial support, having disbursed over ₹ 3.46 lakh crore to more than 11 crore farmers since its 2018 launch.

Seven new agricultural schemes announced in September 2024, with a combined outlay of ₹ 13,966 crore, are set for full implementation in 2025. These initiatives span various aspects of agriculture, including digital transformation, crop science, livestock health, and natural resource management.

However, farmer unrest remains a concern, particularly in Punjab and Haryana, where demands for legal MSP guarantees and other reforms persist.

Import dependency through targeted interventions and increased support prices.

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2024: Big ticket investments boosts TN gov't's USD 1 tn dream

CHENNAI, Dec 29: Tamil Nadu made sincere efforts in 2024 to realise its USD 1 trillion economy dream by 2030 as the ruling DMK government secured some big ticket investments and rolled out sector-specific policies, among others. Measures regarding ease of doing business were also announced by the State government. The DMK government conducted its maiden Global Investors Meet (GIM) in 2024.

The year 2024 also witnessed the changing of hands at one of the city's iconic cement company, The India Cements Ltd. Billionaire Kumar Mangalam Birla promoted UltraTech Cement announced the acquisition of the decades old, city-headquartered company, promoted by noted industrialist N Srinivasan. The GIM in January fetched the government ₹ 6.64 lakh crore investment commitments by several companies that would generate 26 lakh new jobs in the state.

Some of the big ticket investments include ₹ 16,000 crore by Vietnam-based VinFast to establish a manu-

facturing facility in southern Tuticorin district that would generate about 20,000 new jobs, and the ₹ 9,000 crore investment commitment by auto-maker Tata Motors to manufacture sports utility vehicle, electric vehicles at Ranipet. It would generate about 5,000 jobs in the region.

Chief Minister M K Stalin delegations to foreign countries including the US to firm up investments.

After the Parliamentary elections in May, Stalin later embarked on his European trip where he met top industrial leaders hailing from Spain. The government during his visit to Spain signed MoUs with large industrial companies like ROCA, Gestamp.

During his US visit, Stalin met representatives from reputed firms, 18 of them were from Fortune 500 companies. The government during the Chief Minister's visit to the US signed 19 MoUs totalling to ₹ 7,618 crore of investment commitments in the State that would generate 12,000 jobs. (PTI)

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India to host WAVES Summit

Indian traditions. He also honored Tapan Sinha's socially conscious films that inspired unity and awareness. Modi said these legends not only shaped the golden era of Indian cinema but also strengthened India's cultural heritage, leaving behind an everlasting legacy for generations to admire and draw inspiration from. (PTI)

BJP accuses AAP of trying

AAP government's governance failures in the past 10 years. "Kejriwal's theatrics are not new. His baseless allegations about 'Operation Lotus' are a clear indication of his insecurity and fear of losing public support," Verma said. He also challenged Kejriwal to provide evidence for his claims.

"If he is so sure of voter manipulation, why hasn't he submitted concrete evidence to the Election Commission or the courts? His press conferences are merely a stage for sensationalism, not accountability," Verma added. AAP is eyeing a third consecutive term in Delhi while the BJP, which has been out of power since 1998, is looking to mount a comeback in the House. (PTI)

Tripura sees tenfold growth

PM-KUSUM, PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, and the PLI scheme for solar PV modules are driving this progress.

Joshi also urged efforts to raise public awareness about the PM Surya Ghar Yojana, which offers significant benefits for domestic electricity consumers. "With the MNRE subsidy and a concessional loan at 7% interest, consumers could immediately start saving on their electricity bills, with the tariff for usage above 200 units currently set at around ₹5 per unit," he explained.

Tripura's reliance on gas-based power plants results in higher costs, making solar energy a sustainable and economical alternative.

"The adoption of solar energy will reduce power purchase costs for the state DISCOM and help meet Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPO)," he remarked. He further lauded the state government's efforts under the BJP-led administration, which has spearheaded the impressive growth in solar energy generation. "From merely 2.5 MW before 2018 to over 20.5 MW now, Tripura's strides in renewable energy are commendable," he concluded.

'Drink responsibly and avoid

'DJ Lockup' was unveiled by the state police in its campaign against drunk or rash driving on New Year's Eve in 2022 and it had inspired not just police forces from other parts of the country -- UP, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Hyderabad, and Shimla among others -- but also from Africa and Europe to post similar messages. The campaigns are not limited to creating awareness against drunk driving alone, they are focused on ensuring road safety as a whole, said an officer with Guwahati Traffic police.

Singh added, "Short reels and videos on driving precautions to be taken in fog conditions and for picnics to enjoy the celebrations safely have also been released. We want everyone to enjoy the holiday season till Bihu without any mishaps."

Besides police, other government wings like the transport department, have come out with similar videos and these are being shared across social media platforms and media for greater awareness. "Picnic season is here! While you party, don't forget to follow the SOPs -- safety first always," urged a state police post, with a poster adding, "Pack the snacks, no regrets. Stay safe this picnic season".

The Assam Police campaign has also tweaked popular film titles to create popular culture memes for putting across the messages in a catchy manner. 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenga Par Drunk Driver Nah!', 'Andaz Apna Apna Lekin Safeti Sabki Sabki', 'Zindagi Milegi Na Dobara Seatbelt Lagao' and 'Dil Chahata Hai But Law Doesn't Drive Sober' are some such innovations.

Assam Police has 'partnered' with heroes and superheroes, from Hamlet and James Bond to Iron Man and Captain America, over the last two years in fighting crime, generating awareness against social ills and promoting road safety measures.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said recently that Assam is the only major state in the country to record a reduction in road accident fatalities. "While Assam has seen dip in accident fatalities, the time period till January is very crucial to maintain these numbers. We'll carry out extensive measures to ensure our roads are safe for all," said in a post on X.

"Overall accidents and fatalities have seen a reduction of around 15 per cent. Many districts have seen a dip in accidents following enforcement of instruction of last review meeting," he added, though he did not specify the time period. (PTI)

Plane tragedy in South Korea

about what caused the crash, including whether the aircraft was struck by birds, Lee said. Transport Ministry officials later said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane overshoot the end of the runway and skidded across a buffer zone before hitting the wall, the officials said.

Senior Transport Ministry official Joo Jong-wan said workers have retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box, which will be examined by government experts investigating the cause of the crash and fire. He said it may take months for investigators to complete their probe. The runway at the Muan airport will be closed until January 1, the ministry said.

Thailand's prime minister, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, expressed deep condolences to the families of those affected by the accident in a post on social platform X. Paetongtarn said she ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide assistance immediately.

Kerati Kijmanawat, the director of Airports of Thailand, confirmed in a statement that Jeju Air flight 7C 2216 departed from Suvarnabhumi Airport with no reports of abnormal conditions with the aircraft or on the runway. Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" over the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the aftermath of the accident." (AP)

Himanta, Congress trade barbs

contributions to the nation. "Prime Minister @narendramodi Ji has already announced a fitting memorial to honour his legacy, reflecting the nation's gratitude. Yet, the actions of some, who seek to turn this moment of mourning into an opportunity for political gain, are deeply painful," Sarma said.

"The public still remembers the indignities inflicted upon Dr Singh during his tenure, including Rahul Gandhi's infamous gestures that undermined his stature. Such actions remain etched in the nation's memory," he said. Sarma, who was with the Congress before joining the saffron party, asserted that after his death, Singh's "legacy should not be sullied by political opportunism". "Let us honour his memory with the dignity and respect he so richly deserves, free from any discord or manipulation by the leadership of the congress party," the CM added.

Meanwhile, leader of opposition in the state assembly Debabrata Saikia, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleged that the state government disrespected the legacy of Singh on the very day of his funeral.

"The Government of Assam, including its officials, were found to be organising and celebrating scheme launches and programmes at the same time when late Dr Manmohan Singh's funeral was on and you were attending the funeral," Saikia said in the letter on Sunday.

He said such events could have been postponed, but the state government was "acting as it was business as usual". "This act is very unfortunate while state mourning was declared by the Union cabinet presided by you," Saikia said. He pointed out that other states like Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh cancelled scheduled programmes as a mark of mourning.

"... I pray to the conscience of yours to kindly treat this matter with utmost importance and see to it that the State of Assam does duly observe mourning and pays due homage to the legacy of the late Dr Manmohan Singh," the Congress leader added. (PTI)

PM highlights ayurveda's

of traditional medicine in ICD-11 by the WHO this year mark a significant stride in ayurveda's global recognition, it added.

Initiatives like the Ayush visa are facilitating medical tourism, making India a preferred destination for holistic healing, the ministry said.

The success of the 9th Ayurveda Day, celebrated on October 29 across 150 countries, further demonstrates ayurveda's growing global acceptance. Themed "Ayurveda Innovations for Global Health", the event showcased India's leadership in traditional medicine and wellness solutions, the ministry added. (PTI)

Seven illegal immigrants deported

in Rajeev Nagar in Gurgaon. Verification of their mobile phones and documents confirmed their Bangladeshi citizenship, said the DCP. They were handed over to the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) following completion of necessary documentation, he said. (PTI)

Awareness programme held in Diphu

HT Bureau,

DIPHU, Dec 29: Central Bureau of Communication, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Field Office Diphu organised an awareness programme on 'Swachhata Hi Seva' here, on Sunday.

At the outset a theme based quiz and an extempore speech competition along with a plantation drive 'Ek Ped Maa Ki Naam' were held among the audience. Thereafter, a meeting was held at Hojainala Manja. Brinda Hasnu, cluster resource person, Jivika Sathi, Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission, Lumbajong Development Block Manja presided over the meeting.

Bikash Rajbangshi, in-charge, Field Office, Central Bureau of Communication, Diphu elaborated on the importance of Swachhata programme. The winners of the quiz and extempore speech competition were awarded prizes.

Tanuja Hasnu, president of Mamakamadi Village Organiser and Secretary, Rohila Jigdung also witnessed the programme.

UPPL gains momentum in Bodoland region 400 new members join UPPL party in Parbathjora

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 29: More than 400 new members from various political parties, and organisations including BPF joined the UPPL party at a joining programme held at the Khutabagra playground under Debitola primary committee of Parbathjora district committee of the party on Sunday.

UPPL vice president and former MCLA, Afjal Haque Sarkar, UPPL secretary and BTR executive member, Ranjit Basumatary, and senior party leaders were graced and welcomed the newly joined members with traditional Aronai and party mufflers.

Basumatary stated that the UPPL party is now gaining up its popularity amongst the citizens across the region.

He further said that the BTR government under the leadership of Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial



rendering services for well-being of the society, and accordingly the BTR region has reached at this juncture in its four year journey of the government.

He said that the opposition BPF party is now become irrelevant amongst the people as the BPF failed to address the problem and grievances of humanity in their 17

year rule in Bodoland Territorial Region. He said that UPPL means peace, and prosperity, and subsequently working on the development and welfare of the people dedicatedly.

"I'm delighted to attend the joining program of UPPL, was held at Khutabagra, Debitola, organised by the Parbathjora district committee where more than 400 workers from various political parties joining the UPPL family today. The event was graced by vice president Sjt. Afjal Haque Sarkar and esteemed District Leaders of the Parbathjora District Committee, UPPL. It's an honor to be a part of this momentous occasion", Basumatary said.

United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) is reaching out to common masses across the Bodoland region, and has successfully gained many new members from different political parties and organisations.

Governor stresses on importance of NEP 2020

India has been a Vishwaguru for centuries



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 29: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya stressed on the importance New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its impact on education at the 27th training session of Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal Uttar Assam Prant held at Hara Dutta Bira Dutta Bhawan in Rangia, on Sunday.

"True education is which liberates people from all forms of bondage. It should aim to eradicate poverty, inequality, and discrimination. To achieve this vision, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was introduced, and its seamless implementation is paving the way for a purposeful and future-ready education system," an official quoted the Governor highlighting the transformative role of education on the occasion.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor further said that India's ancient legacy as a global leader in the realm of knowledge has been astounding.

"India has been a Vishwaguru for centuries, making extraordinary contributions across various fields. This is the sacred land

where the Vedas and Upanishads originated—timeless examples of universal wisdom—when much of the world was still in its formative stages", quoted the statement.

The Governor reiterated that India's vast cultural heritage and knowledge systems form the bedrock of the country's legacy of universal brotherhood and wisdom which have earned it the title of 'Vishwaguru.'

The Governor said that as the country is the robust path of growth trajectory all the countrymen should work to integrate the rich cultural heritage, and values into the development journey.

Acknowledging the role of the youth, Governor Acharya highlighted, India's immense youth population as its greatest asset.

"If we channel this potential effectively, Bharat will undoubtedly reclaim its glory as a global leader", the Governor remarked.

The event was attended by President of Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal Uttar Assam Prant, Dr Neel Mohan Rai, and Secretary of the organisation, Deepak Kumar Sharma along with other dignitaries.

Indian Railways gears up to equip Kavach 4.0



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 29: Indian Railways announced its speedy preparations to deploy advanced Kavach 4.0 - automatic train protection system across its key routes on Sunday.

"Kavach 4.0 is an enhanced comprehensive, technology-driven solution developed by Indian Railways to prevent accidents and ensure the smooth operation of trains, providing an additional layer of safety and control," an official

statement said.

All the locomotives where lower version of Kavach were installed, will be replaced with the upgraded version.

Over N. F. Railway approximately 1966 Route Kilometer (RKM) of length from Malda Town to Dibrugarh have been identified for implementation of the technology, it stated.

The implementation of Kavach 4.0 by Indian Railways across its key routes is a broader initiative to modernise its infrastructure and improve safety standards.

"By leveraging technology such as Kavach 4.0, the connectivity system will ensure smoother operations, minimising human error and most importantly preventing

accidents," the statement further read.

The statement also claimed that the Kavach 4.0 system has been built upon several critical technological components, including Station Kavach, which receives information from Loco Kavach and signalling systems to guide the locomotive and RFID tags, which are installed along the tracks at regular intervals and signal point to monitor the train's location and direction.

Over the past period, Indian Railways had been taking several steps to cut down train accidents.

"This step is part of a larger plan to strengthen the railway network and boost safety measures across the rail network of the country," it concluded.

Demow press club celebrates last Sunday of 2024

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Dec 29: Demow press club on Sunday visited Dehingmukh for picnic festivities, taking a break from their hectic schedule to celebrate the last Sunday of the year.

The members of the club spent the day with gaiety and pomp with songs and dance.

The festivities were graced by culinary items such as goat, duck fish and pork adding to a scrumptious feast for the members.

As 2025 approaches, a swarm of parties can be witnessed in Dehingmukh to bid the year a gracious goodbye on a good note.

Alumni meet concludes successfully



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 29: Auniati Kamaldev Higher Secondary School successfully concluded its special alumni meet on Sunday, an official statement said.

The primary agenda of the meeting revolved around preparations for the upcoming evaluation program under the "Gunotsav" initiative and the role of alumni in supporting the school's development, it further stated.

As per the statement, Mukuteshwar Goswami, secretary of the Alumni Association, highlighted past contributions of the alumni in academic, cultural, and sports fields and called for discussions on future initiatives.

Rupak Deka, vice-president of the management committee, outlined the achievements and goals of the school. Advisory members of the alumni group, including Thaneshwar Sharma, Saurav Borah, Raman Nath, and chief coordinator Biswajit Baruah, expressed their willingness to provide active support and guidance.

In a speech, Saurav Borah elaborated on strategies to increase student enrollment in the coming days. He also acknowledged the commendable results achieved by the school in the previous "Gunotsav" evaluations and urged collective efforts to improve further, the

statement said.

Alumnus Thaneshwar Sharma assured support in both academic and extracurricular areas to address the school's needs. Similarly, Raman Nath emphasised addressing challenges faced by the school management and teachers, suggesting collaborative efforts to resolve them for the institution's progress, it further said.

Dr Ishankur Saikia, president of the management committee, shared insights into key policy decisions aimed at the holistic development of the school, including enhanced academic infrastructure and initiatives in cultural and sports arenas.

The meeting concluded with a commitment from all stakeholders to work together for the betterment of Auniati Kamaldev Higher Secondary School.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Alumni Association president Utpal Tamuli and was graced by the presence of the school's principal, Purabi Bharali, and management committee president, Dr Ishankur Saikia. Teachers, alumni, and other dignitaries also attended the event, the statement said.

Auniati Kamaldev Higher Secondary School was established in 1867 and is regarded as one of the oldest educational institutions in Kamrup district.

Ranoj Pegu lays foundation stone for school building in Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Dec 29: Education Minister Dr Ranoj Pegu on Sunday inaugurated the foundation stone of a new school building which will be constructed within the premises of Margherita Public Higher Secondary School.

The minister laid the foundation stone during an open session of school's platinum Jubilee celebration which was held on Sunday evening.

"I participated in the Maharajat Jayanti year celebrations of Margherita Public Higher Secondary School in Tinsukia district along with Badia. On the occasion of Maharajat Jayanti year, I lay the foundation stone of the school building to be constructed in the institute with a balance of ₹ 7 crore, the classroom to be built with mp funds," Pegu wrote on micro-blogging site X.

Pegu also extended his best wishes to the teachers, staff, students as well as parents and local



people of the heritage school established in 1948.

Speaking on the occasion, Margherita MLA and president of the celebration committee, Bhaskar Sharma opined that in 1948 Margherita Public Higher Secondary School got established and within these 75th years, thousands of students have gained knowledge from this institution.

"In the coming days, the school shall remain one of the best educa-

tion institutions of Margherita district," he added.

Meanwhile, Assam heartthrob Zubeen Garg and Priyanka Bharali are expected to entertain more than 1 lakh spectators from their mesmerising songs tonight.

Besides Pegu and Margherita MLA, Bimal Borh, Industry and Commerce minister, Union minister of external affairs and textiles Pabitra Margherita, Rajya Sabha MP Rameswar Teli were also present on the occasion.

Feline attacks raise concern at Bhatemora

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 29: A leopard has been taking away livestock on a regular basis from Bhatemora village under the jurisdiction of Pulbar police station, causing an atmosphere of fear and panic among the residents.

In the past week, three goats were dragged away by the feline which was spotted by a girl in the village.

On Wednesday, Bipin Bora, a resident, had tied his goat to a stake near his house with the kid feeding nearby when the leopard decamped with the kid. This was seen by his younger sister from a distance.

Following the incident, the forest department was informed and a cage was set up on Friday while the sand forest guards had burnt firecrackers to ward off the leopard.

However, on Saturday, Babul Sharma, another resident of Bhatemora village lost a goat kid.

Earlier on Tuesday Bijon Dutta, had lost a goat and it was suspected that it was the doing of a leopard although no one had spotted it at the time of the incident.

A forest personnel said that today there had been reports of leopard depredations from Nomora sook at Charigaon and a team had been deployed to protect the villagers there.

He further said that the leopard population had increased and every other day there were frequent reports of incursions.

Fear and concern now grip the villagers, as they suspect that the feline might crave for bolder attacks targeting children.

'District Level Yuva Utsav 2024' organised in WKA

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, Dec 29: Nehru Yuva Kendra, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, organised a day long 'District Level Yuva Utsav-2024' under the aegis of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India in collaboration with the Social Development Organisation and Adarsh Senior Secondary School at Adarsh Senior Secondary School, Kheroni Chariali, West Karbi Anglong on Sunday.

The programme began with the lighting of lamps and gardening before the image of youth icon Swami Vivekananda by chief guest Member of Autonomous Council, Pawan Kumar; Pranabananda Dowerah, asst commissioner, DC Office Hamren; Sukhdeo Singh, principal, Adarsh Sr. Secondary School and others.

