Chief of International Criminal Court lashes out at US, Russia over threats, accusations

Bangladesh court acquits Zia's son and 48 others



Inconsistencies in postal ballots and EVM results in Maharashtra'

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Constitution debate to be held in LS, RS

Govt, Oppn break week-long impasse in Parl

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: The government and opposition parties reached an agreement on Monday to break the week-long impasse in Parliament with the dates announced for a discussion on the Constitution, to mark its 75th year of adoption, in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

The Lower House will take up the discussion on the Constitution on December 13 and 14, and the Upper House on December 16 and 17, Parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju said following a meeting Speaker Om Birla held with floor leaders of different parties.

Opposition parties had demanded discussions in both Houses of Parliament to mark the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution by the Constituent Assembly.

Rijiju told reporters that all parties have agreed to allow Parliament to function from Tuesday, and both Houses will take up their listed agenda items. He expressed confidence that Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will function smoothly from Tuesday.

Following back-channel talks, the breakthrough was achieved at the meeting chaired by Birla and attended by Gaurav Gogoi of the Congress, DMK's T R Baalu and TMC's Kalyan Banerjee among others besides Rijiju and his deputy in the ministry Arjun Ram Meghwal. Several opposition leaders, who attended the meeting, also echoed Rijiju's views about Parliament functioning smoothly



Asked about other issues being raised by the opposition such as the Sambhal violence and the unrest in Manipur, Rijiju said Birla has made it clear that any matter can be raised in line with the rules while requesting parties to allow Parliament to function smoothly.

Sources said the Samajwadi Party may be allowed to raise the Sambhal issue and the TMC the events in Bangladesh following the deposition of the Sheikh Hasina government.

The Congress has been persistent in raising the issue of indictment by US prosecutors of Adani Group chairperson Gautam Adani and other company officials on bribery and fraud charges. This coupled with vociferous opposition protests over matters such as the Sambhal violence and Manipur unrest have resulted in constant adjournments of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha since the Winter Session began on November 25.

However, some other opposition parties, especially the TMC, have not attached the same priority to the Adani row and want Parliament to discuss a host of different issues, including unemployment, price rise, and the Centre's alleged discrimination against oppositionruled states in fund allocation.

The TMC has skipped opposition meetings on formulating the INDIA bloc's joint strategy during the session.

A TMC source said his party cannot be there just to stamp its approval on the Congress' agenda.

The Congress and many of its allies have also been vocal in targeting the ruling BJP for its alleged attack on the Constitution under the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The BJP on the other hand has projected the main opposition come down on account of reduction in GST," she said. party as the principal violator of constitutional norms and spirit when it was (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta apprises Modi about devp initiatives of Assam govt PM to attend Assam investor summit

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the Assam Investor and Infrastructure Summit in Guwahati in February next year, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said here on Monday.

The chief minister also extended an invitation to the Prime Minister to attend a mega performance of the Jhumur dance of Assam's Adivasi community.

"Today in New Delhi, I had the privilege to receive Adarniya Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji's guidance on various developmental issues. On behalf of the people of Assam, I also had the pleasure to invite him to bless the Assam Investor & Infrastructure Summit and Mega Jhumur Performance in February 2025 which he has kindly accepted to grace," Sarma said in a post on X.

The summit in Guwahati will be held on February 24 and 25, 2025. The Jhumur performance will also be held during this time.

In his 25-minute meeting with the prime minister, Sarma apprised him about a slew of development initiatives undertaken in Assam and also sought his guidance on various developmental issues, according to a state government release. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Cost of health, life insurance to come down if GST Council decides: FM

NEW DELHI. Dec 2: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the cost of insurance to the policyholder is expected to come down if the GST Council recommends a reduction in the GST rate on health and life insurance policies.

In a written reply in the Lok Sabha, she said the GST Council in its September 9 meeting had recommended to constitute a Group of Ministers (GoM) to holistically look into the issues pertaining to GST on life insurance and health insurance.

"...The matter of review of GST rates on life and health insurance is pending before the GoM. If a recommendation for a reduction in GST rate is made by the GST Council, the cost of insurance to the policyholder is expected to

Sitharaman said this while replying to the question on whether GST reduction on health insurance will be a step towards making healthcare more equitable.