Jeetendra Harijan, President of Social Development Organisation introduced and felicitated all the guest and judges of the events. Saikat Mondal, district youth officer of Nehru Yuva Kendra, Diphu stated the aims and objectives of the programme.

The event also included a myriad of events and competitions.

Muni Bordoloi and group clinched the first prize in cultural folk competition, whereas in Science Mela (Group) the first prize was bagged by Sonu Chauhan and his group for their Model on Renewable Energy. Roshmi Biswas claimed the first prize in the Science



Mela (Individual) contest.

In the Mobile Photography first prize was awarded to Ajay Verma, Painting first prize went to Sarip Saronga. Sunita Kumari Singh won the first prize in poetry writing competition and the Declamation Contest was won by Deepa Kumari. All the winners were awarded with certificate.

The event was graced by Khorsing Terang, Assam Gaurav Awardee; Raj Kumar Chauhan, advisor, Karbi Anglong Hindi Bhashi Sanstha; Labin Basumatary, dance choreographer; Bolram Thapa, social activist; and Biswabandhu

Thapa, vice principal of Hamren Girls HS School.

Judges for the competitions were Madhumita Mazumdar, HoD of Philosophy; Dr Rajesh Kr. Chauhan, HOD of Hindi; Bharat Sahu, assistant teacher at PG Hari Teron High School; Dr Prem Singh Chauhan, BDS; Sabita Kumari Harizan; Dharam Sing Phangocho and Dr Shio Jee Chauhan, assistant professor, Udali College.

The Yuva Utsav-2024 celebrated the talent and creativity of youth aiming to foster the cultural exchange and scientific innovation among participants from various communities.

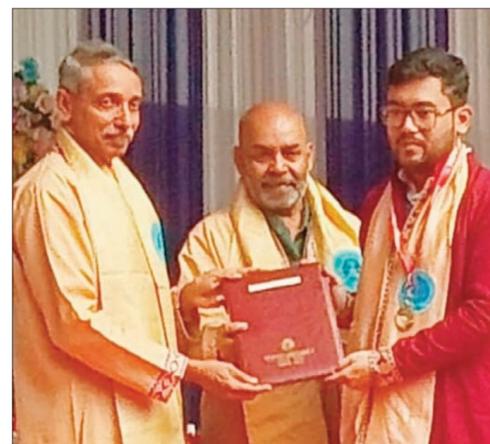
Two books released

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Dec 29: Assistant professor of Guwahati College, Dr Arup Kumar Nath released two books of poetry at 'Nath Sahitya Samaroh 2024' held at Morigaon Bihutoli Ground.

The books titled 'Yatartha' and 'Xoru Sumatu' have been composed and compiled by the aspiring poet Mantu Kumar Nath from Morigaon.

Bibek Nayan Deka wins gold medal in Linguistics



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 29: Bibek Nayan Deka, a student of Tezpur University, has brought laurels to his hometown by securing a gold medal in Linguistics and Language Technology in the current academic session.

He achieved this feat by topping his class with first-class honors. Bibek was awarded the gold medal by Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, UGC Chairman professor M Jagadesh Kumar, and other distinguished guests at the 22nd convocation ceremony of the university.

Bibek, a resident of Lakshminagar in Nagaon, has also achieved remarkable success in national-level exams, securing the sixth position in GATE and clearing NEET with flying colours this current year.

Only child of senior journalist Birinchi Kumar Deka and Bijaylakshmi Baruah, Bibek's achievement has brought joy and pride to the district, highlighting its academic excellence.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Sincerity is the way to heaven
- Mencius*

Indian job market: Future tense

India's jobs market deterioration and failure of the government in decent job creation have sharply pushed up the number of jobs and enterprises in the informal sector, the technical term for which is 'Unincorporated Sector.' The Annual Survey of 'Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2023-24' found an estimated 7.34 crore establishments with a growth rate of 12.84 percent having 12.06 crore workers with a rise of 10.01 percent. It can be called a robust growth compared to the COVID-19 disruption years, but is an indication of failure in reaching decent job creation targets. The survey covered unincorporated non-agricultural establishments belonging to three sectors - manufacturing, trade, and other services. These units were under proprietorship, partnership (excluding Limited Liability Partnerships), Self-Help Groups (SHG), co-operatives, societies, trusts etc. As the majority of jobs in such enterprises are not generally covered under social security, these are not considered as decent jobs. ASUSE 2023-24 was conducted during October 2023 to September 2024, which means it also covers the first six months of the current financial year 2024-25, the budget of which has a big flagship programme for decent job creation in India through three Employment Linked Incentive Schemes worth Rs10,000 crore, which is yet to take-off.

Nevertheless, ASUSE 2023-24 highlights the robust recovery after the disruption by COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and 2021, when such enterprises greatly suffered by lockdowns and containment measures that had stopped the economic wheel of the country. It should be noted that the first such full survey was conducted during the financial year 2021-22 from April 2021 to March 2022. The current survey is the third in its series. ASUSE 2023-24 has found 7.34 crore establishments out of which 2.02 crore were in manufacturing, 2.28 crore in trade, and 3.04 crore in other services sector. It estimated the Gross Value Added (GVA) growth in the unincorporated sector to be 16.52 per cent at current prices during the period from October 2023 to September 2024. Out of 12.06 crore estimated workers covered in survey year 2023-24 in the unincorporated sector, 5.61 crore were in rural areas and 6.45 crore in urban areas. ASUSE 2023-24 says that growth in the unincorporated sector has mainly been driven by the "other services" sector that recorded an establishment growth of 23.55%, employment growth of 17.86% and GVA growth of 26.17%.

Percentage share of GVA in manufacturing was 21 percent, in trade was 35 percent and in other services 44 percent. The result of the current survey revealed that along with the total number of workers, the total number of hired workers also increased in this sector from 2.95 crore in ASUSE 2022-23 to 3.15 crore in ASUSE 2023-24. The data also revealed that the percentage of market establishment at an overall level increased marginally from 99.56 per cent in survey year 2022-23 to 99.66 per cent in 2023-24.

How the export scenario of the country transformed

By: Er. Rajesh Pathak

According to a rough estimate the potential gain in export worth US\$ 3 billion particularly in apparel, leather and footwear sectors leads to generate employment for 1.5 lakhs workers, with foreign currency apart. Before going in big way upon its ambitious task of bringing about paradigm shift in the economic scenario of the country the Modi government had knifed this too well after spending one term in centre.

Therefore for value added production, the essential component in export promotion, and as well as skilled based employment generation a new Five year foreign trade policy (FTP 2015-20) was introduced five years back under 'Make in India' programme. It was later continued to be extended, first for the next two years due to Covid; and then in 2023-2024 with minor amendments, the basic spirit being kept intact though.

The electronic governance is promoted to scale up higher and higher in the ranking that the parameters of 'Ease of doing business' require. Following international standards, the numbers of documents essential for the import-export brought down to 3 under the 24 hours for all 7 days paperless mode of working. The introduction of fast track clearance system enabled manufacturer to self certify that the origin of the product is India. This made the assess to the international market easier and faster. Near the seaport the warehouse could be built now far easier than before, likewise.

This is not all, however. To incorporate the MSMEs (micro-small-medium enterprises) also into export process the categorical steps have been taken, either. Now if the exporter acquires raw materials preferably from the small domestic producers he could avail relaxation up to 75% in the export regulations. Beside export, the role that the MSME fulfil in strategic inputs and employment creation, the MSME clusters-108 is earmarked and a well defined plan has been made for its execution.

If the effect of new FTP is to be looked into just go through an instance of the defence export of India which during last decade increased 23 times touching the figure of 16,000 crore. Overall 85 countries responded in a great way to brace up their defence system with Brahmos and Akash missiles; Tejas fighter planes; Radars; Pinaca rocket and launcher. Even France, Russia and Israel now prefers to purchase offshore petrol vessels; body armours; mine-protected vehicles; avionics and such other exclusively from India, more notably.

This boom in the rise of self-reliance in production and subsequent export is seen also due to 4,666 defence related items have been made notified to be not imported from abroad. It is because of this the amount of license for the production granted to industries in the defence sector has increased as high as 200%. Innovation for defence excellence (IDEX) scheme is launched, under which the start-ups and MSMEs engaged in manufacturing sectors are exhorted to be innovative at the domestic level itself.

The Economist who transformed India

By: Satyabrata Borah

Dr Manmohan Singh is one of the most remarkable leaders India has ever seen. He is widely respected for his intellect, humility, and dedication to the nation's development. Born on September 26, 1932, in a small village in Punjab, which is now in Pakistan, his journey from a modest background to becoming India's Prime Minister is an inspiring tale of determination and perseverance. His early life was marked by simplicity and hardships, but his thirst for knowledge and a strong desire to succeed set him apart.

Dr Singh's academic journey began in a modest setting. Despite the challenges of Partition, he pursued his education with unwavering focus. After completing his schooling, he joined Punjab University, where his brilliance in economics started to shine. His dedication to studies earned him a place at the prestigious University of Cambridge, where he completed his undergraduate degree in economics. Later, he went on to complete his doctoral studies at the University of Oxford. His academic achievements were impressive, and he was widely

recognized as a scholar of exceptional ability. After completing his education, Dr Singh returned to India with a strong sense of responsibility toward his country. He began his career as an economist and quickly rose to prominence in government and academic circles. His work as an economist at international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) brought him global recognition. He also served as a professor of economics, shaping young minds and contributing to the academic community.

Dr Singh's entry into Indian politics was a turning point not just in his life but also in India's history. In 1991, India faced a severe economic crisis. The country was on the brink of bankruptcy, and urgent measures were required to stabilize the economy. It was during this challenging time that Dr Singh was appointed as the Finance Minister in the government led by P.V. Narasimha Rao. This marked the beginning of a new era for India's economy.

As Finance Minister, Dr Singh implemented a series of economic reforms that transformed India. These reforms were aimed at liberalizing the economy, encouraging foreign investments, and reduc-

ing government control over industries. His efforts resulted in the dismantling of the License Raj, a system that had stifled growth and innovation. The economy opened up, and India's growth trajectory changed dramatically. His policies brought stability, boosted investor confidence, and set the stage for India's emergence as a global economic power.

Dr Singh's contributions during his tenure as Finance Minister made him a household name. He became synonymous with economic reform and development. His calm demeanor and focus on results won him respect across political lines. While the reforms were not without challenges and criticism, he stood firm in his conviction, believing that these changes were necessary for the nation's future.

In 2004, Dr Singh was chosen to lead the country as the Prime Minister. This decision was historic in many ways. He became the first Sikh to hold this position, and his appointment was seen as a testament to India's diversity and democratic values. His leadership style was unique. Unlike many politicians, he was known for his humility, integrity, and focus on governance rather than rhetoric. His tenure as Prime Minister lasted for

two consecutive terms, from 2004 to 2014.

As Prime Minister, Dr Singh continued to prioritize economic development, social welfare, and international relations. Under his leadership, India experienced consistent economic growth, with significant advancements in sectors like information technology, telecommunications, and infrastructure. Programs such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) were launched to address rural poverty and unemployment. These initiatives reflected his commitment to inclusive growth and improving the lives of the underprivileged.

Dr Singh also played a crucial role in strengthening India's position on the global stage. His focus on diplomacy and international cooperation helped India forge stronger ties with major powers like the United States, Russia, and China. The India-US civil nuclear agreement was one of the most notable achievements of his tenure. This agreement not only enhanced India's energy security but also symbolized its growing importance in global affairs.

Despite his many accomplishments, Dr Singh faced criticism during his tenure as Prime Minister.

Issues such as corruption scandals and policy paralysis overshadowed his government's achievements. However, his personal integrity and reputation for honesty remained intact. He was often described as a leader who put the nation's interests above personal or political gains. Throughout his life, Dr Singh has been a source of inspiration for millions. His story is a testament to the power of education, hard work, and dedication. Even after stepping down as Prime Minister, he continues to be a respected figure in Indian politics and society. His speeches, writings, and interviews reflect his deep understanding of economics and governance, as well as his vision for India.

Dr Manmohan Singh passed away on December 26, 2024, at the age of 92. Dr Manmohan Singh's life is a lesson in humility, perseverance, and service. He has shown that leadership is not about power but about responsibility. His contributions to India's economic and political landscape are immense, and his legacy will continue to inspire future generations. Whether as an economist, a politician, or a statesman, he has left an indelible mark on the nation. *(The author is an Educationist)*

2025 - A Literary Year ahead

Assam's decision to dedicate 2025 to books is a timely and significant initiative that has the potential to reshape the cultural and intellectual landscape of the state. This declaration is not merely a celebration of literature but a broader commitment to revive reading habits, preserve Assam's rich literary heritage, and foster a deeper connection between its citizens and the written word. In an age where digital content often dominates, this move emphasizes the enduring importance of books in shaping societies, educating minds, and reflecting the diverse narratives that make up Assam's complex identity.

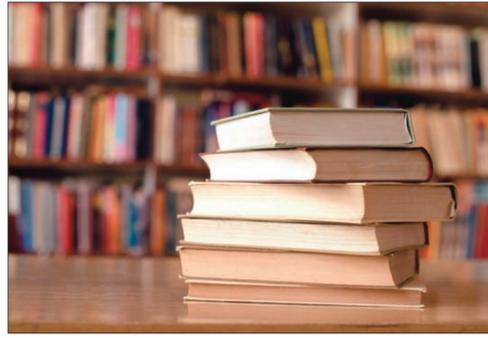
Assam has a long and storied literary tradition, with contributions to literature in Assamese and several indigenous languages such as Bodo, Karbi, and Mishng. Figures like Srimanta Sankardev, the 15th-century saint-scholar who shaped the Bhakti movement, and modern authors like Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Homen Borgohain have defined Assamese literature and helped articulate the state's cultural and social ethos. Literature has always been a bridge between the diverse communities of Assam, from its indigenous groups to its immigrant populations, offering both a mirror of its past and a window to its future. By dedicating 2025 to books, the Assam government is recognizing the vital role literature plays in the state's identity and its capacity to shape the future.

The most immediate benefit of the "Year of Books" initiative is the promotion of reading across all age groups, especially among the younger generation. The rise of social media and digital entertainment has led to a decline in traditional reading habits. Young people, in particular, are increasingly drawn to short-form content, often bypassing books in favor of more instant gratification offered by videos and online posts. By fo-

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

e-books and audiobooks, will ensure that these spaces remain relevant and accessible to people of all ages. Libraries will once again become centers of learning and community engagement, where people can explore new ideas, attend literary events, and engage in discussions that promote intellectual growth. An equally important goal of this initiative is the celebration and preservation of Assam's linguistic and literary diversity. While Assamese literature has long been the focal point of the state's literary scene, the languages of Assam's indigenous communities also carry rich literary traditions. Bodo, Karbi, Mishng, and other regional languages have produced valuable works that reflect the unique experiences of these communities. The "Year of Books" initiative aims to highlight these voices, ensuring



that they are included in the broader literary conversation. The government's focus on regional literature will help preserve traditional stories, folklore, and knowledge that might otherwise be lost in the face of modernization and globalized culture. By translating these works into Assamese and other languages, the government can promote cross-cultural understanding and ensure that the literary contributions of all communities are recognized.

In addition to promoting local authors and literature, the "Year of Books" initiative will serve as a platform for international literary exchange. By inviting national and international authors, scholars, and intellectuals to participate in literary events such as book fairs, author interactions, and public discussions, the government aims to open up new channels for dialogue and collaboration. These events will allow local authors to engage with the broader literary community, share their work, and gain insights into global literary trends. They will also expose Assam's readers to new literary genres, ideas, and perspectives, fostering a more open and cosmopolitan society. These interactions will help position Assam as a key

player in the literary world, contributing to the growth of its intellectual and cultural ecosystem.

Education will also benefit from the focus on literature in 2025. Literature plays a crucial role in shaping young minds, encouraging creativity, empathy, and critical thinking. By integrating books more thoroughly into the education system, the government will help nurture the intellectual growth of students. Literature can be a tool for understanding social issues, history, and human experiences, enriching students' academic journeys and encouraging them to think beyond textbooks. Schools and colleges will be encouraged to incorporate diverse literary works into their curricula, offering students the opportunity to engage with texts that reflect both local and global concerns.

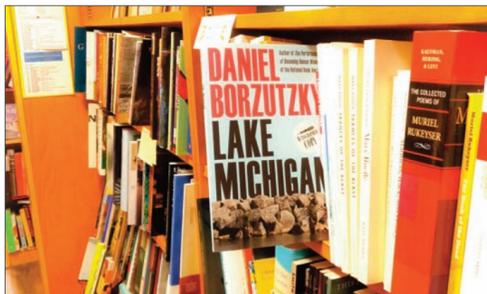
The economic implications of this initiative are significant. As books and literature take center stage in Assam, the local publishing industry is likely to see a resurgence. Independent bookstores, often struggling in the age of online retail, could see increased demand as readers return to physical books. Literary events such as book fairs, author meet-and-greets, and public readings will attract visitors from other states and coun-

tries, generating tourism and economic activity. The increased focus on books will also encourage investment in the cultural sector, which can support jobs in publishing, event management, and retail. By fostering a vibrant literary culture, Assam can build a self-sustaining ecosystem that supports authors, publishers, and bookstores while contributing to the state's economy.

Ultimately, the "Year of Books" is about more than just celebrating literature. It is a call to action for the people of Assam to reconnect with the written word and use it as a tool for personal and societal growth. Books are not just a means of entertainment or escape; they are a way to engage with the world, challenge assumptions, and explore new ideas. In a time of rapid change and uncertainty, the ability to think critically and engage deeply with the world is more important than ever. The "Year of Books" will serve as a reminder of the power of literature to shape societies, empower individuals, and preserve cultural identities.

In conclusion, Assam's decision to dedicate 2025 to books is an initiative that holds great promise for the state's cultural and intellectual future. By promoting reading, revitalizing libraries, celebrating local literature, and fostering international literary exchanges, the government is ensuring that Assam's literary heritage remains vibrant and relevant in the modern age. The initiative will not only encourage reading among the youth but will also create a dynamic literary ecosystem that will contribute to the state's intellectual, cultural, and economic development. Through this celebration of books, Assam is taking a significant step toward reaffirming the central role of literature in shaping a more informed, creative, and engaged society. *(The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK)*

Assam's vision for a Literary Renaissance in 2025



By: Dipak Kurmi

In a monumental decision aimed at fostering intellectual growth and cultural preservation, the Assam government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, has declared 2025 as the "Year of Books." This initiative marks a pivotal step towards promoting the love of reading, reviving literary traditions, and cultivating a culture of knowledge across the state. At a time when digital distractions dominate daily life and traditional reading habits are dwindling, Assam's commitment to literature offers a beacon of hope for preserving the region's rich cultural and intellectual heritage.

The announcement underscores a multi-faceted strategy that goes beyond mere celebration, envisioning a comprehensive movement to revitalize Assam's literary ecosystem. Book fairs, literary festivals, educational reforms, and library revitalization are central to this transformative campaign. Through these measures, the state aims to inspire people, particularly the youth, to embrace books as tools for empowerment, creativity, and unity.

The Literary Legacy of Assam Assam's rich literary history is steeped in contributions from towering figures such as Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, and Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswami. Their works not only shaped Assamese literature but also brought recognition to the region's distinct identity within India's literary landscape. This initiative seeks to honor their legacy by bridging the gap between Assam's glorious past and its evolving future in a rapidly changing world.

Books are not just repositories of information; they are vessels of history, culture, and imagination. For Assam, celebrating literature is a reaffirmation of its intellectual heritage and an effort to safeguard its linguistic diversity. By focusing on promoting books, the "Year of Books" initiative seeks to nurture a new generation of readers and writers while reinvigorating the state's literary traditions.

A Year-Long Celebration of Reading The "Year of Books" promises a vibrant calendar filled with events designed to make reading accessible and enjoyable for all. Book fairs will be held in every district, with the Assam Book Fair making

its debut in Khanapara. These events will serve as platforms for established authors to connect with readers and budding writers to showcase their talents. Additionally, literary festivals and workshops will offer opportunities for dialogue and collaboration among writers, readers, and critics, fostering a thriving literary ecosystem.

This celebration will not be confined to urban areas. Mobile libraries are being conceptualized to reach remote and underserved regions, ensuring that the benefits of this literary revolution extend to all corners of the state. By democratizing access to books, Assam is making a concerted effort to empower its citizens with knowledge and inspiration.

Revitalizing Public Libraries and Institutions

A cornerstone of the initiative is the rejuvenation of public libraries, many of which have fallen into disrepair over the years. These libraries, once bustling centers of learning and community engagement, will be revitalized with modern collections, digital resources, and inviting spaces for readers. Schools and colleges, as nerve centers of intellectual development, will play a crucial role. Activities like book clubs, essay competitions, and storytelling sessions will encourage students to develop a lifelong love of reading while deepening their connection to Assam's cultural roots.

Educational reforms will also emphasize the inclusion of Assamese literature in school curricula, strengthening students' sense of pride in their heritage. By promoting regional authors and creating opportunities for young minds to engage with their works, the initiative aims to nurture a new generation of literary enthusiasts.

Boosting Assam's Publishing

Industry

The "Year of Books" initiative is expected to energize Assam's publishing industry, which often struggles for visibility in a market dominated by English-language publications. By increasing demand for regional literature, the government hopes to provide a platform for local authors and publishers to thrive. Translation efforts will further enrich the literary landscape, bringing world classics to Assamese readers and showcasing Assamese literature to global audiences.

Preserving Indigenous Languages and Oral Traditions

Assam's linguistic diversity is one of its greatest treasures, yet many indigenous languages and dialects are at risk of fading into obscurity. The initiative includes efforts to document oral traditions in written form, ensuring their preservation for future generations. By promoting authors from tribal and marginalized communities, the campaign aims to create an inclusive literary movement that reflects the state's cultural richness.

Bridging the Gap Between Tradition and Modernity

Recognizing the evolving nature of reading habits, the initiative embraces digital platforms to complement traditional formats. E-books, audiobooks, and digital libraries will make literature accessible to tech-savvy readers while broadening the reach of Assamese literature globally. These efforts will bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, ensuring that literature remains relevant in an increasingly digital world.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

While the vision for the "Year of Books" is ambitious, it is not without challenges. Disparities in literacy rates and access to learning resources between urban and rural

areas must be addressed. Collaborating with NGOs, private entities, and community organizations will be vital to overcoming these barriers. Financial constraints faced by economically disadvantaged families also call for innovative solutions, such as subsidized or free book distribution programs.

Transforming Assam Through Literature

The "Year of Books" is more than a cultural initiative; it is an investment in Assam's intellectual capital and a step towards building a more informed and empowered society. A well-read population is better equipped to embrace diversity, foster innovation, and contribute to sustainable development. The economic benefits of this initiative are also significant, from boosting tourism through literary festivals to creating opportunities for local writers and artisans.

A Renaissance of Culture and Intellect

As Assam embarks on this literary revolution, it is not merely celebrating books but reaffirming its identity as a land rich in intellect and culture. The initiative is a call to action for all stakeholders—government bodies, educators, parents, and civil society—to come together and make reading a cornerstone of personal and collective growth.

Through the "Year of Books," Assam is poised to become a model for India in promoting literacy, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering intellectual growth. This is not just a celebration of stories but a renaissance of imagination, self-reflection, and knowledge. With every page turned in this transformative year, Assam will honor its past while building a brighter, more inclusive future. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipld@gmail.com)*

Non-invasive radiotherapy proving highly effective in treatment of brain tumors

By: Dr Aditya Gupta

The occurrence of brain tumors in India is steadily rising. More and more cases of brain tumors are reported each year in our country among people of varied age groups. In 2020, brain tumor was ranked as the 10th most common kind of tumor among Indians. While there is no specified known cause, age bracket or gender for brain tumors, there is still hope for patients – the medical fraternity has made several strides to treat brain tumor effectively with a reduced rate of morbidity and mortality.

Symptoms of such tumors pose a challenge in its early diagnosis and hence complications arise for surgical intervention. Only, once the patient have persistent symptoms and come for further investigation and hence the doctors' advice not to ignore any such symptoms for better outcomes.

The International Association of Cancer Registries (IARC) reported that there are over 28,000 cases of brain tumors reported in India each year and more than 24,000 people reportedly die due to brain tumors annually. Every year 40,000 to 50,000 people are diagnosed with brain tumors, out of which 20% are children.

While there has been tremendous advancements made in the treatment modality of brain tumors, the latest CyberKnife radiosurgery system can be used as an alternative to surgery, or in conjunction with other treatments. With the advent of cyberknife, the procedure has played a significant role in the management both non-cancerous and cancerous brain tumors. The technique that has been around in India for about 3-4 years has been mostly used to treat a range of cancerous and non-cancerous/benign tumors in the body including the prostate, lung, liver, etc., is now being commonly used to kill tumors of brain and spine as well. What is CyberKnife?

Basically, CyberKnife radiation surgery is the most advanced, non-invasive radiation therapy tools available to treat especially non-cancerous as well as cancerous and other diseases with the help of precise beams of high-dose radiation. It is a no pain and a no risk day-care treatment wherein patients are discharged as soon as the session gets over and therefore, no hospitalisation is required. The treatment uses a sophisticated image guidance system to beam high doses of radiation directly to your tumor. The CyberKnife radiation therapy has clinically proven success rates, however, it works the best for a tumors that's upto 2-2.5 cm in size. However, in a few rare cases it is also used as an treatment option to cure brain tumors that either cannot be operated because of their location in the head, or the patients who cannot undergo brain tumor surgery due to their poor medical condition, etc. And, the success of the treatment largely depends and increases beyond 90% upon choosing the right patient. The next

generation of CyberKnife - M6 is highly precise when compared to the earlier ones used in India as this offers some of the exceptional features and delivers a maximum dose of radiation directly to the tumor from many different angles with sub-millimeter precision for the higher success rates. Also, the emitted focused beams of intense energy destroy cancer cells and shrink/control the growth of tumors. It further prevents the cancerous cells from multiplying. Infact, the objective of radiation therapy is to destroy the harmful cells while minimising damage to healthy cells. Besides, the CyberKnife system automatically adjusts itself and tracks the tumor which aids in minimising radiation exposure to healthy organs and tissues. The CyberKnife radiation surgery offers multiple benefits compared to conventional radiation treatments and surgery. Cyber Knife Vs conventional Gamma Knife For brain tumor patients, Gamma Knife treatment is not as convenient or comfortable, largely because Gamma Knife requires an invasive head frame be bolted into the skull. Besides, the entire treatment process; right from imaging to planning to treatment itself has to happen on the same day. Typically, the head frame is mounted to the patient's skull in the morning, followed by imaging scans which take place. The patient has no choice but to wait in the hospital during the treatment planning process with the metal head frame bolted to their skull. Compared to this, the CyberKnife is a non-invasive, real-time motion tracking technology for accurate delivery of high-dose radiation therapy. Instead of a bulky head frame, CyberKnife patients are provided with a soft, mesh mask during the treatment. Moreover, treatment with CyberKnife is flexible; imaging is performed few days in advance, thereby leaving the neurosurgeon with enough time to design and finalise a customised treatment plan. Once the plan is set in place, the patient will return for a non-invasive, pain-free experience. Using advanced tumor-tracking technology, the CyberKnife system is able to either deliver one single high-dose treatment, or smaller doses (upto 5) over the course of two to five days. This approach limits side effects and enables most patients to return to their regular routine the same day. Additionally, clinical studies have shown that patients with certain cancerous and non-cancerous conditions in the brain, neck and spine have a better outcome with a lower dose of two to five fractionated radiation treatments than a single, large dose. Nothing is required of patients during treatment with CyberKnife, except to relax and lie as still as possible. The treatment is usually completed in four to five treatment sessions, over a week's time. The treatment through CyberKnife is cost effective and it is almost similar to the cost of other surgeries. *(The author is the Director, Neurosurgery and Cyberknife Centre, Artemis Hospital)*

Why does red wine sometimes cause headaches?

By: Andrew Waterhouse & Apramita Devi

Medical accounts of red wine headaches go back to Roman times, but the experience is likely as old as winemaking – something like 10,000 years. As chemists specializing in winemaking, we wanted to try to figure out the source of these headaches.

Many components of red wine have been accused of causing this misery – sulfites, biogenic amines and tannin are the most popular. Our research suggests the most likely culprit is one you may not have considered.

The common suspects

Sulfites have been a popular scapegoat for all sorts of ailments since it became mandatory in the 1990s to label them on wines in the US. However, not much evidence links sulfites directly to headaches, and other foods contain comparable levels to wine without the same effects. White wines also contain the same amount of sulfites as red wines.

Your body also produces about 700 milligrams of sulfites daily as you metabolise the protein in your food and excrete it as sulfate. To do so, it has compounds called sulfite oxidases that create sulfate from sulfite – the 20 milligrams in a glass of wine are unlikely to overwhelm your sulfite oxidases.

Some people point the finger for red wine headaches at biogenic amines. These are nitrogenous substances found in many fermented or spoiled foods, and can cause headaches, but the amount in wine is far too low to be a problem.

Tannin is a good guess, since white wines contain only tiny amounts, while red wines contain substantial amounts. Tannin is a type of phenolic compound – it's found in all plants and usually plays a role in preventing disease, resisting predation or encouraging seed dispersal by animals.

But there are many other phenolic compounds in grapes' skin



and seeds besides tannin that make it into red wines from the winemaking process, and are not present in white, so any of them could be a candidate culprit.

Tannin is also found in many other common products, such as tea and chocolate, which generally don't cause headaches. And phenolics are good antioxidants – they're unlikely to trigger the inflammation that would cause a headache.

A red wine flush

Some people get red, flushed skin when drinking alcohol, and the flushing is accompanied by a headache. This headache is caused by a lagging metabolic step as the body breaks down the booze.

The metabolism of alcohol happens in two steps. First, ethanol is converted to acetaldehyde. Then, the enzyme ALDH converts the acetaldehyde to acetate, a common and innocuous substance. This second step is slower for people who get flushed skin, since their ALDH is not very efficient. They accumulate acetaldehyde, which is a somewhat toxic compound also linked to hangovers.

So, if something unique in red wine could inhibit ALDH, slowing down that second metabolic step, would that lead to higher

levels of acetaldehyde and a headache? To try to answer this question, we scanned the list of phenolics abundant in red wine.

We spied a paper showing that quercetin is a good inhibitor of ALDH. Quercetin is a phenolic compound found in the skins of grapes, so it's much more abundant in red than white wines because red grape skins are left in longer during the fermentation process than white grape skins.

Putting enzymes to the test

Testing ALDH was the next step. We set up an inhibition assay in test tubes. In the assay, we measured how fast the enzyme ALDH breaks down acetaldehyde. Then, we added the suspected inhibitors – quercetin, as well as some other phenolics we wanted to test – to see whether they slowed the process.

These tests confirmed that quercetin was a good inhibitor. Some other phenolics had varying effects, but quercetin glucuronide was the winner. When your body absorbs quercetin from food or wine, most is converted to glucuronide by the liver in order to quickly eliminate it from the body.

Our enzyme tests suggest that quercetin glucuronide disrupts your body's metabolism of alco-

hol. This disruption means extra acetaldehyde circulates, causing inflammation and headaches. This discovery points to what's known as a secondary, or synergistic, effect.

These secondary effects are much harder to identify because two factors must both be in play for the outcome to arise. In this case, other foods that contain quercetin are not associated with headaches, so you might not initially consider quercetin as the cause of the red wine problem.

The next step could be to give human subjects two red wines that are low and high in quercetin and ask whether either wine causes a headache. If the high-quercetin wine induces more headaches, we'd know we're on the right track.

So, if quercetin causes headaches, are there red wines without it? Unfortunately, the data available on specific wines is far too limited to provide any helpful advice. However, grapes exposed to the Sun do produce more quercetin, and many inexpensive red wines are made from grapes that see less sunlight.

If you're willing to take a chance, look for an inexpensive, lighter red wine. *(Courtesy: Scroll.in)*

Vitamin D may not prevent fractures or falls in older adults, experts warn

By: Amanda Ward

Vitamin D supplements with or without calcium, while necessary for overall health, have no effect on preventing falls or fractures in older adults, according to a new draft recommendation from the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force.

By analyzing 20 unique randomized, controlled studies in 54 different publications, reviewers determined that additional vitamin D supplementation for postmenopausal women and older men – given that those populations had normal vitamin D levels, no previous fractures, and no issues with bone density – was unnecessary and had no bearing on the severity of injuries from falls.

The finding was an update from a 2018 recommendation that postmenopausal women should not supplement with 400 units or less of vitamin D and 1,000 milligrams or less of calcium for the primary prevention of fracture; men were not included in that recommendation.

What is vitamin D good for?

Vitamin D is essential for the bones and teeth, the immune system, brain health, and for regulating inflammation. The body produces vitamin D as a response to sun exposure.

Certain foods and supplements can also boost vitamin D intake. Despite its name, vitamin D is not a vitamin but a hormone or prohormone.

An adequate intake of vitamin D may support good immune function and reduce the risk of autoimmune diseases. Researchers believe there may be a link between long-term vitamin D deficiency and

the development of autoimmune conditions, such as type 1 diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis, but more research is necessary to confirm the link.

A lack of exposure to sunlight, the natural process of aging, and high levels of body fat can all contribute to vitamin D deficiency, which can lead to osteoporosis, bone and joint pain, and muscle weakness. These are all factors associated with falls and fractures in older adults.

What are physicians' recommendations for vitamin D intake?

Mary Tinetti, MD, a Yale Medicine geriatrician and Gladys Phillips Crofoot Professor of Medicine at Yale School of Medicine, who is an expert in fall prevention, told Medical News Today that the recommendations for vitamin D supplementation have shifted numerous times.

"Falls and vitamin D is an ever-changing topic, with guidelines about testing and supplementing changing, and different groups are making different recommendations depending on current data and what data are considered," Tinetti said.

David Cutler, MD, board certified family medicine physician at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, CA, told MNT that belief in the benefits of vitamin D has changed over time as more research has been published.

"Vitamin D was once considered a panacea for a variety of ailments but now is considered by some to be unimportant. Many recent, large, well-conducted studies have shown no benefits in reducing fracture risk, cardiovascular disease, cancer prevention, or death from vitamin D supplementation," Cutler said.

"Some experts suggested that vitamin D could be obtained safely from sun exposure, a recommendation that was considered controversial because of a potentially increased risk of skin cancer. Other experts suggested that perhaps being outdoors with sun exposure caused improved health outcomes independent of increased vitamin D. Needless to say, this nuanced balancing of benefits and risks is difficult for experts, let alone the average person, to reconcile," Cutler explained.

Do I need to take vitamin D supplements?

Cutler added that many people do not need extra vitamin D supplements in general, but he supported the new findings that it doesn't eliminate the danger to older adults from falls. He emphasized that the context of someone's overall health should be taken into account when considering the need for vitamin D supplements.

"The appropriate conclusion is not that patients do not need any vitamin D but more correctly that patients with adequate amounts of vitamin D will not reduce their fracture risk by additional supplementation," — David Cutler, MD

"Addressing the issue of vitamin D supplementation with your physician requires looking at all the potential benefits and risks in the context of your personal health situation. This includes addressing diet for adequate calcium intake, exercise for fall prevention, and genetic factors that may affect the risk of kidney stones. So, it is only by comprehensively evaluating your entire health status that an appropriate recommendation for vitamin D supplementation can be made," Cutler said. *(Courtesy: Medical News Today)*

Conceiving amid smog: Impact of pollution on IVF success

By: Dr. Neelam Banerjee

As pollution levels surge across North India, the detrimental effects of poor air quality extend far beyond respiratory illnesses. Increasing evidence reveals a concerning link between pollution and reproductive health, particularly in the success rates of in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatments. For couples struggling with infertility, pollution represents an often-overlooked factor that could significantly impact their journey toward parenthood.

Connection Between Pollution and Fertility

Air pollution, laden with fine particulate matter, heavy metals, and other toxins, is known to affect overall health. Its influence on reproductive health is now a focus of scientific research. Pollutants like nitrogen dioxide, and sulphur dioxide can disrupt hormonal balance, oxidative stress levels, and inflammation in the body, factors that play a crucial role in fertility. For men, exposure to polluted air has been associated with lower sperm count, reduced motility, and an increase in abnormal sperm morphology. For women, pollution can impair ovarian reserve, disrupt menstrual cycles, and ad-

versely affect egg quality. These challenges compound the difficulty for couples undergoing IVF, where both egg and sperm quality are critical for successful outcomes.

Impact on IVF Success Rates

Studies have highlighted that individuals exposed to higher levels of air pollution are at a greater risk of poor IVF outcomes. Pollutants can negatively influence embryo quality, implantation success, and pregnancy rates. One study reported that women exposed to elevated levels of fine particulate matter during ovarian stimulation had fewer mature eggs retrieved during the IVF process. Additionally, pollution-induced oxidative stress can lead to increased DNA damage in reproductive cells. This not only reduces the likelihood of conception but may also elevate the risk of miscarriage and complications during pregnancy.

Pollution Crisis and Reproductive Health

North India is facing alarming pollution levels, with the region frequently enveloped in hazardous smog during the winter months. Cities like Delhi, Gurugram, and Lucknow report air quality indices (AQI) that often exceed safe limits by several folds. This environmental crisis amplifies health

risks, including those related to fertility. For couples seeking IVF treatment, the toxic air quality may pose an added hurdle. Prolonged exposure to polluted air could affect both partners, diminishing the effectiveness of fertility treatments and adding to the emotional and financial strain of the process.

Protective Measures for Reproductive Health

While systemic solutions are essential to combat pollution, individuals can reduce its impact by using air purifiers, limiting outdoor exposure on high-pollution days, maintaining an antioxidant-rich diet to counter oxidative stress, and consulting fertility specialists to address potential risks during IVF.

As the air quality crisis continues to escalate, its implications for reproductive health and IVF outcomes cannot be ignored. Addressing this issue requires both immediate individual precautions and long-term policy interventions. For hopeful parents navigating the challenges of infertility, understanding and mitigating the impact of pollution could be a vital step in achieving their dream of parenthood. *(The author is the Senior Consultant & Head of Department - IVF, Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida)*

Sadness, stress, and burnout: When is it a mental health issue?

By: Bimal Raturi

The term "Mental Health" has recently emerged from quiet discussions into mainstream conversations. This shift is essential for breaking stigma and promoting awareness. However, with increased visibility, there is a risk of overusing or misusing terms like "Depression," "Anxiety," and "Trauma." While raising awareness about mental health is crucial, confusing everyday challenges with clinical conditions can trivialize genuine struggles and desensitize the public. How daily experiences are sometimes mislabeled as mental health issues and how we can distinguish between the two.

The Rise of Overdiagnosis Culture

A 2023 survey by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) found that nearly 40% of young adults reported experiencing anxiety in the past year. However, clinical diagnoses accounted for only around 18% of these cases. This discrepancy emphasizes how everyday experiences of stress or sadness are often misinterpreted as mental disorders.

The role of the internet and social media in this trend is significant. While platforms like Instagram and Facebook can be beneficial for raising awareness, they also contribute to a culture where casual self-diagnosis is common. Phrases such as "I'm so depressed" or "I have anxiety" are frequently used to describe temporary feelings like disappointment or nervousness.