To a query on how the government will ensure that insurance companies pass on the benefits of any GST reduction to consumers, rather than retaining them through increased premiums, Sitharaman said competitive pricing would bring down the cost of insur-

> and above the insurance premium, if the GST rate is reduced, it is expected to benefit the policyholder directly especially in a competitive market with many insurers as the cost of insurance will reduce to that extent," she said. Currently, an 18 per cent GST is

ance. "As the GST rates are applicable over

levied on premiums paid for life and health insurance policies. The GST Council, chaired by Sitharaman and comprising her state counterparts, is slated to

meet on December 21 where the GoM report on reduction of GST on life and health insurance is expected to be discussed. In the 2023-24 fiscal, the Centre and state governments collected ₹ 16,398 crore GST from healthcare and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India must become data self-reliant: **IN-SPACe** chief

HYDERABAD/NEW DELHI. Dec 2: Space sector regulator IN-SPACe's chairman Pawan Goenka on Monday said India faces significant gaps in meeting all its space data needs and remains heavily re-

liant on foreign providers. Addressing the GeoSmart India 2024 conference in Hyderabad, he also said without the geospatial industry growing, India cannot achieve its vision of being a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

"Are all our data needs met today? My answer is definitely not... Affordability, low-resolution data, high-resolution data -- not enough,' Goenka said. He said despite abundant data from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), it falls short of providing "anytime, any-

'Make in India' has become 'Make-believe in India': Cong

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: The Congress on Monday said that the fall in the GDP numbers for the last quarter highlights the "unimpressive" manufacturing growth and the failure of 'Make in India' which, it claimed, has become 'Make-believe in India'.

Jairam Ramesh, in a statement, said the GDP growth figures released three days back for the quarter July-Sept 2024 revealed a "dramatic fall". Equally noteworthy and concerning is that manufacturing growth slowed to a shocking 2.2 per cent, he said, lamenting that export growth has also decelerated to 2.8 per cent.

The data belies the dismal reality of the Prime Minister's decade-old promise to make India a new global hub for manufacturing exports."

"The unfortunate reality is that ten years after the Government's flagship Make in India scheme was launched, India's manufacturing is stagnating, and our exports are faltering," Ramesh claimed in his statement, a day after party leader Rahul Gandhi raised similar con-

The BJP has alleged that the Congress' attempt to "paint a picture of economic doom with selective data and half-truths" is misleading. BJP leader Amit Malviya said that "crying foul over a 5.4 per cent GDP growth rate is laughable when it is one of the highest globally". "Your persistent doom-mongering is not just baseless but reflects an inability to acknowledge progress," Malviya said while refuting Gandhi's criticism. Ramesh claimed that the share of manufacturing in India's Gros Value Added has fallen from 18.1 per cent in 2011-12 to 14.3 per cent in 2022-23, and the number of manufacturing workers has fallen from 51.3 million in 2017 to 35.65 million in 2022-23.

He said India's share in global merchandise exports has also largely stagnated, and exports are falling as a share of India's GDP.

"In fact, growth in India's share of global exports grew much faster in the 2005-15 period, largely corresponding to Dr Manmohan Singh's tenure as Prime Minister," he

claimed. In the all-important employmentintensive sectors like garments, exports have fallen from USD 15 billion in 2013-14 to USD 14.5 billion in 2023-2024 and India has been left way behind by countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam, he

claimed. "These depressing results are ultimately a result of the Modi Government's failure to boost private investment in manufacturing. The hype over (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'No voter should be excluded': SC seeks EC stand over enhanced voter limit



NEW DELHI, Dec 2: The Supreme Court on Monday sought the Election Commission's response on a PIL challenging its decision to increase the maximum number of voters from 1,200 to 1,500 at every polling station, saying no elector should be excluded.

While asking the poll panel to clarify its stand, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar said, "We are concerned. No voter should be excluded."

The bench therefore directed senior advocate Maninder Singh, representing the poll panel, to file a short affidavit explaining the rationale behind the decision to increase the number of voters per polling station.

"Senior advocate Maninder Singh, appearing for the Election Commission, says on instruction that they will explain the position by way of a short affidavit. Let the affidavit be filed within a period of three weeks," said the bench.

Singh said the bench knew about the consistent allegations on EVMs, adding, "They will keep on coming. The polling has been happening like this since 2019 and political parties are being consulted before this in every constituency.