When It's Not a Mental Health Issue

Here are some everyday situations often mistaken for mental health disorders, along with their more accurate descriptions:

Sadness vs. Depression

Feeling sad after a breakup, losing a job, or experiencing a tough day is normal. Sadness is a fundamental human emotion that allows us to process loss or disappointment. However, depression is a clinical condition marked by a persistent low mood, low energy, and a lack of interest in activities that lasts for an extended period, typically two weeks or more.

Example:

- Feeling sad because your weekend plans were cancelled? That's disappointment, not depression.
- Struggling to get out of bed for weeks, feeling hopeless, and losing appetite or sleep? That could be clinical depression and warrants professional help.

Nervousness vs. Anxiety

Feeling nervous before a public speech or exam is normal. It's your body's way of preparing for a challenge. Clinical anxiety involves intense fear or worry that disrupts daily life, often without a clear cause.

Example:

- Butterflies in your stomach before a job interview? That's natural nervousness.
- Avoiding social situations altogether because of extreme worry about being judged? That could be social anxiety.

Stress vs. Burnout

Everyone experiences stress—deadlines, responsibilities, or juggling roles can push anyone to the limit. Burnout, however, is a state of chronic emotional and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, often coupled with feelings of cynicism and inefficacy.

Example:

- Feeling overwhelmed by a busy week? Take a break; it's probably just stress.
- Struggling to care about work, feeling emotionally drained, and unable to recover even after rest? That's likely burnout.

Overthinking vs. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

der (OCD)

It's normal to worry about a mistake you made or replay a conversation in your mind. OCD involves intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors (compulsions) performed to alleviate anxiety.

Example:

- Double-checking if you locked the door? That's overthinking.
- Repeatedly washing your hands to the point of injury because you fear contamination? That could be OCD.

Why Mislabeled Matters

Misusing mental health terms can really undermine the experiences of those who genuinely struggle with their mental health. When everyone starts labelling their feelings as anxiety, it can make it harder for those dealing with severe anxiety disorders to get the support they need. It's similar with depression; if we casually describe normal challenges as depression, it can dilute



the seriousness of what someone with clinical depression experiences. Additionally, self-diagnosis often leads people down an uncertain path. When we rely on social media trends to label our feelings, it can create unnecessary stress and sometimes distract us from recognizing when we truly need professional help. It's so important to approach mental health with care and understanding, both for ourselves and for others.

What Can We Do?

Educate Yourself and Others

Learn the difference between normal emotional experiences and mental health conditions. Familiarize yourself with clinical definitions and share accurate information in your circles.

Use Language Carefully

Instead of saying "I'm depressed" when you're sad, try "I'm feeling down." This distinction respects those with actual mental health struggles while accurately describing your emotions.

Seek Help When Necessary

If you suspect your feelings go beyond normal, consult a mental health professional. They can provide clarity and support rather than relying on internet checklists or social media advice.

Practice Self-Care

Whether it's stress, sadness, or clinical anxiety, prioritizing self-care can help. Activities like exercise, journaling, mindfulness, and connecting with loved ones benefit overall mental health.

A Balanced Perspective

Recognizing mental health challenges is an important step forward, but we should be careful not to over-pathologize the human experience. Life includes its ups and downs, and not every difficult moment indicates an illness. By differentiating between normal emotions and actual mental health conditions, we can better support those in need while also embracing the full spectrum of human feelings. *(Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)*

North Korea's Kim vows toughest anti-US policy before Trump takes office

SEOUL, Dec 29: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he will implement the "toughest" anti-US policy, less than a month before Donald Trump takes office as US president, the country's state media reported Sunday.

Trump's return to the White House raises prospects for high-profile diplomacy with North Korea. During his first term, Trump met Kim three times for talks on the North's nuclear programme.

Many experts however say a quick resumption of Kim-Trump summits is unlikely as Trump would first focus on conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. North Korea's support for Russia's war against Ukraine also poses a challenge to efforts to revive diplomacy, experts say.

During a five-day plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party that ended Friday, Kim called the US "the most reactionary state that regards anti-communism as its invariable state policy." Kim said that the US-South Korea-Japan security partnership is expanding into "a nuclear military bloc for aggression."

"This reality clearly shows to which direction we should ad-



vance and what we should do and how," Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

It said Kim's speech "clarified the strategy for the toughest anti-US counteraction to be launched aggressively" by North Korea for its long-term national interests and security.

KCNA didn't elaborate on the anti-US strategy. But it said Kim set forth tasks to bolster military capability through defence technology advancements and stressed the need to improve the mental toughness of North Korean sol-

diers. The previous meetings between Trump and Kim had not only put an end to their exchanges of fiery rhetoric and threats of destruction, but they developed personal connections. Trump once famously said he and Kim "fell in love." But their talks eventually collapsed in 2019, as they wrangled over US-led sanctions on the North.

North Korea has since sharply increased the pace of its weapons testing activities to build more reliable nuclear missiles targeting the US and its allies.

The US and South Korea have

responded by expanding their military bilateral drills and also trilateral ones involving Japan, drawing strong rebukes from the North, which views such US-led exercises as invasion rehearsals.

Further complicating efforts to get North Korea to rid itself of nuclear weapons is its deepening military cooperation with Russia.

According to US, Ukrainian and South Korean assessments, North Korea has sent more than 10,000 troops and conventional weapons systems to support Moscow's war against Ukraine. There are concerns that Russia could give North Korea advanced weapons technology in return, including help to build more powerful nuclear missiles.

Russia and China, locked in separate disputes with the US, have repeatedly blocked US-led pushes to levy more UN sanctions on North Korea despite its repeated missile tests in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions.

Last month, Kim said that his past negotiations with the United States only confirmed Washington's "unchangeable" hostility toward his country and described his nuclear buildup as the only way to counter external threats. (AP)

Sri Lanka human rights body cries foul over denial to visit Rohingya 15 hurt in Florida when train hits fire truck that drove onto tracks after another train passed

COLOMBO, Dec 29: Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission has written a letter to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake alleging that they have been denied permission to meet Rohingya refugees staying at a military camp since last week.

"On December 26, a team of officials from the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), including a director, attempted to monitor the detention conditions of these asylum seekers at the Sri Lanka Air Force Camp in Mullaithivu in the Northern Province. However, they were refused access to the asylum seekers," the letter said.

The Sri Lanka Navy on December 20 said they had rescued over 100 Rohingyas from Myanmar in a distressed condition in the seas off the island's northeastern coast.

They were spotted by local fishermen in the Mullaithivu district's Vellamullaivaikkal area. The government later said their arrival could be due to a human trafficking racket.

"Investigations revealed that they had deliberately landed here and we consider them as illegal immigrants," Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Arun Hemachandra was quoted as saying by The Sunday Times here.

The HRCSL letter stated that the powers and functions of the commission extend not only to Sri Lanka citizens but to "any person" detained within Sri Lanka.

The commission said it had the statutory authority to access the said Air Force Camp and monitor the detention conditions of all asylum seekers, including the children present there.

The HRCSL has summoned the controller general of immigration and emigration and other responsible officials who obstructed the commission's attempts to monitor the detention conditions to appear before it on December 31 to provide an explanation. (PTI)

DELRAY BEACH (US), Dec 29: Three firefighters and a dozen passengers were injured in Florida on Saturday when a fire truck with its lights flashing drove around rail crossing arms and into the path of a high-speed passenger train after waiting for another train to pass, according to video of the incident and a person briefed on what happened.

The crash happened at 10:45 am in crowded downtown Delray Beach. In the aftermath the Brightline train was stopped on the tracks, its front destroyed, about a block away from the Delray Beach Fire Rescue truck. Its ladder was ripped off and in the grass several yards away. The Sun-Sentinel reported.

The Delray Beach Fire Rescue said in a social media post that three Delray Beach firefighters were in stable condition at a hospital. Palm Beach County Fire Rescue took 12 people from the train to the hospital with minor injuries.

The person familiar with the details of the crash, who was not authorised to disclose what happened because of the ongoing investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity, said the fire truck stopped at the crossing and waited for a freight train to go by before maneuvering around the lowered crossing arms.

Video of the collision shows the fire truck driving around cars stopped at the crossing with its lights flashing to cross the double tracks.

Emmanuel Amaral rushed to the scene on his golf cart after hearing a loud crash and screeching train brakes from where he was having breakfast a couple of blocks away. He saw firefighters climbing out of the front window of their damaged truck and pulling in-

jured colleagues away from the tracks. One of their helmets came to rest several hundred feet away from the crash.

"The front of that train is completely smashed, and there was even some of the parts to the fire truck stuck in the front of the train, but it split the car right in half. It split the fire truck right in half, and the debris was everywhere," Amaral said.

A Brightline safety officer said the entire community is involved in ensuring railroad safety and drivers should never go around closed gates.

The Federal Railroad Administration will investigate. A spokesperson for the National Transportation Safety Board said in the afternoon that it was still gathering information about the crash and had not decided yet whether to investigate.

The NTSB is already investigating two crashes involving Brightline's high-speed trains that killed three people early this year at the same crossing in Melbourne along the railroad's route between Miami and Orlando.

More than 100 people have died after being hit by trains since Brightline began operations in July 2017 — giving the railroad the worst death rate in the nation. But most of those deaths have been either suicides, pedestrians who tried to run across the tracks ahead of a train or drivers who went around crossing gates instead of waiting for a train to pass. Brightline has not been found to be at fault in those previous deaths.

Railroad safety has been a concern since a Norfolk Southern train derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, in February 2023, spilling toxic chemicals that caught fire. (AP)

Musk vows to 'go to war' to defend H-1B visa programme; Trump sides with him

WASHINGTON, Dec 29: Elon Musk has received support from President-elect Donald Trump on his stance on H-1B visas, a day after the tech billionaire vowed to "go to war" to defend the programme used to bring skilled foreign workers to the US.

Musk, who along with Indian-American tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy has been tapped by Trump to lead his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), argued last week that foreign workers are needed for tech companies like Musk's SpaceX and Tesla.

Musk on Friday blasted a user on X who used a video of Musk discussing SpaceX processes to go after the billionaire's stance on the visa programme.

"The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H1B," Musk wrote on X.

He also used a profane quote from Tom Cruise's character in the movie "Tropic Thunder" to attack his critics.

"Take a big step back and F--- YOURSELF in the face," Musk said. Trump on Saturday sided with Musk, saying he fully backs the programme opposed by some of his supporters.

"I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them," Trump told the New York Post newspaper.

"I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It's a great programme," Trump said. The H-1B visa is a non-immi-

grant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The tech industry has long called for more H-1B visas to attract highly skilled workers to the US. Trump's first administration restricted the programme in 2020, arguing that it allows businesses to replace Americans with lower-paid foreign workers.

Musk himself once on an H-1B visa and whose electric vehicle company Tesla has hired workers using the programme, defended the tech industry's need to bring in foreign workers.

"Anyone — of any race, creed or nationality — who came to America and worked like hell to contribute to this country will forever have my respect. America is the land of freedom and opportunity. Fight with every fiber of your being to keep it that way!" he wrote on X on Friday.

Musk also lashed out at those who prioritise personal gain over the well-being of the country.

"This is the right position for those who want America to win. For those who want America to lose for their own personal gain, I have no respect. Zero," he said in a separate post.

Musk has been consistently posting on X in favour of the programme.

"There is a permanent shortage of excellent engineering talent. It is the fundamental limiting factor in Silicon Valley," Musk wrote on December 25 on X.

Several of Trump's supporters and immigration hardliners have been increasingly pushing for scrapping the H-1B visa programme amid debate over immigration.

The debate sparked when Laura Loomer, a right-wing influencer, criticised Trump's selection of Indian-American entrepreneur Sri Ram Krishnan as an adviser on artificial intelligence policy in his coming administration. Krishnan favours the ability to bring more skilled immigrants into the US.

Loomer declared the stance to be "not America First policy" and said the tech executives who have aligned themselves with Trump were doing so to enrich themselves.

The debate intensified when Ramaswamy criticised American culture for promoting mediocrity instead of focusing on academic excellence and success on the basis of merit.

"Trump's election hopefully marks the beginning of a new golden era in America, but only if our culture fully wakes up. A culture that once again prioritises achievement over normalcy; excellence over mediocrity; nerdiness over conformity; hard work over laziness," Ramaswamy said on Thursday.

He faced backlash for the comment.

In response, Musk called for removing "contemptible fools" from the Republican Party who oppose his immigration agenda.

Musk later clarified that his statement was addressing the "hateful, unrepentant racists" he considers a threat to the Republican Party's future. (PTI)

Palestinian shot dead in West Bank home, her family blames Palestinian security forces

JENIN (WEST BANK), Dec 29: A Palestinian woman was shot and killed in her home in the volatile northern West Bank town of Jenin, where the Palestinian Authority is carrying out a rare campaign against militants.

The family of Shatha al-Sabbagh, a 22-year-old journalism student, said she was killed by a sniper with the Palestinian security forces late Saturday while she was with her mother and two small children. They said there were no militants in the area at the time.

A statement from the Palestinian security forces said she was shot by "outlaws" — the term it has been using for local militants who have been battling Israeli forces in recent years. The security forces condemned the shooting and vowed to investigate it.

Separately, a fourth infant has died of hypothermia in the Gaza Strip, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by nearly 15 months of war are huddled in tents along the rainy, windswept coast.

The Western-backed Palestinian Authority exercises limited self-rule in parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. It is deeply unpopular among Palestinians, largely because it cooperates with Israel on security matters, even as Israel accuses it of incitement and of generally turning a blind eye to militancy.

In a statement, the al-Sabbagh family accused the Palestinian security forces of having become "repressive tools that practice terrorism against their own people instead of protecting their dignity and standing up to the (Israeli) occupation."

The Hamas militant group also blamed the security forces and condemned the shooting. It noted that al-Sabbagh was the sister of one of its fighters who was killed in a battle with Israeli troops last year.

Palestinian security forces launched a rare operation earlier this month in Jenin, which has seen heavy fighting between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in recent years. The Palestinian Authority says the operation is aimed at restoring law and order, while critics charge it is aiding the occupation.

Violence has flared in the West Bank since Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on Gaza triggered the war there. At least 835 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since then, according to the Palestinian Authority. Most appear to have been militants killed in clashes with Israeli forces, but the dead also include civilians and participants in violent demonstrations.

Israel captured the West Bank, along with Gaza and east Jerusalem, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories for a future state. (AP)

Pakistan 2024: Troubled ties with neighbours, economic woes and a problem called Khan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 29: Pakistan was haunted by political uncertainty, economic instability, a deteriorating security situation and troubled relations with neighbours in 2024. But what defined the year were not just these perennial ills but the country's inability to tackle incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan.

Amid political turbulence, Pakistan hosted a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) conclave, which was also attended by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar — the first high-ranking Indian minister in nearly a decade to visit Islamabad amid frosty ties between the two neighbours. The last Indian foreign minister to visit Pakistan was Sushma Swaraj. She had travelled to Islamabad to attend the 'Heart of Asia' conference on Afghanistan in December 2015.

In his address at the SCO event, Jaishankar said, "If friendship has fallen short and good neighbourliness is missing somewhere, there are surely reasons to introspect and causes to address."

He also said if activities across borders are "characterised" by terrorism, extremism and separatism, they are hardly likely to encourage trade, energy flows and connectivity in parallel. His remarks were seen as directed towards Pakistan, which has troubled relations with all its neighbours.

If the year began with Iran conducting missile strikes within Pakistan in January, targeting Baloch militants, it ended with Pakistan carrying out airstrikes in Afghanistan, killing at least 46 people, including women and children, according to Afghanistan's Taliban government. Pakistan says the target was militants.

Pakistan witnessed a series of terror attacks, particularly in troubled Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provinces in 2024, among the toughest years for its se-

curity forces.

According to the details shared with Parliament by the interior ministry, 924 people were killed and 2,121 injured in 1,566 terrorism incidents in the first 10 months of the year. At least 573 dead and 1,353 injured belonged to law enforcement agencies, including the army.

On the economic front, Pakistan was on the verge of default in 2022 and only averted it due to the timely intervention by the International Monetary Fund.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif takes credit for pulling the country back from the brink of bankruptcy and turning around the economy.

In 2024 inflation came down to single digits, policy rates reduced from 22.5 to 15 per cent, foreign exchange reserves improved, and the stock market made record gains.

But it was jailed former prime minister Imran Khan who often hogged the headlines.

In the elections in February, independent candidates backed by Khan's party surprised everyone by winning more than 100 out of the 226 seats in a hung parliament.

And then the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz threw in a surprise, nominating Shehbaz Sharif as the prime ministerial candidate instead of the party supreme and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif.

As the PML-N and the Pakistan Peoples Party struck a power-sharing deal to form a coalition government led by Shehbaz, Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) decided to sit in the Opposition.

Khan was arrested in August 2023 after his conviction in a case of corruption and has remained behind bars since then.

Contrary to expectations, his popularity swelled in 2024, proving right his words — uttered before he was ousted as PM in 2022 after losing a trust vote in Parliament — that he would be "more dangerous when out of power." (AP)

Pak soldier killed, 11 wounded in firing by Afghan Taliban forces

ISLAMABAD, Dec 29: A Pakistan paramilitary soldier has been killed and 11 others injured in firing by the Afghan Taliban forces at the border posts of Pakistan troops, days after strikes by Pakistan targeted the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) militants.

According to defence sources, the Afghan troops resorted to "unprovoked fire on multiple Pakistani border posts" in the Upper Kurram district on Saturday morning.

They fired at posts in Ghozgarhi, Matha Sangar, Kot Ragma and Tari Mengal areas using both light and heavy weaponry, sources said. Pakistani forces retaliated, inflicting significant

losses on the other side as seven to eight personnel of the Afghan forces were killed in the exchange of fire, sources added.

However, in the fire exchange, a "Frontier Constabulary (FC) soldier was killed and 11 others were injured".

The incident of firing occurred days after Pakistan targeted terrorist positions in Paktika province of Afghanistan to punish the banned TTP militants, allegedly using Afghan soil to train and attack Pakistan.

The Saturday attack came after militants made an infiltration attempt on Friday night, using the posts controlled by the Afghan Taliban

to cross into Pakistani territory, but the attempt was thwarted.

"The firing was effectively responded to and there are confirmed reports of heavy losses on the Afghan side with over 15 militants killed and many others wounded," according to sources.

Reportedly, the Afghan forces abandoned their posts and left the area after the incident.

Relations between Pakistan and Taliban-led Afghanistan have deteriorated gradually since they came to power in 2021 because the latter allegedly failed to rein in the TTP rebels who have increased attacks on the Pakistani forces. (PTI)

Croatia holds presidential election with incumbent NATO, EU critic considered favourite

Zagreb, Dec 29: Croatia's left-leaning president, an outspoken critic of Western military support for Ukraine in its war against Russia, is running for reelection in the Adriatic Sea state, but is unlikely to get an outright majority in the first round of voting on Sunday.

President Zoran Milanovic, who is often compared to Donald Trump for his combative style of communication with political opponents, faces seven other contenders, including Dragan Primorac, the candidate of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union.

The two are expected to face off in the second round on January 12 if no contender gets more than 50 per cent of the vote, according to pre-election polls.

The most popular politician in Croatia, 58-year-old Milanovic had served as prime minister in the past. Populist in style, Milanovic has been a fierce critic of current Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and continuous sparring between the two has lately marked Croatia's political scene.



Plenkovic, the prime minister, has sought to portray the vote as one about Croatia's future in the EU and NATO. He has labelled Milanovic "pro-Russian" and a threat to Croatia's international standing.

"The difference between him and Milanovic is quite simple: Milanovic is leading us East, Primorac is leading us West," he said. Though the presidency is

largely ceremonial in Croatia, an elected president holds political authority and acts as the supreme commander of the military.

Milanovic has criticised the NATO and European Union support for Ukraine and has often insisted that Croatia should not take sides. He has said Croatia should stay away from global disputes, thought it is a member of both NATO and the EU.

Milanovic has also blocked Croatia's participation in a NATO-led training mission for Ukraine, declaring that "no Croatian soldier will take part in somebody else's war."

His main rival in the election, Primorac, has stated that "Croatia's place is in the West, not the East." His presidency bid, however, has been marred by a high-level corruption case that landed Croatia's health minister in jail last month and which featured prominently in pre-election debates.

Trailing a distant third in the pre-election polls is Marija Selak Raspudic, a conservative independent candidate. She has focused her election campaign on the economic troubles of ordinary citizens, corruption and issues such as population decline in the country of some 3.8 million.

Sunday's presidential election is Croatia's third vote this year, following a snap parliamentary election in April and the European Parliament balloting in June. (AP)

Three die off northern France coast in Channel crossing attempt



PARIS, Dec 29: At least three migrants died early Sunday while attempting to cross the English Channel to Britain from northern France, authorities said.

The deaths were confirmed after an early morning rescue operation involving French emergency services and the navy's "Dauphin" helicopter.

The prefecture described the attempted crossing as "difficult," with around 50 people stranded in the water and on the beach near Sangatte at around 6 am. Rescuers assisted 45 individuals, including four who were transported to hospitals.

Three unconscious people were pulled from the water but could not be revived, despite efforts by medical teams.

An investigation has been opened by prosecutors in Boulogne-sur-Mer.

Sunday's tragedy comes during a spike in Channel crossing attempts as 2024 draws to a close. Officials have noted a significant increase in attempted crossings over the past days.

This year has been one of the deadliest for migrants attempting the perilous journey between France and England, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Despite French and British efforts to stop it, the route remains a major smuggling corridor for people fleeing conflict or poverty.

Migrants favour the UK for reasons of language, family ties or perceived easier access to asylum and work. (AP)

‘Hydropower generation is only the secondary goal’ Siang project to mitigate flood risks posed by China: Arunachal CM

ITANAGAR, Dec 29: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), estimated to cost ₹ 1.13 lakh crore, was being planned by the Centre not just for generating electricity but to maintain the natural flow of the river all year round and mitigate risks of flooding if China released excess water.

Khandu's remarks came in the wake of China approving the construction of the world's largest dam, at a cost of USD 137 billion, on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet close to the Indian border. The dam is to be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra river makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh.

"The SUMP, with an estimated installed capacity of 11,000 mw, is not just about generating power, but also about maintaining the natural flow of the Siang river and mitigating potential flood risks from water releases by China," Khandu told PTI in an interview. Describing SUMP as a project of national importance, he said hydropower generation is only the secondary goal of it.

"The real objective of the project is to save the Siang river and the communities that have depended on it for generations," he said.

The survey for preparing the pre-feasibility report of the projects is yet to be done amid stiff opposition from locals who are concerned about displacement, loss of livelihoods, and environmental impact of the mega dam.

Warning of severe consequences if China's project moves ahead "without safeguards", Khandu said the neighbouring country's plans to divert water from the Brahmaputra into its arid regions could drastically reduce the flow of the Siang river during winters.

"In such a scenario, the volume of water



could decrease so much that one might be able to cross the mighty river on foot," he claimed.

"The proposed Siang project would create a reservoir capable of storing 9 billion cubic meters of water. This would ensure the river maintains a consistent flow, even during dry seasons. Additionally, the reservoir would act as a buffer in case of sudden water releases from upstream Chinese dams, potentially averting catastrophic flooding in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Bangladesh," he said.

Acknowledging the ongoing bilateral discussions between India and China, the CM cautioned against "complacency".

"China is unpredictable and can do anything," Khandu said, underscoring the need for India to remain vigilant.

"We cannot take chances when it comes to national security and the welfare of our people," he said.

The Chinese government approved the

construction of the hydropower project in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo river, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra. It is expected to generate more than 300 billion kWh of electricity each year – enough to meet the annual needs of over 300 million people.

The total investment in the dam could exceed one trillion yuan (USD 137 billion), which would dwarf any other single infrastructure project on the planet, including China's own Three Gorges Dam, regarded as the largest in the world.

On the concerns of the locals, Khandu said the government would conduct extensive surveys before finalising the plans.

"Only after these studies, we will know the exact location of the dam, its height, and the submergence area," he said, adding that a public hearing will be held to listen to people's concerns.

The CM said India was a democratic country, and it does not believe in "forcing

things on its people.

However, he criticised activists, accusing them of spreading misinformation among villagers about the project.

He claimed that these activists were instigating people without providing accurate information about the project's benefits.

"I urge people to come forward and get their confusions addressed through dialogue," he said.

Khandu also spoke about the state's broader hydropower development plans.

He said the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) recently sanctioned ₹ 1,750 crore for the 186 mw Tato-I Hydro Electric Project and ₹ 1,939 crore for the 240 mw Heo Hydro Electric Project in the Shi Yomi district.

The CM said the state has signed agreements with NHPC, NEEPCO, THDCIL, and SJVN to develop 13 hydropower projects with a combined capacity of over 11,000 mw. Once completed, these projects are expected to generate substantial revenue for the state.

The Centre has also approved a significant equity support scheme to boost hydropower development in the Northeast, he said.

Under this initiative, ₹ 4,136 crore has been allocated to northeastern states to develop hydroelectric projects with a cumulative capacity of 15,000 mw by 2032.

"This initiative will transform the hydro-electric landscape of Arunachal Pradesh and the northeast region," Khandu said, adding the Centre has also agreed to increase the Local Area Development Fund (LADF) contribution from power projects to over 2 per cent.

"We are taking steps to ensure that Arunachal Pradesh becomes a powerhouse for the nation while protecting the interests of our people and environment," he added. (PTI)

Four labourers held for staying in Manipur without valid ILP cards



IMPHAL, Dec 29: Four people were held in Manipur's Thoubal district for allegedly violating the Inner Line Permit system, CM N Biren Singh said.

They were apprehended from Yairipok Bishnunaha on Saturday and steps are being taken for their "deportation", he said.

"Today, four non-local laborers were apprehended for violating the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system. They were found residing without valid ILP cards and overstay at the Yairipok Bishnunaha water reservoir construction site," he said in a post on X.

They were identified as Afsar Ali (22), Md Sanfaraj (20), Md Rahmatullah (23) and Sahabaj Alam

(20), the CM said.

"The defaulters were taken into custody by Yairipok Police Station and have been produced before the Executive Magistrate, Thoubal. Legal action will be initiated against them as per the provisions of the ILP system, and steps are being taken to deport them from the state," he said.

Singh appealed to all employers, contractors, and locals to cooperate with the authorities in implementing the ILP system effectively.

ILP is a document issued by the government to allow Indian citizens to travel in a protected state for a limited period. It is obligatory for Indian citizens from outside those states to obtain this permit. (PTI)

Speeding train severely injures elephant in Tripura

AGARTALA, Dec 29: A full-grown elephant was severely injured after allegedly being hit by a speeding train in Tripura's Khowai district, an official said on Sunday.

District Forest Officer (DFO) Akshay Balu Bhorde told PTI that the elephant was bleeding profusely following the accident that happened on Saturday night.

It was given preliminary treatment and a team from the state veterinary hospital was sent to the spot, he said.

"A local train, which was going from Agartala to Dharmangar on Saturday night, hit the elephant at Champlai. The elephant herd was moving from one habitation to another when the accident happened," Bhorde said.

"The train, which was supposed to run at low speed (20 km per hour) as it is an elephant corridor, might have crossed to 50 km per hour, leading to severe injuries to the elephant," he said.

Bhorde said both back legs of the elephant were severely fractured, and it cannot even crawl due to the injuries.

Northeast Frontier Railway's CPRO Kapinjal Kishore Sharma, however, said, "It was not exactly known what has happened because the loco pilot is not aware of any mishap."

"The loco pilot cautiously passed the elephant corridor. A probe is on to know what exactly occurred on Saturday night," he added.

The forest officer said that an elephant had died in February after being hit by a train at Champlai, a designated elephant corridor.

"After the February incident, we had asked the railway authorities to limit the speed while crossing the elephant corridor between Teliamura and Mugjakami. Last night's incident could have been avoided had the loco pilot operated the train within the speed limit of 20 km per hour as we had suggested," he said. (PTI)

No major law and order issues during Christmas in Mizoram: Police



AIZAWL, Dec 29: Christmas celebrations were peaceful across Mizoram, with no major law and order issues in the northeastern state during the festivities, a top police officer said on Sunday.

Although there were minor cases relating particularly to burglary and illegal selling of firecrackers, the crime rate has been low this year in comparison to the festive period in the past few years, Inspector General of Police (Headquarters) Lalbiakthanga Khiantge said.

He also lauded people for adhering to laws and government orders.

Khiantge said comprehensive security measures are in place to ensure peaceful New Year celebrations.

Around 28 criminal cases were registered in police stations in the Aizawl region between December 24 and December 29, of which burglary cases were 22, the officer said.

Two persons were arrested for selling banned firecrackers during the period, he said.

At least 47 people were arrested for breaking traffic rules during the Christmas festivities, and three unnatural death cases were reported, Khiantge said. (PTI)

CCTVs installation in Tripura schools underway phase wise; Govt tells HC

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 29: The Tripura Government has submitted before the High Court of the state that the government is in process of ensuring the safety concerns of the children by installation of CCTV's at vantage positions in the school.

The government said this while Tripura High Court was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking directions to ensure safety and security measures in schools across the state.

The PIL was filed by Advocate Kundan Pandey and heard by Chief Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh and Justice Biswajit Palit.

As per the hearing it indicates that in eight districts of Tripura comprising 4905 schools, only 218 schools have CCTV cameras in-



stalled.

"Further averments as to the information sought by the petitioner-in-person under RTI have been delineated 0 of the additional counter-affidavit. Statement has also been made that under the new Education Policy, 2020, guidelines on school safety

and security has been shared by the District Education Officers concerned with all the stakeholders' school management in the matter of safety and security of the children studying in the school", the high court order reads.

In the order it was mentioned that during the hearing Learned Government Advocate SM Chakraborti and Kohinoor N Bhattacharya has also conveyed that there are various categories of children identified from the weaker sections under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 in respect of whom notification dated July 15 of 2022 has been issued by the State to provide them the legal entitlements.

"Learned Government Advocate

submits that the government is in process of ensuring that safety concerns of the children by installation of CCTV's at vantage positions in the school are taken up and installed in a phased manner. However, he submits that so far as the privately managed schools are concerned, the State has issued guidelines as per the National Education Policy, 2020. He submits that the deliberation would be held with the State Officials on the issue of installation of CCTV cameras by the privately managed schools", the order reads.

Learned Advocate General has also appeared and submitted that the matter would be taken up with the competent authority under the State.

However the next hearing would be held on February 06 of 2025.

Manmohan Singh's contributions to Manipur's development hailed

IMPHAL, Dec 29: Manipur Congress Legislature Party Leader Okram Ibobi Singh on Sunday praised former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for his significant contributions to the development of the Northeast, particularly Manipur, during his 10-year term.

Speaking to reporters, the CLP leader recalled the former PM's deep affection for Manipur, noting that he accorded the special category status to the state.

"This support led to the construction of a new assembly, high court building, and civil secretariat. Infrastructure in the hill districts was also developed, with district hospitals and power substations built during Manmohan Singh's tenure," he added.

State Congress president Keisham Meghachandra also acknowledged Singh's contributions, emphasising that he will be remembered in Manipur's history for being the first PM to lift the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from the state. "The lifting of AFSPA from seven assembly segments and the return of Kangla Fort from the Assam Rifles to the people of Manipur were significant milestones, fulfilling long-standing demands," he added.

Earlier, Congress leaders and workers paid floral tributes to Singh during a "condolence meeting" held at the Congress Bhavan. (PTI)



Akash Sagar's video posted one week after Church visit

SHILLONG, Dec 29: Police investigation has revealed that Akash Sagar had gone to the Church of Epiphany at Mawlynnong in East Khasi Hills - also known as the cleanest village in Asia - days before he uploaded the video on social media.

"Sagar had gone and committed the act one week before he uploaded the same on social media," East Khasi Hills SP Sylvester Nongtger has said. The police had registered a case against one Akash Sagar following an FIR filed against him. It is alleged that Sagar had uploaded the video, where he was seen entering the church and shouting "Jai Shree Ram" and singing a Hindu song. Nongtger said that Sagar is not a resident of the state and had gone to Mawlynnong village as a tourist. He said that police are on the job to locate the accused's place of origin.

Earlier, attempts were also made to check the airports.

On December 26, the Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR) leader Angela Rangad had filed an FIR against a social media user for "criminally trespassing" the Church of Epiphany at Mawlynnong in East Khasi Hills - also known as the cleanest village in Asia - and shouted non-Christian slogans allegedly aimed at creating communal disharmony.

In a complaint lodged with the Laitumkrah police station, Rangad had said, "Recently I came across videos on social media, Facebook and Instagram by one Akash Sagar, where he is found criminally trespassing the Church of Epiphany, Mawlynnong, East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya and deliberately desecrating the religious sanctity of the church by deliberately and in a premeditated and planned way trespassed into the altar area and

MAWLYNNONG INCIDENT

shouted non-Christian slogans and mockingly sang non-Christian songs."

"This act was deliberately and in collusion with two others who appear in the video, done to create communal disharmony, insulting the minority culture and to establish a majoritarian culture of hate in violation of all constitutional rights of religious freedom," she added.

Rangad also alleged that this video creates a culture of fear and is liable to create public disorder while adding moreover these videos are being shared widely by handles promoting religious majoritarianism and hate.

"I therefore appeal to you to take strong legal action against this person involved in this criminal

act and criminal conspiracy and also ask the social media platforms to ban these videos, their creator and the people and groups that are sharing these. This person needs to be booked and legal action should ensue to ensure that such criminal acts that threaten the peace do not take place again," the TUR leader had stated in the FIR.

Meanwhile, the Central Puja Committee (CPC) had also noted with anguish a video, presently circulating on social media, wherein one individual by the name of Akash Sagar is seen involved in deliberately outraging and violating the religious sanctity of a church located in Mawlynnong in East Khasi Hills.

In a statement on Thursday, CPC president N. Bhattacharjee had said, "We strongly condemn the activity of this individual and urge the district administration to investigate the matter and initiate immediate action as per law and take stringent exemplary action against the offender."

He said that Meghalaya is known all over the country for upholding religious harmony among all faiths residing in the state, which at no cost should be allowed to be affected by such irresponsible acts of an individual to disrupt the unique age-old brotherhood among people of different religion and faith. (NNN)

Gandhi family has no respect for non Gandhi Congress leaders: Pralhad Joshi

AGARTALA, Dec 29: Union minister Pralhad Joshi on Sunday alleged that the Gandhi family has never accorded respect to non-Gandhi Congress leaders.

He dismissed the Congress accusation that the Centre insulted Manmohan Singh, the country's first Sikh prime minister, by performing his last rites at Nigambohd Ghat instead of a designated spot that could be turned into his memorial as "unfortunate and cheap politics".

"Despite our ideological and political differences with former prime minister Manmohan Singh, he is the most respectful person. Union Home Minister Amit Shah following the wish of Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken all possible initiatives to accord full state honour to Singh's funeral", he told PTI.

He claimed, "Not only former prime minister (Manmohan Singh), the Congress did not accord due respect to another former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao and former president Pranab Mukherjee. Now Pranab Mukherjee's daughter said that the Congress did not convene a CWC meeting after the death of her father."

"In fact, the Gandhi family has never given respect to the non-Gandhi Congress leaders. They did not even give the Bharat Ratna award to former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao and respect to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The Gandhi family must introspect on all these", he added.

Joshi, the Union minister of consumer affairs, food and public distribution & new and renewable energy, is on a two-day visit to Tripura to review the centrally sponsored schemes of his ministries. (PTI)

Focus on empowering women, self-reliance for Youth: Tripura CM

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Dec 29: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday said that the government is working towards empowering women in rural areas and has initiated efforts to make the youth self-reliant.

"The state government is working for the overall development of women under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Special importance has also been given to improving their socio-economic conditions. Along with this, initiatives have been taken to make the youth self-reliant," he said.

Saha made these remarks while participating in a winter clothing (blanket) distribution program in the Taltala area of Ward No. 40 of Baradowali Assembly Constituency on Sunday.

During the program, the chief minister emphasised that blanket distribution is not merely a donation, but a means of building good relations with the people. "That is why we have arranged this small initiative today," he added.

"It feels good to be here today. The face of Tripura is gradually changing after our



government came to power in 2018. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given special importance to the development of the North Eastern region through the Act East Policy. There is no talk except for overall development. Now in the North Eastern region, everything is improving, from national highways to the internet, railways, airways, and

waterways. We have benefited a lot from the Prime Minister's diamond model. The current state government is working towards development," he said.

The chief minister also stated that the government is working towards making women in rural areas self-reliant.

"The number of self-help groups has in-

creased several times compared to before. About four lakh women from all over the state have joined these groups. Empowering women is one of our priorities. The state government is working in the direction set by the Prime Minister for the overall development of women. Special importance has been given to improving their socio-economic conditions. Along with this, initiatives have been taken to make the youth self-reliant. They are being brought under various schemes," said Saha.

Saha further informed that offers for Group D posts will be released very soon.

"Since this government came to power, the DA of employees has been increased. No agitation was needed for this. This government is a very sensitive government," he added.

Additionally, in a separate program on the same day, Saha participated in another winter clothing (blanket) distribution program in Arundhati Nagar area of Ward No. 39 of Town No 8 Baradowali Assembly Constituency and handed over blankets to the citizens of the area.

Akhilesh pitches for ballot voting, says EVMs not trustworthy

'Even faces of those who win elections seem dejected as they too do not have faith in the system'

LUCKNOW, Dec 29: Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav has called for elections to be conducted using ballot papers, citing a lack of trust in electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said this at a press conference at the SP headquarters here on Sunday, alongside Rahul Kumar Kamboj, an Indian-origin member of Parliament in Germany.

"Even a country like Germany conducts elections using ballot papers. But in India, elections are conducted with EVMs to serve vested interests," Yadav said.

Emphasising the need for elections that inspire confidence, he said, "No one trusts EVMs. Even the faces of those who win elections seem dejected as they too do not have faith in the system."

At the press conference, Kamboj



highlighted the benefits of Germany's ballot-paper voting system. "In Germany, voting is still conducted using ballot papers. It is an important system because any discrepancies can be addressed with a

recount," he explained. Reflecting on his visit to Lucknow and his longstanding relationship with Yadav, Kamboj said, "My efforts are focused on fostering a collaboration between Indian-origin

individuals and Germany, so that the qualities of both countries can come together. We aim to facilitate cultural exchanges and I invite everyone to participate in the upcoming cultural festivals in Germany. Visa issues will no longer be a hurdle," he said.

Kamboj also spoke of building a bridge between opportunities in Europe and their implementation in India, specifically in Uttar Pradesh.

"If we can identify the opportunities available in Germany and Europe, and bring them to places like Lucknow, it will open new avenues. That is my mission," he added.

Welcoming Kamboj, Yadav expressed enthusiasm for strengthening ties. "Your visit has created an opportunity to deepen the relationship between our regions, which will benefit the people of this state and country," he said.