The senior lawyer said polling stations could have

multiple polling booths and political parties were consulted in each constituency when the total number of voters was raised per EVM.

Singh further said voters were always permitted to cast their votes, even beyond the prescribed time. The bench, which will hear the matter on January 27,

the petitioner before the next date of hearing The PIL, filed by Indu Prakash Singh, challenged two

communications issued by the EC in August, increasing the number of voters per polling station in each constituency across India. The plea said the decision to increase the number of

voters per polling booth was arbitrary and not based on On October 24, the top court refused to issue any no-

tice to the poll panel but allowed the petitioner to serve the copy to the standing counsel of the poll panel so that its stand on the issue is known. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the

petitioner, contended that increasing the number of voters from 1,200 to 1,500 would lead to the exclusion of underprivileged groups from the electoral process as an individual would take longer to cast their franchise.

He submitted longer queues and waiting times at the polling stations would dissuade voters from going to

The bench, however, said the poll panel wanted more participation and with the use of EVMs, it took a shorter time compared to ballot papers as the poll panel intended to considerably reduce the time taken to cast votes by increasing the number of EVMs at booths.

The petitioner, however, said the poll panel's decision would impact voters during the assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand (since concluded) and Bihar and Delhi to be held in 2025. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Kejriwal alleges 'Jungle Raj' in Delhi, slams BJP and Shah

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Monday alleged that there was a "Jungle Raj" in Delhi and people in the city had never witnessed such times of rise in crime.

Kejriwal met a family in Naraina whose two members were killed in a span of six months by the criminals. He said that a youth was recently stabbed to death despite complaining to the police fearing for his life from some local criminals. Six months ago, his younger brother was murdered, he told reporters.

'Delhi people never witnessed such times of chaos and Jungle Raj all around. Anybody can murder anybody. When it was known that those who killed one member of the family, could kill someone else, why was no action taken to stop them?" he asked.

Kejriwal urged the BJP and the Union home minister Amit Shah to provide safety to Delhi people who were feeling unsafe. Ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, the Aam Aadmi Party has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

AAP more interested in liquor sales than health of citizens: Mandaviya

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: Union Min- (AB-PMJAY). ister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday slammed the AAP dispensation for not implementing the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme and said it is more interested in liquor sales than the health of Delhi's citi-

The Delhi assembly polls are slated for early next year. The minister's remarks also assume significance as they come a week after the Delhi High Court sought the AAP government's stand on a plea by Delhi's BJP MPs seeking implementation of the Ayushman Bharat

Addressing a press conference here, Mandaviya said it was unfortunate that states like Delhi and West Bengal are not implementing the scheme even after repeated requests by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and letters from the Centre.

"There could be political differences but public welfare works must be prioritised in India's federal democratic set-up for the welfare of all," he said. "The government of India has written to the Delhi government urging it to implement the scheme but the Delhi government is more Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana interested (CONTD. ON PAGE-2) Bond of friendship between Nagas and

'Young innovators are nearing commercial success by building rockets and satellites'

ISRO chief Somanath urges youths Assamese people rooted in proximities: Guv to pursue careers in S&T

GUWAHATI, Dec 2: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman S Somanath on Monday exhorted youths to engage themselves with scientific and technological advancements being made by the country so that India can emerge as a global leader in the years ahead. He urged them to pursue careers in science and technology and contribute to the growth in these fields. Somanath was speaking at a 'Student Science Interactive Program -Face to Face with New Frontiers in S&T', as part of the four-day India International Science Festival (IISF) at IIT-Guwahati, which will con-

clude on Tuesday. The ISRO chairman interacted with school students, inspiring them to explore careers in science and technology and pursue innovation in the field of space research, a release



said. "As students, you are the torchbearers of the future in science and technology. It is essential for you to grasp the remarkable innovations and advancements taking place in

these fields today," he said. "By recognising their potential

and the opportunities they present, you can draw inspiration to pursue similar paths and contribute to building a brighter tomorrow," Somanath added

He maintained that engagement of the youth in the country's current

scientific and technological endeavours is pivotal in realising the vision of making India a global leader.