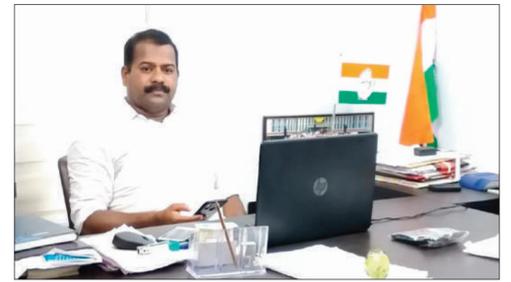
Highlighting the need for a stronger future for the next generation, Yadav said, "Our youngsters need better education, training and skills to secure good jobs. Building bridges between opportunities will open pathways to progress."

Sharing a personal anecdote, Yadav recounted his government trip to Germany. "I remember visiting Frankfurt and deciding to travel to Hannover by road.

The roads in Germany are among the best and that inspired me to replicate them in Uttar Pradesh. Today, when people drive on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, they feel that it is one of the best roads in the world," he said.

Yadav reiterated his commitment to creating opportunities for the younger generation while strengthening ties between India and Germany. (PTI)

Congress leader's death CPI(M) wants to invoke abetment charges against MLA



WAYANAD (KERALA), Dec 29: The suicide of a local Congress leader and his bedridden son has triggered a political row in Kerala's Wayanad as the ruling CPI(M) alleged that a cooperative bank job scam involving the grand old party's MLA I C Balakrishnan was the reason for their extreme step.

However, Balakrishnan has denied the charges. Wayanad District Congress Committee (DCC) treasurer and former Sultan Bathery panchayat president, N M Vijayan, 78, and his son Jijesh, 38 had breathed their last at Kozhikode Government Medical College Hospital on Friday.

Soon after their death, allegations cropped up that Vijayan, in his capacity as the office bearer of the party, had accepted money from many who aspired to get a job in a Congress-controlled cooperative bank under the direction of MLA Balakrishnan.

There were also reports that as the promised job appointments were not given, the deceased leader recently sent a letter to the KPCC chief requesting his intervention in the matter.

Though I C Balakrishnan, who represents Sulthan Bathery constituency, vehemently rejected the charges, the CPI(M) district leadership on Sunday urged the police to invoke abetment of suicide charges against him in the death of the Vijayan and his son.

"Earlier also, many people approached public activists with complaints on the recruitment issues. They did not reveal the complaints openly out of fear that they wouldn't get their money back. They also faced several threats," CPI(M) Wayanad district secretary

K Rafeeq said.

He said, as per his knowledge, those who had given money for the job, are now getting ready to pursue legal measures against the accused. Corruption issues were involved in the matter as money was accepted illegally promising jobs, he further said.

"A person who is holding the post of the MLA has a key role in the issue. There is also another issue that the KPCC leadership was not ready to intervene in it despite receiving a complaint. So, the CPI(M) is viewing it as a serious matter," Rafeeq added.

However, I C Balakrishnan said he would face the issue legally with the permission of the Congress party.

The MLA said he had not seen the purported document — circulated by a section of media — reportedly signed by the deceased leader and a job aspirant which allegedly said that ₹ 30 lakh was given for the appointment as directed by Balakrishnan.

Balakrishnan told reporters here that it was a fake document and he had no knowledge about a contract like this.

He also said that he would lodge a complaint to the district police chief soon.

Vijayan and his son Jijesh allegedly consumed poison at their home and were found by their neighbours in critical condition on Tuesday, police said.

They were initially admitted to a private hospital and later shifted to Kozhikode Medical College.

Vijayan was a prominent Congress leader in Wayanad. Jijesh, a former employee of Sultan Bathery Cooperative Bank, had been bedridden for an extended period due to health issues. (PTI)

Pranab's daughter seeks answers from Congress; alleges rot has set in party

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Sharmistha Mukherjee, the daughter of former president Pranab Mukherjee, alleged on Sunday that decay has set in the Congress and stressed the need for serious introspection on the "sad state of affairs" in the party.

Mukherjee lamented that several old Congress workers feel alienated from the party today due to the current state of affairs and the lack of an ideology among the top leaders.

She also raised questions as to why no Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting was convened after her father's death and a resolution passed.

Mukherjee said she felt bad when no CWC meeting was convened after her father's demise. The CWC is the highest decision-making body of the Congress.

"The Congress has to answer for this. I can only state the fact. But I would like to just add, I do not know whether it was deliberate or sheer negligence. What are the conventions in such a grand old party?" she asked.

"If there is this loss of institutional memory, if Rahul Gandhi and the people around him do not know how the Congress acted in these earlier situations, that itself is a serious and sad state of affairs within the Congress," Mukherjee told PTI Videos.

Asked about recognising the contributions of non-dynastic leaders in the Congress, she said, "Let us not forget what was done to (former prime minister) P V Narasimha Rao."

"The whole Congress ecosystem, as in, its social media was relentlessly trolling me and my father over this and some other issues. The kind of language that was used on me and one of the tallest leaders like my father shows that there is a real rot in the Congress. The Congress, rather than un-

leashing trolls on social media, should do serious introspection that why a person like me who believed in the hardcore Congress ideology, today feels alienated by the party," she said.

Earlier, in a post on X, Mukherjee said: "When baba passed away, Congress didn't even bother to call CWC for a condolence meeting. A senior leader told me it's not done for Presidents. That's utter rubbish as I learned later from baba's diaries that on K R Narayanan's death, CWC was called and condolence msg was drafted by baba only."

Speaking on the row over the setting up of a memorial for former prime minister Manmohan Singh, Mukherjee said she would not venture into the controversy as she is not part of the Congress anymore and has quit politics.

She, however, pitched for a memorial for Singh and said Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award of the country, should also be conferred on the former prime minister posthumously.

"I would not like to say anything about this, I am not associated with the Congress anymore, I have quit politics. The Congress needs to clarify what Rahul Gandhi has said.

"I think the demand to have a memorial for Manmohan Singh is absolutely justified. He was the architect of economic reforms in India, he was the father of India's growth story, he was a two-time prime minister. So the demand for a memorial in his honour is absolutely justified. Also, on behalf of the ordinary citizens of India, I demand Bharat Ratna for him, he thoroughly deserves it," Mukherjee said.

Singh passed away at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here on December 26. He was 92. (PTI)

Dravidianism and communism will stay forever: Stalin

CHENNAI, Dec 29: The ties between Dravidianism and communism were beyond electoral politics and the "ideological friendship" would stay on forever, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin said on Sunday.

The "political friendship" between the two movements may have taken the occasional break, he said in an apparent reference to alliance regrouping, "but the ideological friendship will continue under all circumstances."

"It is bound to continue," the CM, also president of the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) said at an event to mark the birth centenary of freedom fighter and CPI veteran R Nallakannu, here.

Veteran Communist leader Singaravelar

had supported Periyar when he founded the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK).

In fact, DMK stalwart and former CM M Karunanidhi had once said he would have joined the communist movement if the DK did not come into existence, Stalin recalled.

"I myself am named Stalin," he said in an apparent reference to Russian communist leader Joseph Stalin.

"The friendship between the two movements is ideological friendship, beyond electoral politics. The best gift to be given to Nallakannu on the occasion of his birth centenary would be that of democratic forces joining hands against casteism, communalism, majoritarianism, and autocracy," Stalin said. (PTI)

CPI(M) has no links in Periya double murder, says its leader

PATHANAMTHITTA (KERALA), Dec 29: Reiterating the CPI(M)'s position that they had no involvement in the murder of two youth congress workers in Kerala's Periya five years ago, party central committee member A K Balan on Sunday said that neither the party nor its top leaders had any knowledge of the incident.

His views come in the wake of a CBI court convicting 14 accused including a former CPI(M) MLA in this case on Saturday.

Speaking to the media, the CPI(M) leader assured that the accused in the case would face the law. "The Kerala Police had taken a firm stance in the case right from the initial stages," he said, adding that the CBI merely completed the investigation initiated by the state police.

A special CBI court in Kochi on Saturday found 14 accused including a CPI(M) former MLA guilty in the murder of two Youth Congress workers Kripesh, 19, and



Sarith Lal P K, 24, allegedly carried out by CPI(M) workers on February 17, 2019.

The accused found guilty include former MLA and CPI(M) district leader K V Kunhiraman, Kanhangad block panchayat president K Manikandan, former CPI(M) Periya local committee member A Peethambaran, and former Pakkam local secretary Raghavan Velutholi.

According to the prosecution, the twin murders were carried out after politically motivated attacks and counterattacks between the workers of CPI(M) and Congress in

the area. "The Congress is accusing the CPI(M) of murder, but people know which party is truly the killing party," Balan said.

He alleged that a Congress worker had murdered a fellow party member in Thrissur a few years ago due to internal factional conflicts.

"Now, that same party is leveling accusations against the CPI(M)," he added. Earlier, Congress leaders attacked the CPI(M) terming the court verdict as a severe blow to the left party's "culture of violence". (PTI)

Kejriwal accuses BJP of manipulating electoral roll

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday accused the BJP of trying to manipulate voter list in the run-up to the Delhi Assembly elections.

Speaking at a press conference alongside Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, Kejriwal claimed the BJP was trying to win elections through "unfair means" after failing to present strong candidates or issues.

"BJP has already lost the elections. They don't have a chief ministerial face or even proper candidates. They only aim to win through manipulation, but we won't let them succeed," Kejriwal said.

The former Delhi chief minister also alleged that the BJP had filed 11,000 voter deletion applications in one constituency alone, but the move was halted at Chief Election Commissioner's intervention. "We exposed this, and thankfully, it was stopped."

Kejriwal said that a large-scale operation began on December 15, with 5,000 voter deletion applications and 7,500 addition requests filed so far in his assembly constituency, New Delhi.

He claimed this could alter 12 per cent of the constituency's votes. The total number of voters in the constituency, he said, is 1,06,873, as per the voter list published on October 29 after the summary revision, which was conducted between August 20 and October 20.

"Operation Lotus has now reached my constituency. They are attempting to manipulate the electoral rolls to change the election outcome," Kejriwal alleged. "This kind of manipulation undermines democracy. We appeal to the Election Commission to continue its strict monitoring to prevent such malpractice," he said.

The BJP is yet to respond to the allegations. (PTI)

AAP failed to give ₹ 1,000 to Punjab women: Ravneet Bittu



LUDHIANA, Dec 29: Union Minister of State Ravneet Singh Bittu on Sunday hit out at AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, saying his party failed to fulfill its poll promise of giving ₹ 1,000 to every woman in Punjab and is now "peddling a similar falsehood" in Delhi ahead of elections.

Bittu, who is the Minister of State for Railway and Food Processing Industries alleged that former Delhi chief minister has a proven track record of deception, adding that his empty promises are not worth the risk.

He further said the AAP government in Punjab has not yet provided ₹ 1,000 per month to women, a promise made by the party before

the 2022 assembly elections.

"Kejriwal's promise of ₹ 1,000 to every woman in Punjab in 2022 was a blatant lie, a deceitful tactic to lure voters. Three years have passed and the women of Punjab are still waiting for this promised financial support," Bittu, a BJP leader, posted on X.

"Now, he's at it again, peddling a similar falsehood in Delhi, promising ₹ 2,100 to the women of Delhi. This is nothing but a treacherous attempt to manipulate voters once more," Bittu alleged.

"I request the voters of Delhi: do not trust Kejriwal. He has a proven track record of deception, and his empty promises are not worth the risk. The women of Punjab have already fallen victim to his false assurances; don't let the women of Delhi suffer the same fate," Bittu said.

In its budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year, the Delhi government announced a scheme to provide ₹ 1,000 per month to all adult women.

However, Kejriwal recently announced that the amount would be raised to ₹ 2,100 if his party returns to power for a third consecutive term after the upcoming Delhi assembly elections. (PTI)

2024: India navigated geopolitical challenges with steely resolve, focused on expanding strategic heft

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: In a year marked by geopolitical tensions and turbulence, India and China ended an over four-and-a-half-year border standoff and announced steps to reduce mistrust even as New Delhi faced fresh challenges after deposed Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled the country in the face of a mass movement against her rule.

The year 2024 saw India shifting gears in expanding its strategic heft in the neighbourhood and beyond with a steely resolve while navigating the two most consequential crises -- the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

At the end of the year, New Delhi was readying its approach in dealing with US President-elect Donald Trump's second term amid fears that his policy approach relating to trade and tariff may have profound implications for international trade.

Though the overall India-US relations broadly continued to blossom, especially in the domains of defence, critical technologies and clean energy, the ties came under some strain over the so-called "murder for hire" case.

Washington has been pressing India to take action against Indians

allegedly involved in a foiled plot to assassinate pro-Khalistan separatist Gurbatwant Singh Panun in New York last year.

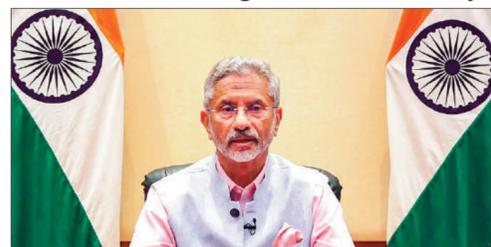
In November last year, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta of working with an Indian government employee in the plot.

The relations between India and Canada sharply nosedived in the second half of the year after Ottawa linked several Indian diplomats including High Commissioner Sanjay Verma to the murder of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

India strongly rejected the charges and recalled Verma even as the Canadian government said Indian diplomats were expelled. India expelled acting Canadian High Commissioner Stewart Wheeler and five other diplomats following Canada's allegations.

However, the end of the military faceoff between India and China along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh was the high point in the foreign policy domain.

A brutal clash at Galwan Valley in June 2020 that killed 20 Indian soldiers and an unspecified number of Chinese soldiers took relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbours to their lowest point in



six decades.

Following an understanding reached on October 21, the two sides completed the disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points of Demchok and Depsang.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks on the margins of the BRICS Summit in Russia on October 23 and agreed to revive various bilateral dialogue mechanisms, signalling an intention to normalise the relations.

In the nearly 50-minute meeting, Modi underscored the importance of properly handling differences and disputes and not allowing them to disturb peace and tranquillity in border areas.

Nearly four weeks later, the Special Representatives on the border issue -- India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's foreign minister Wang Yi held talks in Beijing.

It was the first dialogue under the framework of Special Representatives in nearly five years.

In the talks, Doval and Wang focused on "positive" direction for cross-border cooperation including resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, river data sharing and border trade.

There were indications of some positive approach in India-Pakistan relations as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to Islamabad in October to attend a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Or-

ganisation (SCO).

It was the first such visit from India to Pakistan in nearly a decade that came amid frosty ties between the two neighbours.

Jaishankar's exchange of pleasantries and brief interaction with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar triggered hopes of better ties between the two neighbours.

However, India's relations with Bangladesh also came under severe strain after deposed prime minister Hasina fled the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest that ended her nearly 16-year rule.

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5.

The relations nosedived dramatically after the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus failed to contain attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, in that country.

This month, the Yunus-government sent a diplomatic note to New Delhi seeking extradition of Hasina, a move that may further strain the ties.

The year also saw India forced to focus more on the neighbourhood with pro-China leaders helming governments in the Maldives and

Nepal.

Following insistence of Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, India withdrew all its military personnel from the Maldives, a key island nation for New Delhi in the Indian Ocean.

In June, top leaders from India's neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean region including Muizzu, Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe graced the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Modi.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Hasina, Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, his Bhutanese counterpart Tshering Tobgay and Vice-President of Seychelles Ahmed Afif also attended the glittering ceremony.

In his first foreign trip after becoming the prime minister for a third straight term, Modi travelled to Moscow in July.

In his meeting with President Vladimir Putin, Modi told him that a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield and peace efforts do not succeed in the midst of bombs and bullets.

Modi's visit to Russia triggered some criticism in the West as the trip came amid global outrage over

a Russian missile strike on a children's hospital in Kyiv.

In his televised opening remarks at summit talks with Putin in the Kremlin, Modi said killing of innocent children is heart-wrenching and very painful.

In August, Modi travelled to Ukrainian capital city of Kyiv and conveyed to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that both Ukraine and Russia should sit together without wasting time to end the ongoing war and that India was ready to play an "active role" to restore peace in the region.

The prime minister said India was on the side of peace since the beginning of the conflict and he would even like to contribute personally for a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

Modi's nearly nine-hour visit to Ukraine was the first by an Indian prime minister since its independence in 1991.

In February, Qatar released eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel and seven of them returned home.

It was seen as a major diplomatic victory for India that came nearly three-and-a-half months after a Qatari court handed them death sentence. (PTI)

Maha Kumbh's message is unity, banishment of hate from society: PM

'New revolution is coming to Bastar'

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday described the upcoming 'Maha Kumbh' as the "Maha Kumbh of unity" as he asked people to return from the grand religious congregation with a resolve to banish hate and division from the society.

Speaking in his monthly Mann ki Baat broadcast, Modi said, "Maha Kumbh ka sandesh ek ho pura desh (Message from the Maha Kumbh should be that the entire country must be united)."

He added, "Ganga ki aviral dhara, na bante samaj hamara" (Like the uninterrupted flow of Ganga, let our society remain one).

Noting the diversity of people visiting the mammoth congregation, which will be held in Prayagraj from January 13, he said there is no other example of such a sight of unity in diversity.

"Maha Kumbh's speciality lies not just in its vastness but also in its diversity," he said.

The mega-religious event is held every 12 years.

Tens of millions of people congregate at the event, he said adding that saints, thousands of traditions, hundreds of sects and many akhars become its part.

"There is no discrimination anywhere. No one is big or small. Such a scene of unity in diversity will be seen anywhere else in the



world," he said.

"It is also the Maha Kumbh of unity. This time's Maha Kumbh will strengthen the mantra of Maha Kumbh of unity. When we participate in the Kumbh, let us bring along this resolve of unity with us. Let us also make a resolve to annihilate the feeling of division and hatred in the society," he added.

The prime minister said an AI chatbot will be deployed at the event for the first time, and the facility of digital navigation will help people reach different ghats, temples, and akhars of sadhus. Information related to the Maha Kumbh will be available in 11 Indian languages through the AI chatbot, he said.

Modi cited a WHO report to highlight an 80 per cent reduction

in the number of malaria cases and deaths in the country between 2015 and 2023. "This is no mean achievement."

In the tea gardens of Jorhat in Assam, malaria used to be a major cause of concern until four years ago but people's participation in a movement against the mosquito-borne disease has curbed it, he added.

Citing another success on the health front, the prime minister referred to a study in the medical journal Lancet that said the chances of starting cancer treatment on time in India have increased.

He said the 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana' has played a big role in getting cancer patients timely treatment.

"Because of this scheme, 90 per

cent of cancer patients have been able to start their treatment on time. Due to lack of money, poor patients would earlier shy away from getting tested for cancer and its treatment. Now, the Ayushman Bharat Yojana has become a big support for them," he said.

"There is only one mantra to fight cancer - Awareness, Action and Assurance. Awareness means awareness of cancer and its symptoms, Action means timely diagnosis and treatment, Assurance means the belief that every help is available for patients," he added.

Turning to India's animation films, TV series and movies, he said their popularity underscores the potential of the country's creative industry.

Noting that the year 2024 marked the 100th anniversary of many great film personalities, including Raj Kapoor and Mohammad Rafi, he said a great opportunity is on the way to showcase India's creative talent to the world.

Next year, for the first time, the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit i.e. WAVES summit is going to be organised in our country, he added.

This summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation, he said the "creators' economy" is bringing in

new energy in the country's target of emerging as a USD 5 trillion economy.

During the broadcast, Modi highlighted the increasing appeal of Indian traditions and culture, noting that a Tamil teaching programme in Fiji is drawing a lot of interest.