The release said industry-academia collaboration, knowledge-sharing technical sessions and initiatives to inspire students and teachers in creative, knowledge-based learning have been organised as part of the IISF. The event also brought policymakers and scientific leaders together under one roof to discuss sustainable practices across science, agriculture, manufacturing and healthcare, it added.

A key highlight of IISF 2024 was the lab-to-life initiative, where the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) signed three technology transfer Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to promote sustainability and technological advancements. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 2: Nagaland Governor La Ganesan said the bond of friendship between the Nagas and the Assamese people is rooted in cultural, historical, and geographical proximities.

Ganesan said this during the commemoration of the Assam State Foundation Day at Raj Bhavan in Kohima on Monday. He said Assam with its remarkable history and cultural depth has always held a special place in the hearts of the Nagas, adding both communities have interacted over centuries, fostering mutual respect and understanding.

These interactions have laid the foundation for the bond of friendship and brotherhood that persists to this day," Ganesan noted.

He also stressed that despite occasional differences. like any neighbouring states, the focus should remain on harmonious relations and shared prosperity.

He said the gathering on the occasion signifies the strong connection between Assam and Nagaland and highlights the Assamese community's invaluable contribution to our shared heritage.

"Let this occasion remind us to continue advocating for stronger ties and a mutual appreciation that transcends geographical boundaries.

"Let us celebrate not only Assam's accomplishments but also the enduring bond between the people of Assam and Nagaland, and may this spirit of camaraderie and cooperation light our path toward a

brighter future," he added. Ganesan said Assam, with its beautiful landscapes, diverse culture, and rich resources, serve as a crucial

economic powerhouse for India. "Its abundant tea gardens have not only placed India on the global map as a leading tea producer but have also become a symbol of our agricultural success. The oil and gas reserves in Assam further underscore its value in our country's development, providing energy

and economic strength," he said. Beyond economics, Ganesan said, Assam's contribution to India's cultural richness is incomparable and that its classical Sattriya dance, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Page 2 Dec 03_Normal Pages 02-12-2024 21:24 Page 1

Govt scraps windfall profit tax on domestic crude oil, export of fuels

ernment on Monday scrapped 30month old windfall profit tax on domestically-produced crude oil and on export of jet fuel (ATF), diesel and petrol following a decline in international oil prices.

Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary tabled a notification in Rajya Sabha scrapping the levy on crude oil produced by firms like state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and exports of fuels done by companies like Reliance Industries Ltd.

The notification rescinded June 30, 2022 order and withdrew levy of special additional excise duty (SAED) on production of crude oil (which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel) and on export of aviation turbine fuel (ATF), diesel and petrol, he said.

Alongside, the road and infrastructure cess (RIC) levied on export of petrol and diesel has also been withdrawn.

India first imposed windfall profit taxes on July 1, 2022 joining a growing number of nations that tax super normal profits of energy companies. At that time, export duties of ₹ 6 per litre (USD 12 per barrel) each were levied on petrol and ATF and ₹ 13 a litre (USD 26 a barrel) on diesel.

A ₹ 23,250 per tonne (USD 40

Aviva India announces strong H1 FY25 financial results

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 2: Aviva India, on Monday announced its financial results for the first half of FY25, showcasing steady progress across key metrics.

Building on its robust FY24 performance of Rs. 90 crore in profit, the company is on track to surpass this benchmark, driven by strategic initiatives, customer-centric innovations, and operational efficiencies that continue to bolster its market position and financial health, an official release said.

According to the release, the Assets Under Management (AUM) grew by 13% to Rs 14,636 crore in H1 FY25, reflecting prudent fund management and growing investor trust. Additionally, sales quality saw a notable improvement, with "complaints per 10K policies" reducing from 10.3 in H1 FY24 to 8.8 in H1 FY25, underscoring Aviva India's commitment to enhancing customer experience.

The release further stated that, the Gross Written Premium (GWP) for H1 FY25 stood at Rs. 548 crore, reflecting flat growth compared to Rs 546 crore in H1 FY24, while operational efficiency significantly improved. The Opex-to-GWP ratio declined to 27% from 30% last year, demonstrating a focus on cost optimization and streamlined resource management.

Aviva India's product mix reflects a growing focus on protection, with the share of protection products increasing as compared to H1 FY24. This aligns with Aviva India's strategy to diversify its portfolio and cater to evolving customer needs. The claim settlement ratio, a critical trust indicator, stood at an impressive 98.98%, further cementing Aviva India's reputation for reliability and commitment to



ACKO drives Insurance Awareness

home with Innovative D-OOH Activity

per barrel) windfall profit tax on domestic crude production was also levied. The tax rates were reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks. While the levy on export of petrol became nil in the very first fortnightly review that happened in mid-July 2022, the tax on diesel and ATF exports became nil in mid April 2023 but were back in August that year. There has been no levy on export of ATF and diesel since March this year.

As far as crude oil is concerned, the levy fluctuated every fortnight. It was ₹ 1,850 per tonne in August 31, 2024 and became nil in the next fortnightly review.

GUWAHATI, Dec 2: ACKO, al-

located by IRDAI to drive insur-

ance awareness in the state, took

the opportunity to celebrate Asom

Divas (Assam Day) by unveiling an

innovative Digital-Out-Of-Home

Acknowledging the significance

and relevance of the day, ACKO

creatively leveraged prominent pin

codes in the capital city such as La-

chit Nagar, Silphukur, Adabari, to

share the message of insurance

facts around health, auto, and life,

by combining cultural pride of the

state. Engaging facts around the

state witnessing 5,640 accidents in

the last six months, and only

3.11% of the population having life

insurance, were interestingly

placed to strike a chord with the

residents. Each display carried a

thoughtful call to action: "Take in-

(D-OOH) campaign on Monday.

Now, the levies on both domestically produced crude oil and fuel

exports have been scrapped. The government had garnered about ₹25,000 crore from the levy in the first year of its implementation, ₹ 13,000 crore in 2023-24 and ₹ 6,000 crore this year.

Reliance Industries Ltd, which operates India's largest only-forexport oil refinery at Jamnagar in Gujarat, and Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy are primary exporters of fuel in the country.

The government levied tax on windfall profits made by oil producers on any price they get above a threshold of USD 75 per barrel. The levy on fuel exports is based

With this D-OOH activity,

ACKO's aim was to educate and

encourage the larger community to

consider the benefits of insurance

By leveraging technology and

impactful messaging, ACKO reaf-

firmed its commitment to empow-

ering individuals with the

knowledge to make informed fi-

nancial decisions while celebrating

According to the release, over

the last year, as part of the IRDAI

mandate, ACKO has been working

closely with various villages and

communities on-ground in the

state to spread insurance aware-

ness, starting from bringing out an

insurance-anthem in collaboration

with the local music sensation San-

nidhya Bhuyan, conducting free

health check camps for tea estate

the rich heritage of Assam.

for safeguarding their future.

between the international oil price realised and the cost.

earn on overseas shipments. These

margins are primarily a difference

The decision to scrap the levy follows softening in international oil prices. The basket of crude oil that India imports averaged USD 73.02 per barrel in November, down from USD 75.12 a barrel in the previous month. The import price was about USD 90 per barrel in April this year but has continued to slide in subsequent months. It fell to USD 73.69 per barrel in September but rose marginally in the following month.

Since its levy, the windfall profit tax has been a subject of controversy. While it initially sought to balance government revenue amid fluctuating oil prices, industry players argued that it negatively impacted profitability and disincentive production. For private and foreign players, it brought in an element of uncertainty in the fiscal regime. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas too had been lobbying for its removal for some time now.

While doing away with tax on domestically-produced crude oil will benefit ONGC and Oil India Ltd, the scrapping of levy on fuel exports would help Reliance and Nayara. (PTI)

Axis Bank unveils 'harraahdil se open'

GUWAHATI, Dec 2: Axis Bank on Monday launched the next chapter in its acclaimed 'Dil Se

Open' campaign.

According to an official statement, this latest iteration, 'harraahdil se open', pays tribute to the dedication of over 100,000 bankers who work tirelessly to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Emphasizing a relationship oriented customer-first approach to banking in an era of transactional banking, the campaign reaffirms Axis Bank's values of warmth, empathy, kindness, and openness, central to its 'Dil Se Open' philosophy, first introduced in 2019.