He said a unique Olympics has started in Bastar, long associated with violent Maoist activities.

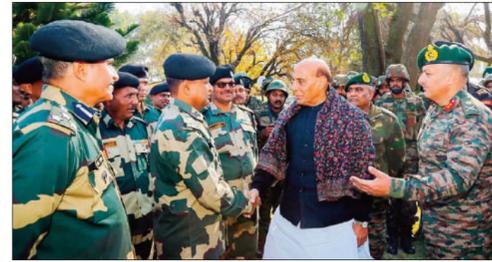
"A new revolution is coming to Bastar through the first Bastar Olympics. This is taking place in the region which was once a witness to Maoist violence. The mascot of the Bastar Olympics are - 'Wild Water Buffalo' and 'Hill Myna'. It reflects the rich culture of Bastar," he said.

In the very first instance, 1.65 lakh players from seven districts have participated in the Bastar Olympics in athletics, archery, badminton, football, hockey, kho-kho and volleyball among other sports.

Modi asked people to encourage such sporting events in their regions, saying sports not only lead to physical development but are also a powerful medium to connect society with the sportsman spirit.

He also spoke of the "vegetable revolution" in Odisha's Kalahandi, one known for its grim tales of poverty and people's migration, and lauded farmers. (PTI)

India not 'lucky' on security front, stay vigilant against enemies: Rajnath to Armymen



MHOW (MP), Dec 29: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday termed India a "not very lucky" nation on the security front and urged soldiers to keep a sharp eye on internal and external foes who he said are always active.

He was addressing Army personnel at the more-than-two-century-old Mhow cantonment in the Indore district of Madhya Pradesh.

"Taking the security scenario into account, Bharat is not a very lucky country because our northern border and western border continuously face challenges," said Singh, who is on a two-day tour of the state.

Mhow cantonment, 25 km from Indore, is home to three premier training institutes - Army War College, Military College of Telecommunication Engineering and Infantry School - other than the Infantry Museum and Army Marksmanship Unit.

"We also face challenges on the internal front. In the backdrop of this, we can't sit quiet, unconcerned. Our enemies, whether internal or external, remain active always. In these circumstances, we must keep a close eye on their activities and take appropriate and timely effective steps against them," he told the Armymen.

To make Bharat a developed and

self-reliant country by 2017, the role of the Army is very crucial, said the defence minister.

"... as the country's defence minister, I would like to tell you that we should be alert always. This patch of time, though often referred to as peacetime, struck me deeply when I arrived and witnessed the discipline and dedication with which you are undergoing training. Your regimen is no less than that of a war," he told the gathering.

"To maintain such a level of discipline, dedication and firm conviction are needed," he added.

Singh said he was impressed by the cleanliness at the Army establishments and cantonments across the country.

"Your dedication to work inspires me. I can say that the most appealing thing is your devotion towards work and sense of responsibility. It is inspiring to all of us," Singh said.

Earlier, Singh along with the Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi paid floral tributes at the memorial of Dr B R Ambedkar at Mhow.

The memorial of Ambedkar, the chief architect of India's Constitution, has been built at his birthplace in the Kali Paltan area of Mhow cantonment. (PTI)

Similipal tigress Zeenat finally captured in Bengal's Bankura



KOLKATA, Dec 29: Tigress Zeenat, which had strayed from Odisha's Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) to Bankura in West Bengal, was finally captured on Sunday afternoon after being sedated with tranquillisers, chief wildlife warden Debal Roy said.

The tigress had kept wildlife officials from both the states on edge for over a week after leaving STR. Roy said the tigress was tranquillised with a single dart shot at 4:09 pm, after previous attempts to sedate her had failed. The animal's vital parameters would be examined before deciding her temporary accommodation, he said.

"Zeenat could not be sedated during a previous attempt despite tranquillisers being used early Sunday morning. The operation resumed in the afternoon after veterinarians gave their approval," he said.

Since Saturday night, the tigress had been in Gopalpur forest in Bankura district, where she was surrounded by double netting, he added.

"At 1.20 am on Sunday, the tigress was first tranquillised, but de-

spite repeated doses, she could not be sedated," Roy said.

The operation was paused at 4:30 am due to the upper limit on tranquilliser doses. After the tigress had rested and calmed down, the operation resumed, and she was successfully sedated in the afternoon, Roy said.

Zeenat had been relocated from Maharashtra's Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) to Similipal last month to introduce new gene pool to the tiger population.

After leaving Similipal, Zeenat ventured through forests in Manbazar and Bandwan before crossing into West Bengal, covering over 120 km across the borders of West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha.

Despite efforts, the tigress avoided baits in trap-door cages and instead killed domestic goats that strayed into the forest. Surveillance using drones was also conducted, but the dense forests made monitoring challenging.

Officials said Zeenat had been traveling shorter distances in recent days, suggesting she may be settling in the area. (PTI)

10-yr-old boy who fell into borewell in MP's Guna dies

BHOPAL, Dec 29: A 10-year-old boy, who fell into a 140-feet borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Guna district, lost the battle for life despite hectic efforts by multiple agencies for 16 hours to save him, officials said on Sunday.

The boy, Sumit Meena, slipped into the open shaft of the borewell at around 5 pm on Saturday in Pipliya village under Raghogarh assembly segment, located 50 km from the Guna district headquarters.

He was unresponsive when he was brought out at around 9.30 am on Sunday, the officials said.

The boy was rushed to a hospital in Raghogarh on life support system, Guna Superintendent of Police Sanjeev Sinha told PTI.

"Sorry to say, he is no more," Guna district chief medical and health officer Dr Rajkumar Rishishwar told reporters at the hospital.

"The child was in the narrow borewell for the entire night in the chilly weather. His hands and feet were drenched and swollen. His clothes were also wet and mud was found in his mouth," he said.

Doctors examined whether the body parts froze due to hypothermia (a condition that occurs when the core body temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, he said.

Rescuers worked through the night and dug a parallel pit to reach the boy via a passage between the pit and borewell, Raghogarh Congress MLA Jaivardhan Singh told PTI over phone from the spot earlier in the morning.

The boy was trapped at a depth of 39 feet in the borewell, which is around 140-feet deep, Guna Collector Satendra Singh said on Saturday.

The borewell did not strike water, and hence no casing had been put on it, he said.

The NDRF team reached there from Bhopal late Saturday evening and helped in the operation.

The family members of the boy panicked on Saturday evening when they did not see him for a long time.

A search was carried out and then they realised he had fallen into the borewell, a local person said. (PTI)

Two wanted criminals nabbed after shootout in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Delhi Police on Sunday arrested two wanted criminals involved in about 80 cases, including that of armed robbery, after a shootout in west Delhi, officials said.

Acting on a tip-off about the duo's location in Madipur, multiple teams were formed to cover all possible exit routes in the area. Deputy Commissioner of Police (West), Vichitra Veer, said, "The suspects were spotted at around 4:30 am. They opened fire when police asked them to stop, hitting the bulletproof jackets of some police personnel though no one was injured," the DCP said.

The duo sustained gunshot injuries on their legs when police fired back, and they are being treated at a nearby hospital, the officer said.

The accused have been identified as Rohit Kapoor, a known criminal from Dwarka district, and Rinku, a history-sheeter from Khyala in west Delhi, the DCP said. In the past few days, a few incidents of robbery were reported at different police stations in west district, wherein the miscreants stole gold ornaments from people on gunpoint or by brandishing a dagger, mostly in morning hours or late at night, police said. (PTI)

'Physical relations' cannot automatically mean sexual assault: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: The Delhi High Court has acquitted a man in a POCSCO case, saying the use of phrase 'physical relations' by the minor survivor cannot automatically mean sexual assault.

A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Amit Sharma allowed the appeal by the accused, who was awarded imprisonment for the remainder of his life, and observed that it was unclear how the trial court concluded that there was any sexual assault when the survivor had voluntarily gone with the accused.

The court asserted that the leap from physical relations or 'samband' to sexual assault and then to penetrative sexual assault must be established by evidence and cannot be deduced as an inference.

"The mere fact that the survivor is below 18 years cannot lead to a conclusion that there was penetrative sexual assault. The survivor, in fact, used the phrase 'physical relations', but there is no clarity as to what she meant by using the said phrase," the court said in the judgement passed on December 23.

"Even the use of the words 'sam-

band banaya' is not sufficient to establish an offence under Section 3 of the POCSCO Act or under Section 376 IPC. Though consent would not matter if the girl is a minor under the POCSCO Act, the phrase 'physical relations' cannot be converted automatically into sexual intercourse let alone sexual assault," it held. The court said the benefit of doubt ought to be in favour of the accused and, therefore, ruled, "The impugned judgement completely lacks any reasoning and also does not reveal or support any rationale for the conviction. Under such circumstances, the judgement is liable to be set aside. The appellant is acquitted." The complaint in this case was lodged in March 2017 by the minor girl's mother, alleging that her 14-year-old daughter had been lured and kidnapped from her home by an unknown person.

The minor was found in Faridabad along with the accused, who was arrested and subsequently convicted for offence of rape under IPC and penetrative sexual assault under POCSCO in December 2023 and later awarded imprisonment for the remainder of his life. (PTI)

Delhi Police nabs murder convict absconding for over 2 years

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: A 46-year-old murder convict who jumped parole during the COVID pandemic was apprehended from Mumbai, police here said on Sunday.

Ajay Kumar Tripathi was found working in the metro city's Ghatkopar area with a food app as a delivery executive.

He was serving a life sentence for killing a boy he had kidnapped from northeast Delhi's Bhajanpura area.

"Tripathi was convicted of kidnapping and murdering a child in 2000 in Delhi. He was serving a life sentence when he was granted parole on July 23, 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic," a police officer said.

On September 19, 2021, when his parole ended, Tripathi did not return.

Police discovered that he had changed his identity to Akshay Kumar and moved to Mumbai with his three-year-old son.

"This was not his first instance of absconding. In 2010 also, he jumped parole and evaded arrest for five years," the officer said.

To track him down this time, police collected information from his previous addresses, jail records, and visitors and found Tripathi had moved to the Maharashtra capital.

"A team camped in Mumbai, verified local delivery personnel, and traced Tripathi to Gautam Nagar in Chembur. He was apprehended on December 28," the officer said.

Tripathi, originally from Agra, holds a graduate degree and worked as a storekeeper when he kidnapped the boy. (PTI)

Law will take its own course in theater stampede case: DGP

HYDERABAD, Dec 29: Telangana DGP Jitender said on Sunday that law would take its own course in the case related to the death of a woman in a stampede here during the premiere show of the blockbuster film 'Pushpa-2'. Actor of the film Allu Arjun, is an accused in this case.

Reacting to a query during a year-end press conference here, the top police officer, however, refused to elaborate much, saying the matter is sub judice.

"The case is already under investigation. The court is also looking into this. It is sub judice also. Moreover, law will take its own course. This is what I have to say. Nothing more," Jitender said. A 35-year-old woman died and her eight-year-old son was injured

on December 4 during a stampede-like situation at the Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad when fans jostled to have a glimpse of the actor at the premiere of 'Pushpa 2' movie.

Following the incident, the city police registered a case against Allu Arjun, his security team, and the theatre management under different sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at the Chikkadpally police station based on the complaint lodged by the deceased woman's family.

The regular bail petition filed by the actor, who was named as accused no 11, has been posted by a local court to December 30. Allu Arjun was arrested on December 13 in connection with the incident and later granted interim bail by the Telangana High Court. (PTI)

4 workers die after inhaling toxic gas at chemical unit in Bharuch

BHARUCH (GUJARAT), Dec 29: Four workers died on Sunday after inhaling toxic fumes following gas leakage at a chemical plant at Dahej in Gujarat's Bharuch district, police said.

The victims fell unconscious after inhaling the toxic fumes leaking from a pipe at a production unit of the Gujarat Fluorochemicals Limited (GFL) at around 10 pm on Saturday, Dahej police station inspector BM Patidar said.

They were rushed to a private hospital in Bharuch. Three of them died at around 3 am on Sunday, while another one succumbed at 6 am, the official said.

"The incident occurred at around 10 pm when the four workers fell unconscious due to gas leakage from the pipe passing through the ground floor of the company's CMS plant. They were rushed to a private hospital where all four of them died," he said.

The bodies were sent for post-mortem and further probe into the incident was underway, the offi-

cial said.

The deceased have been identified as Rajesh Kumar (hailing from Gujarat), Mudrika Yadav (belonging to Jharkhand), Sushit Prasad and Mahesh Nandlal (both from Uttar Pradesh), police said.

GFL, Dahej, Deputy General Manager Jignesh Parmar told reporters that they will investigate the matter and a compensation of ₹ 25 lakh would be paid to the kin of each of the deceased workers.

"The company and the management are saddened by the incident. We have promised to cooperate with legal authorities and we will investigate the matter and bring out our report," he said.

Sub Divisional Magistrate, Bharuch, Manisha Manani said three of the deceased were from other states.

"Four persons died due to gas leakage at the GFL plant near Ambeta village. The bodies have been sent to the civil hospital in Bharuch for post-mortem and an investigation is underway," Manani said. (PTI)

IIMs develop framework for capital market, banking sector to use software without installing them

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Researchers at Indian Institute of Management (IIM) at Lucknow, Amritsar and Kashipur have combined to develop a new framework to guide the country's capital market players and banking sectors in adopting technologies that would enable them to use software without installing them.

Referred to as Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) technologies, these are cloud-based services that deliver software applications over the Internet, eliminating the need for organisations to install and maintain software on their own servers.

While SaaS is widely used globally, its adoption in India, particularly among regulated industries, has been slow.

The research delves into the reasons for this hesitation and offers insights into how firms can assess risks involved in adopting SaaS. The research has been published in the prestigious Journal of Organi-

sational Computing and Electronic Commerce.

"Popular SaaS applications include Google Drive and Microsoft 365. While SaaS offers cost savings and flexibility, its adoption in India has been slow, especially in highly regulated industries, due to concerns over data security, privacy, and compliance with stringent regulations," said IIM Lucknow professor Arunabha Mukhopadhyay, who led the research.

"The research addresses these concerns by introducing a risk-based IT governance framework, designed to help organisations in regulated sectors assess the risks associated in using cloud-based software. The framework focuses on how top management makes these decisions, especially about data security, loss of control, and regulatory compliance," he told PTI.

Other members of the team included Swati Jain from IIM Amrit-



sar and Shubendu Dutta from IIM Kashipur.

The team found that decisions about adopting SaaS in regulated industries depend largely on how leadership views and manages risks. The researchers developed a model that considers factors such as the organisation's risk tolerance, security measures, and internal processes. If the perceived risks are

deemed too high, the model suggests taking steps to mitigate them before adopting SaaS. If the risks are manageable, the organisation can proceed with the adoption.

"Our study, which includes a case study of a capital market firm, shows that organisations make decisions about SaaS adoption not just by evaluating the technology itself but by carefully assessing the

risks involved. We emphasise the importance of managing risks related to data security and regulatory compliance," Mukhopadhyay said.

"The framework we developed helps organisations evaluate these risks and make more informed decisions about whether to adopt SaaS. The practical implications of the study are significant. SaaS providers can leverage these findings to tailor their offerings to better meet the needs of companies in regulated industries, addressing their security and compliance concerns."

"For organisations, especially in banking and capital markets, understanding how to evaluate and manage risks will help them adopt SaaS solutions more confidently.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing technology adoption, particularly in sectors where regulatory requirements and security concerns are paramount," he added. (PTI)

PM remembers Raj Kapoor, Mohd Rafi, ANR, Tapan Sinha in 2024's last Mann Ki Baat address

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday remembered four icons of Indian cinema Raj Kapoor, Mohammed Rafi, Akkineni Nageswara Rao and Tapan Sinha in their birth centenary year in his last Mann Ki Baat address of 2024.

Speaking in his monthly radio broadcast, the prime minister said: "In 2024, we are celebrating the birth centenary of several film personalities who were instrumental in bringing global recognition to the country... The lives of these personalities is a source of inspiration for our film industry."

"Through his films, Raj Kapoor ji made the world aware of India's soft power," Modi said.

Mohd Rafi's magical voice would touch the heart of every listener, added the prime minister.

"He had an incredible voice. Be it devotional songs, romantic songs or sad songs, he made every emotion come alive with his voice. The fact that the youth of today also listens to his songs with the same passion is a testament to his greatness as an artist. This is the true meaning of timeless art," he said about the singer.

Modi praised ANR for taking Telugu cinema to "newer heights".

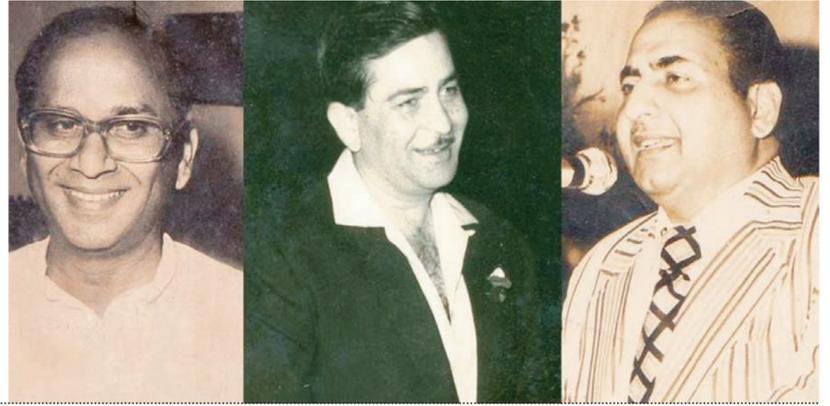
"His films beautifully depicted Indian traditions and values."

"Tapan Sinha ji's films gave a new vision to society. His films conveyed the message of social consciousness and national unity," Modi added in the monthly broadcast.

The birth centenaries of Kapoor, the showman of the Hindi film industry, and Rafi, one of the greatest playback singers in Indian cinema who could paint a rainbow of emotions with his voice, were commemorated recently on December 14 and December 24, respectively.

Akkineni Nageswara Rao, better known as ANR, was one of the most prominent figures in the Telugu industry who in his seven-decade career starred in numerous landmark films. His 100th birth anniversary was marked on September 20.

Sinha, one of the most prominent Bengali cinema directors in the 1970s and 1980s forming a quartet with Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen, would have turned 100 on October 2. (PTI)



James Gunn addresses 'The Batman 2' delay, says 5-year gap or more fairly common in sequels

LOS ANGELES, Dec 29: DC Studios head James Gunn defended a five-year gap between "The Batman" movies, saying it's common for the sequels of big-budget movies to have lengthy gaps in between.

His comments come after he announced on Friday that director Matt Reeves' sequel to his 2022 film "The Batman" was postponed by a year -- from October 2, 2026, to October 1, 2027.

The development led to a section of fans online criticising the studio over the delay in the part two of the movie, starring Robert Pattinson in the title role.

"To be fair, a 5 year gap or more is fairly common in sequels. 7 years between 'Alien' and 'Aliens.' 14 years between 'Incredibles.' 7 years between the first two 'Terminators.' 13 years between 'Avatars.' 36 years between 'Top Guns.' And, of course, 6 years between 'Guardians Vol 2' and 'Vol 3,'" Gunn wrote on Threads.

The filmmaker, also known for directing Marvel Studios's "Guardians of the Galaxy" film franchise as well as "The Suicide Squad" from the erstwhile DC Films, previously confirmed the delay in the release of "The Batman".

In an earlier Threads post, Gunn said "the only reason the film was pushed" was because a "full script" was yet to be completed.

"Matt is committed to making the best film he possibly can, and no one can accurately guess exactly how long a script will take to write. Once there is a finished script, there is around two years for pre-production, shooting and post-production on big films (sic)" he wrote.