The new campaign, 'harraahdil se open' is brought to life through five films, each focused on distinct customer segments: salaried, senior citizens, entrepreneurs, highnet-worth clients, and customers in Bharat, the statement further con-

surance, protect your life today," workers, conducting financial litemphasising the importance of eracy program for 100+ villages in being prepared and secure, an offi-

Ather Energy opens its first Experience Centre in SL

GUWAHATI, Dec 2: Ather En- Lanka Private Limited. As Ather's mobility. Here, we invite everyone ergy Limited has opened its first Experience Centre, Ather Space, in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Monday, marking a significant milestone in its international expansion strategy, an official statement announced.

This has marked the company's entry into its second international market, following its debut in Nepal in November 2023. At the Experience Centre, Sri Lankan customers can test ride and purchase Ather's flagship scooter, the Ather 450X, which caters to the performance segment.

The Experience Centre was opened in collaboration with Evolution Auto Pvt. Ltd., a joint venture between Sensei Capital

Partners, Atman Group, and Sino to innovation and sustainability in national distributor in Sri Lanka, Evolution Auto will not only manage sales, service operations, and network expansion, but will also be establishing Ather grid fastcharging stations across the country, the statement said. Ravneet Singh Phokela, chief business officer, Ather Energy Limited, shared, "We are thrilled to enter our second international market, Sri Lanka, where we are starting our sales with the Ather 450X. We believe that the Ather 450X, with its emphasis on performance, is fit for the Sri Lankan market." Dhiren Kundanmal, director, Evolution

Auto Pvt. Ltd., further said, "This

center symbolizes our commitment

to experience the cutting-edge Ather electric scooters, engage with the Ather technology, and become a part of a greener future. We believe that the journey towards sustainable transportation begins with the right experience, and we are excited to share it with the vibrant community of Colombo.' Last year. Ather entered its first international market, Nepal and as of October 31, has established 5 Experience Centres and 16 Ather grid fast-charging stations across the country. In India, Ather has 239 Experience Centres across 175 cities and has established over 2000 Ather Grid fast-charging stations, as of October 31, claimed the statement.

India's manufacturing sector growth falls to 11-month low of 56.5 in Nov on price pressures

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a joint 11-month low of 56.5 in November, restricted by competitive conditions and inflationary pressures amid a softer increase in factory orders, a monthly survey said on Monday

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 57.5 in October to 56.5 in November, signalling a softer improvement in the health of the sector. However, the pace of growth remained above its long-run average. In PMI parlance, a print above

50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India recorded a 56.5 manufacturing PMI in November, down slightly from the prior month, but still firmly within expansionary territory," Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC said.

Bhandari further noted that strong broad-based international demand, evidenced by a fourmonth high in new export orders, fuelled the Indian manufacturing sector's continued growth. At the same time, however, the rate of output expansion is decelerating

due to intensifying price pressures. On the domestic macroeconomic front, the latest government data released on Friday showed India's economic growth slowed to



a near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter of this fiscal due to poor performance of manufacturing and mining sec-

tors as well as weak consumption. According to the survey, the expansion in sales and output in the manufacturing sector during November was largely supported by positive demand trends, though firms indicated that growth was somewhat restricted by competi-

tive conditions and price pressures. "Goods producers experienced a weaker, albeit still robust, upturn in new business intakes during November," the survey said, adding that growth was "stymied by fierce competition and price pressures".

On the price front, Indian goods producers increased their selling prices to the greatest extent since October 2013. Survey participants suggested that additional outlays on freight, labour and materials had been shared with clients.

"Input prices for a variety of intermediate goods including chemicals, cotton, leather, and rubber rose in November, while output prices soared to an 11-year high as rising input, labour, and transportation costs were passed on to consumers," Bhandari said.

India's retail inflation soared to a 14-month high of 6.21 per cent in October --above the RBI's tolerance band, mainly on account of

rising food prices. It was 5.49 per cent in September.

The RBI, which is mandated by the government to contain inflation at 4 per cent (+/- 2 per cent) has projected retail inflation to be 4.5

per cent in the current fiscal year. Although price pressures curbed domestic sales to a certain extent, the growth of new export orders gained momentum.

"The rate of expansion in international demand was the best seen for four months, with panellists reporting gains from Bangladesh, mainland China, Colombia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Nepal, the UK and the US," the survey said.

With demand conditions remaining favourable, Indian manufacturers continued to scale up production. Accordingly, for the ninth month in a row, factory employment in India increased during November.

Going ahead, business optimism has increased by predictions that marketing efforts and new product releases will bear fruit. Recent capacity expansion efforts and forecasts of demand strength also underpinned upbeat forecasts for output in 2025. The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI was compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to purchasing managers in a panel of around 400 manufacturers. (PTI)

Commerce ministry reviewing India-US trade relations amid Trump statements

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: The commerce ministry is reviewing various aspects of India-US trade relations focusing on implications of statements made by US President-elect Donald Trump during his election campaign and after the results, an official said. The official added that there are no irritants in the relations between the two countries that can lead to discriminatory tariffs against India.

Trump, during his election campaign, has called India an "abuser" of import tariffs, a claim that echoed his October 2020 statement labelling India the "Tariff King". Trump on Saturday also warned BRICS countries against any move to replace the US dollar and has sought a commitment from the nine-member group that includes India, Russia, China, and Brazil. In the wake of such statements, brainstorming is fundamental to discuss the trade relations as the US is

the largest trading partner of India. Trade experts have time and again stated that Trump's claim that India is an "abuser" of import tariffs is unfair as many nations including America protect their domestic industries by imposing high

customs duties on certain products. According to WTO's World Tariff Profiles 2023, the

US also imposes high duties on items like dairy products (188 per cent), fruits and vegetables (132 per cent), coffee, tea, cocoa and spices (53 per cent), cereals and food preparations (193 per cent), oilseeds, fats and oils (164 per cent), beverages and tobacco (150 per cent), fish and fish products (35 per cent), minerals and metals (187 per cent), and chemicals (56

An expert said that if the US would seek a cut in customs duties for some of their products, India should also demand a similar reduction to get greater market access for domestic items.

The US was the largest trading partner of India in 2023-24. India's exports stood at USD 77.51 billion, while imports aggregated at USD 42.2 billion in the last fiscal. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has recently stated that the US President is a 'friend of India" and India-US friendship will only continue to blossom and grow further.

India's trade relations with the US will continue to grow irrespective of the change in regime in America and according to the commerce ministry data, India's exports to the US jumped to USD 39.2 billion in October against USD 21.46 billion in October 2015. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Constitution debate to be held

in power, asserting that the Modi government has strengthened constitutional practices and principles during its over 10-year tenure. Proceedings in both Houses were adjourned for yet another day on Monday amid protests by opposition members over the Adani indictment row, the recent violence in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal and other issues.

Rijiju said every party expressed their concern over the deadlock in Parliament. The government, he said, noted that MPs from across the country want to voice their issues and that it was not appropriate to waste taxpayers' money due to the continuing logjam. (PTI)

Cost of health, life insurance

life insurance policies. This included ₹8,135 crore from life insurance and ₹8,263 crore from health insurance. Also, ₹ 2,045 crore was raised as GST from reinsurance on life and health insurance last fiscal, including ₹ 561 crore from reinsurance on life and ₹ 1,484 crore on healthcare. The GST Council is slated to meet on December 21 in Jaisalmer where it is expected to take up the issue of GST on life and health insurance. The first meeting of the GoM on life and health insurance under Bihar deputy chief minister Samrat Chaudhary was held on October 19.

According to sources in the know, the GoM has broadly agreed on exempting insurance premiums paid for term life insurance policies and senior citizens' health insurance from GST.

Also, GST on premiums paid by individuals, other than senior citizens, for health insurance with coverage of up to ₹ 5 lakh is proposed to be exempted. However, an 18 per cent GST will continue on premiums paid for policies with health insurance cover of over ₹ 5 lakh. (PTI)

India must become data self

any resolution" capabilities. Goenka said one of the first steps a country must take is to become self-reliant in data. "Currently, ISRO is the only Indian source, and there is a high dependency on foreign sources. I am not suggesting that we generate all the data ourselves, but all strategic data must be produced from sources within India,

Some progress has already been made, and while part of it will happen organically, some efforts will require a little push from the government, Goenka added. "Our vision has to be no gap in data of any kind, cutting edge in providing geospatial solutions widely used by the Indian government, businesses, and the world," the In-SPACe chairman said. (PTI)