Gunn is awaiting the release of his "Superman" film. Starring David Corenswet, Rachel Brosnahan, and Nicholas Hoult, the film is slated to hit the big screens on July 11, 2025. (PTI)



Never expected movie business to be at mercy of two OTT platforms: Sanjay Gupta

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Sanjay Gupta, best known for directing films such as "Kaante", "Zinda", "Shootout at Wadala" and "Kaabil", has voiced his disappointment over how the movie industry is now at the "mercy of two OTT platforms".

While Gupta didn't specify which streaming services he was referring to, he said the rise of digital platforms had caused "the entire system" to collapse.

"Been in the movie business since I was a teenager. Been a director for thirty years. Never had I imagined nor expected that the entire system would collapse the way it has and be at the mercy of two OTT platforms. LITERALLY," the filmmaker said in an X post on Satur-

day.

The cause behind Gupta's comments remains unclear, but his post sparked mixed reactions online.

"So true," wrote one of the users.

"It's called disruptive change," stated another. "Bring originality into Bollywood movies and things will start to improve," said the other user.

Gupta's last theatrical release as a director was 2021's crime action film "Mumbai Saga", starring John Abraham and Emraan Hashmi.

He recently produced "Visfot", headlined by Fardeen Khan and Riteish Deshmukh. The film, directed by Kookie Gulati, premiered on JioCinema in September. (PTI)

Steven Knight teases more projects in 'Peaky Blinders' franchise



LONDON, Dec 29: Writer Steven Knight says the upcoming "Peaky Blinders" movie may not be the last project in the franchise, headlined by Cillian Murphy.

Murphy is reprising his role as Birmingham gangster Tommy Shelby from the 2013 drama series "Peaky Blinders" in the new film, directed by Tom Harper.

Knight, who created the original show and has penned the movie, was asked whether there are any "plans for more 'Peaky Blinders' beyond" the film.

"Well, it's interesting you should ask that question because the film is coming out and that won't be the end," he told U.K.'s Times Radio.

The screenwriter, however, didn't disclose whether it's another series or film.

Knight also said while shooting on the "Peaky Blinders" movie was complete, the release date is yet to be decided.

"It's a bit too soon for that, but you know, you can sort of work out that it will be about a year," he added.

Set in Birmingham between 1919 and 1934, "Peaky Blinders" followed the rise of the Shelby family as they navigated a world wracked with radical social, economic, and political change.

The British period crime drama, about the titular Peaky Blinders crime gang in the aftermath of the First World War, had ended with its sixth season run in April 2022 creator Knight had maintained he would like to continue the story "in another form".

"Peaky Blinders", which premiered on BBC Two in 2013, moved to BBC One, and eventually became a worldwide phenomenon after it became available on Netflix.

The film will also star Barry Keoghan, Rebecca Ferguson, Tim Roth, and Stephen Graham. (PTI)

Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi fondly remember Shyam Benegal at his memorial meet

MUMBAI, Dec 29: Days after filmmaker Shyam Benegal passed away, his actor friends Shabana Azmi and Naseeruddin Shah on Saturday fondly recalled his "wide, warm smile" and how he stayed true to a creative person.

At a memorial service at Y B Chavan Centre in south Mumbai, several film industry people, including Azmi, Shah, Javed Akhtar, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Ila Arun, Prahlad Kakkar, Urmila Matondkar, Divya Dutta, gathered to honour Benegal.

"The first image I've of Shyam Benegal was in 1973 and what struck me about him the most was his wide, warm smile as I went to visit him at ASP office where he was the creative director and was looking for cast for 'Ankur'."

"The last image I've of Shyam was on December 14, 2024, when he, Nira and Pia had organised a celebration for his 90th birthday. After spending a beautiful hour with us, he was whisked away with that same warm wide smile," Azmi said.

The filmmaker passed away on December 23 after suffering from a chronic kidney disease.

Azmi, who collaborated with Benegal on films like "Ankur", "Nishant", "Junoon", "Susman", and "Antarnaad", shared an anecdote about Benegal's personal life.

"Not many people know that Shyam Benegal was a romantic man. He got to know that Nira (his wife) loves yellow flowers, so the day they got married, he sent her a bouquet of yellow flowers and a message written on it saying, 'Only 23 hours'. Then the bouquet kept coming every hour till they got married. Can you imagine? If I were Nira, I would've postponed the marriage, it was so lovely," Azmi added.

Shah, who worked with Benegal on classic movies like "Nishant", "Manthan" and "Mandi", said the filmmaker stayed true in his pursuit as a

creative person.

"Death is the unimportant part of life and what's important is what you do with the time you've. It is undeniable that Shyam used every single moment of his life, breath and iota of energy in a creative pursuit of some kind or the other," he said.

At the memorial service, Atul Tiwari gifted Benegal's wife Nira and daughter Pia Benegal a book he had penned on the late director, "Mentor".

Kakkar said he admired Benegal for how he inspired everyone around him, from actors to writers.

"His method was that if you are ever going to be a filmmaker, you could not have a designation, you could never say, 'This is not my problem'."

That's the one thing he taught us, that everything to do with films, from serving food to cooking to

cleaning to supervising carpenters to sitting with writers, everything is your job.

"I could never imagine his great generosity of spirit, and his capacity to teach, mentor and inspire. I've seen him inspiring actors, writers and people around him to perform on what they could do. That's the greatest gift to all of us," he said.

Azmi said she considered Benegal her mentor and often sought his suggestions on the offers she received as an actor.

"Shyam Benegal was my guru, although a re-

luctant one. He didn't want to be called anyone's guru, but nevertheless he was my guru. He was my guru not only because he was my first director but by being around him I learnt so many lessons of life. "He was my mentor. I consulted him every now and then about a project that I should do or not. He wanted neither to be my guru nor my mentor. He was my friend, and equal and he created that space for this friendship. He gave me equal respect and ability to stand," Azmi recalled. (PTI)



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Australian tail wags after Bumrah magic, Test at MCG poised for exciting finish

MELBOURNE, Dec 29: Jasprit Bumrah left the hosts in a daze with a dream spell but the courageous Australian lower order steered the side to a commanding 333-run lead on Sunday, setting up the Boxing Day Test for an intriguing last-day finish.

Australia finished the fourth day at 228 for nine, leaving India skipper Rohit Sharma a bit irritated as the home team was in a spot at 156 for 8 at one stage.

Australia's number 8, 10 and 11 batters saw off nearly 35 overs and it could prove decisive if India doesn't bat exceedingly well on a track which has remained true in all four days.

Bumrah (4/53 in 17 overs) was an artist at work in the first two sessions and found his ally in Mohammed Siraj (3/66 in 22 overs) as momentum suddenly swung in India's favour.

Bumrah was unplayable for the better part of the second innings and completed 200 Test wickets on the day at an incredible average of 19.56.

But as luck would have it, he couldn't complete his five-for as he overstepped when he had



Nathan Lyon caught in the slips by KL Rahul. Insult to the injury was the last-ball boundary hit by Lyon.

With immaculate length, awkward bounce and late movement,

Bumrah had the Australian lineup in complete tangle but India let slip the advantageous position in the final session.

Pat Cummins (41 off 90 balls), Lyon (41 batting, 54 balls) and

Scott Boland (10 batting, 65 balls) beuffed up the second innings total, leaving a jittery Indian top-order with a mountain to climb on the final day. A victory isn't impossible but for it to

happen India would need something freakish from Rishabh Pant and at least a couple of senior batters need to shrug off the rust.

The pitch has no demons but Indian batters need to clear the cobwebs in their minds.

Marnus Labuschagne played his grittiest knock of the series with a 70 but Yashasvi Jaiswal's three dropped catches could cost India dear despite another day of heavy lifting by the peerless Bumrah. Labuschagne fought doggedly but could have been dismissed for 47 if Jaiswal held onto a regulation catch in third slip off Akash Deep.

For the first time since the Perth Test, Bumrah had meaningful support from the other end as Australia lost three wickets in a space of 10 deliveries.

The pacer's effort helped India regain a good bit of control despite conceding a 105-run first innings lead even after Nitish Reddy's brilliant 114.

Steve Smith (13) edged while trying to drive Siraj while Bumrah had Travis Head (1) who flicked uppishly to man-of-the-moment Nitish Reddy at square leg. (PTI)

Bumrah 200 Test wickets: Joint second fastest Indian and first bowler with below-20 average

MELBOURNE, Dec 29: Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Sunday became the second fastest Indian along with Ravindra Jadeja to complete 200 Test wickets and the first bowler ever to reach that milestone with a sub-20 average during the fourth day's play of the fourth Test against Australia here.

Bumrah dismissed Travis Head (1) for his 200th victim in the post-lunch session, joining Jadeja in the list of bowlers who are fastest to 200 wickets in Tests.

He is also the fastest Indian pace bowler to achieve the feat, going past legendary Kapil Dev who went past the mark in 50 matches.

Both Bumrah and Jadeja achieved the feat in their 44th Test, and overall he is 12th Indian bowler in the format to complete the landmark.

The recently retired Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin was the quickest among Indians to have taken 200 wickets, a feat that he achieved in his 37th Test.

Among all bowlers who have crossed the 200-wicket mark in Test cricket, Bumrah is the only bowler with an average of under 20 which includes some of the fearsome fast bowlers from the West Indies such as Malcolm Marshall (376 wickets at 20.94), Joel Garner (259 wickets at 20), Curtly Ambrose (405 wickets at 20.99) as well as England's James Anderson (704 wickets at 26.45) and even Glenn McGrath (563 wickets at 21.64).

Ashwin is ranked third in the overall list of bowlers who were fastest to 200 Test wickets, behind two leg-spinners -- Pakistan's Yasir Shah (33 Tests) and Australia's Clarrie Grimmett (36 Tests).

The dismissal of Head followed by that of Mitchell Marsh's (0), caught behind the wicket, as Bumrah took his wickets tally in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy to 28.

He had earlier dismissed opener Sam Konstas (8) for his first wicket in Australia's second innings. (PTI)

Assam Swimming Association organises 'Technical Official Clinic 2024'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 29: The Assam Swimming Association, continuing its annual tradition, successfully organised the 'Technical Official Clinic' for the year 2024. Trained, experienced, and certified technical officials are crucial for the smooth conduct of aquatic sports at state, national, and international levels.

General Secretary Bhaskar Ranjan Das and Publicity Secretary Mukuteswar Goswami informed that this year's clinic was held as a two-day event on December 28 and 29 at the Assam Olympic Association Auditorium in Guwahati. A total of 68 participants from various parts of the state attended the clinic.

During the two-day clinic, par-

ticipants received guidance from Kamlesh Nanavati, Senior Vice President of the Swimming Federation of India and an international referee; Sanket Sindhe, another international aquatic sports referee; and Dronacharya Awardee Tapan Panigrahi. These experts joined the event virtually and explained effective strategies to achieve success at national and international levels.

Senior coaches and referees from Assam, including Ravindra Modak, Babul Gurung, and Farid Ali, elaborated on the rules, regulations, and intricacies of aquatic sports. General Secretary Bhaskar Ranjan Das emphasised that the association aims to nurture international-level swimmers and referees from Assam.

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed Grandmaster Koneru Humpy's feat of winning the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess championship title twice in her career.

Humpy capped a wonderful year for Indian chess, defeating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge champion in New York on Sunday.

She had won the event back in 2019 at Georgia, and the India No. 1 is only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to

clinch the title more than once.

"Congratulations to @humpy_koneru on winning the 2024 FIDE Women's World Rapid Championship! Her grit and brilliance continues to inspire millions," wrote Modi on 'X'.

Humpy's achievement laced a sensational year for the chess fraternity after D Gukesh defeated China's Ding Liren to emerge champion in the classical format World Championship recently in Singapore. "This victory is even

more historic because it is her second world rapid championship title, thereby making her the only Indian to achieve this incredible feat," noted the PM.

Humpy said her victory will inspire other Indians to take up chess.

"It's high time for India. We also have Gukesh as world champion and now I got the second world title in the rapid event. So, I think this will motivate a lot of youngsters to take up chess professionally," she said. (PTI)

Humpy's grit and brilliance continues to inspire millions: PM Modi



68th National School Games Yogasana training camp concludes successfully at Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 29: The training camp for the Assam team, organised from December 25 to December 28, at Nehru Yuva Kendra, Nagaon was concluded on Saturday last here.

The camp was organised by Directorate of Sports and Youth Welfare in association with District Sports Office, Nagaon and hosted by Nehru Yuva Kendra, Nagaon. The camp was organised to prepare the Assam team for the 68th National School Games, which will be held in Hyderabad from January 9 to January 11 for girls under 14

category. The team under 14 will consist of Jyotismrita Bora, Rimpi Gogoi, Chayanika Chakraborty, Jiyana Nihit Gautam, and Pratishruti Saikia.

Similarly, the boys and girls teams under 17 as well as under 19 categories will participate in the national competition scheduled to be held in Kolhapur, Maharashtra from January 15 to January 18.

Yoga guru and coordinator of the selection camp, Prabhat Chandra Bora, who is also a coach for the Indian yoga team, briefed reporters on Sunday here.

State Sr Tug of War contest held in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 29: In an appreciable step, the traditional sports lovers have revived popular interests in the ancient sporting event tug of war in Assam. The Tug of War Association of Assam organised the 13th State Senior Tug of War Tournament in Sivasagar on Sunday in which 13 male and 9 female teams from various places took part. In Men's section Kamrup emerged 1st, Golaghat 2nd and Sonitour 3rd while

in Women's section Golaghat won the best team, followed by Sonitpur and Dima Hasao. Sonitpur was adjudged the Best Disciplined team of the tournament.

Jyoti Prasad Saikia, professor, Dept of Sociology, Dibrugarh University, inaugurated the tournament. A souvenir was also released on the occasion. It may be mentioned that tug of war was included as an event in the Olympics in 1901 and was continued till 1920.

Inter-district athletics competition: Dibrugarh wins best district title

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Dec 29: The 46th Inter-District Athletics Championships, which was commenced from December 27 concluded successfully on Sunday. About 1,400 competitors and about 200 officials from 35 districts of the state participated in the tournament. Dibrugarh district won 285 gold medals while Assam Police won 185 gold medals. Shivsagar team

won the third best team title with 176 gold medals. The 46th Inter-District Athletics Championship was held in collaboration with the Morigaon District Administration and Morigaon District Sports Association. The closing ceremony was attended by Assam Athletics Association officials including Assam Government Minister Piyush Hazarika and Morigaon MLA Ramakant Deuri.

Koneru Humpy grabs historic Rapid chess world title

NEW YORK, Dec 29: India's Koneru Humpy bagged an epochal second World Rapid Chess Championship title, beating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia here on Sunday.

Humpy had won the event back in 2019 at Georgia, and the India No. 1 is only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to clinch the title more than once.

The 37-year-old Humpy finished the tournament with 8.5 out of 11 points.

"I'm very excited and I feel very happy. In fact, I expected it to be a very tough day, like some sort of tie-break. But when I finished the game, I only got to know when the

arbitrator told me, and it was a tense moment for me," said Humpy, who began with black pieces, after her victory.

"So, this is quite unexpected because the whole year I have been struggling a lot and I had very bad tournaments where I just ended up in last place. So, this came as a surprise," she added.

Humpy's achievement capped a sensational year for Indian chess after D Gukesh defeated China's Ding Liren to emerge champion in the classical format World Championship recently in Singapore. In September, India had won its first-ever gold medals in Open and Women's categories in the Chess

Olympiad in Budapest.

The seasoned Humpy admitted that she was not thinking about the title after her first-round defeat here. "I think, after the first round loss, I was nowhere thinking about the title, but things turned out well, especially yesterday winning the four games in a row helped me," she said.

However, Humpy faced some challenges off the board too as well because of the big time-gap between India and the USA.

"Yeah, off the board, it was very difficult for me because of the time difference. I was lacking sleep. Literally, I haven't slept properly since coming here. So, it wasn't

Atalanta's 11-match win streak ends but still on top after late equalizer at Lazio



ROME, Dec 29: Atalanta's winning streak ended at 11 matches after drawing at fourth-placed Lazio 1-1 in Serie A.

Substitute Marco Brescianini's late equalizer meant the Bergamo squad remained atop Serie A. Four minutes after he went

on, Brescianini finished off a counterattack set up by Nicolò Zaniolo and Ademola Lookman.

Fisayo Dele-Bashiru scored midway through the first half for Lazio after receiving a ball over the top and blasting past onrushing goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi.

Atalanta was left one point ahead of defending champion Inter Milan, which won at Cagliari 3-0 earlier and also has a match in hand.

Atalanta will face Inter in its next match on Thursday, in the semifinals of the Italian Super Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Juventus plays AC Milan in the other semifinal.

Atalanta was without leading scorer Mateo Retegui, who injured his left leg against Empoli last weekend.

Inter perfect in last 4 matches. Thirteen goals scored. Zero conceded. Four wins in four matches across all competi-

easy to play restlessly, but I'm happy that I managed to do it," she added.

Humpy has always excelled in the Rapid worlds as she had won a bronze medal in the 2012 edition of the event held in Moscow, while finished with a silver last year at Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Humpy said her victory will now prompt other Indians to take up chess.

"I think it's high time for India. We also have Gukesh as world champion and now I got the second world title in the rapid event. So, I think this will motivate a lot of youngsters to take up chess professionally," she concluded. (PTI)

Mridul and Deepanjan duo wins Pulin Das Memorial Open Prize-Money Sports Quiz Competition

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 29: The duo of Mridul Ram Kalita and Deepanjan Das emerged victorious in the seventh edition of the Pulin Das Memorial Open Prize-Money Sports Quiz Competition 2024, organised by the Guwahati Tennis Association (GTA) at the auditorium of the NAP Cultural Complex for Performing Arts, Guwahati, on Sunday. Bikram Deka and Chandan Duorah secured the first runner-up position, while Sayan Majumdar and Gaurav Haloi finished as the second runners-up. The competition was expertly conducted by noted quizmasters Dipankar Koushik and Dilip Kumar Sharma. A total of 26 teams participated in the preliminary screening round, from which six teams advanced to the final. The final featured eight diverse rounds, including two audio-visual rounds, three buzzer rounds, one photo-frame round, one "take-your-choice" round, and two dry rounds. This year, the organisers also introduced a Written Sports Quiz Competition for school students up to Class 12. The initiative aimed to ignite a passion for sports among young minds and challenge them to demonstrate their knowledge of sports, players, and iconic moments. Bibek Barman and Suraj Ahmed from Little Flower School, Nalbari, won the first prize, while Dhruvarka Ranjan Sarma and Nibir Niloy Baishya from Maharshi Vidya Mandir, Silpukhuri, Guwahati, secured the second prize. Mriganka Saha and Niloy Kashyap from South Point School took the third prize. The audience actively participated and won several prizes by answering questions posed by the quizmasters.

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Mind Speaks:
Community Vision for BTR

COMMUNITY VISION DOCUMENT

An initiative of the Government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)

বড়োলেণ্ড ক্ষেত্রীয় অঞ্চল (বি.টি.আৰ) চৰকাৰৰ উদ্যোগত
বহু'লেণ্ড হায়ুজাৰি আনসোল (বি.টি.আৰ.) সৌৰস্বাৰনি মৌনসে হাৰাফাৰি

🕒 11:00 AM



30th December, 2024



Pragjyoti ITA Centre, Machkhowa, Guwahati

Chief Guest

Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya
Governor, Assam

In the august presence of
Shri Pramod Boro
Chief Executive Member, BTR

and
Cabinet Ministers of Assam
& other dignitaries



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FOR YOUR FUTURE... TO MAKE IT BETTER!