PM to attend Assam investor

Later, the chief minister met external affairs minister S Jaishankar and Union minister of Jal Shakti C R Paatil. "Inviting Global Investors to join the Assam Growth Story. I had the pleasure to call upon Hon'ble Union external affairs minister Shri @DrSJaishankar ji today in New Delhi and extend an invitation to attend the Assam Infrastructure and Investment Summit 2025. I also sought all possible cooperation from @MEAIndia to make the Summit a grand success," Sarma wrote on 'X'

After meeting Paatil, he said: "Assam is vigorously implementing the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of Har Ghar Jal and we have so far achieved over 80% of our tap water connection target. To take the Jal Jeevan initiative further & ensure its saturation in the State, I held a meeting with Hon'ble Union minister Shri @CR-Paatil ji today and discussed the roadmap ahead for the project." (PTI)

Make in India' has become

tax cuts and production-linked incentives does not match the reality."

"Further, in sector after sector evidence has piled up on how continued cheap imports from China are destroying Indian manufacturing - over a third of MSMEs in the stainless steel production industry in Gujarat alone are lying closed on account of such imports from China. There are numerous such instances," the Congress leader claimed 'Make in India has simply become Make-Believe in India," Ramesh alleged.

India's economic growth slowed to a near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter of this fiscal due to poor performance of manufacturing and mining sectors as well as weak consumption, but the country continued to remain the fastest-growing large economy, data showed on Friday. The gross domestic product (GDP) had expanded by 8.1 per cent in the July-September quarter of the 2023-24 fiscal and 6.7 per cent in the first quarter of the current fiscal (April-June 2024).

The previous low level of GDP growth at 4.3 per cent was recorded in the third quarter (October-December 022) of the financial year 2022-23. The data also showed that the growth of private final consumption expenditure (PFCE), which indicates consumer spending, decelerated to 6 per cent. (PTI)

'No voter should be excluded': SC

The petitioner said elections were normally held for 11 hours and it took around 60 to 90 seconds to cast a single vote and therefore 660 to 490 persons could cast their vote in a day at one polling station with one EVM. Considering the average voting percentage to be 65.70 per cent, it was perceivable that a polling station prepared to accept 1,000 electors, saw about 650 people turning up, said the petitioner.

The plea said there were booths where the elector turnout was in the range of 85-90 per cent. "In such a situation. about 20 per cent of voters will either end up standing in the queue beyond the voting hours or due to long waiting times, will abandon exercising their right to vote. Neither is acceptable in a progressive republic or a democracy, argued the PIL. (PTI)

Kejriwal alleges 'Jungle Raj'

been raising the issue of law and order situation in the city, attacking the BJP-led Centre and the Union home minister. Kejriwal said that the entire Naraina area knew about a gang of local criminals who terrorised the residents but police took no action against them.

"Three murders were committed in the city yesterday. The BJP and Shah have left the city at the mercy of goons and gangsters," he charged. The BJP has hit back at Kejriwal saying he was raising the law and order issues by citing criminal incidents to deflect attention from the corruption and failures of the AAP government. (PTI)

AAP more interested in liquor sales

in liquor sales and excise policy. They should rather focus on the health of the citizens and for that it is important that the scheme is implemented in the national capital," he said. Mandaviya added that the Centre has expanded health coverage for all aged 70 years and above irrespective of their income status under AB-PMJAY.

According to the minister, there is no move to increase the insurance limit of ₹5 lakh for treatment as of now. He, however, stressed that health services offered under the scheme are constantly monitored to weed out overcharging and waste.

It had come to light during his tenure that the private sector was conducting caesarean sections in a majority of its patients under AB-PMJAY, he said. "As the number was found to be very high, C-section was removed from the packages offered." He said the Punjab government had branded Ayushman Arogya Mandirs Aam Aadmi Clinics but has now said they will reverse the name.

"Branding them as Aam Aadmi clinics was a breach of agreement with the Union health ministry where the Centre is giving 60 per cent of the funding. It will also follow the required colour scheme and display the mandated

ISRO chief Somanath urges

Speaking about technology transfer, C Anandharamakrishnan, director, CSIR-NIIST, Thiruvananthapuram said, "Young innovators like you have already begun building rockets and satellites in colleges, efforts that are nearing commercial success. By understanding these advancements and the opportunities in the field of space, science and

technology, you can be inspired to pursue similar paths and shape a brighter future." (PTI) Bond of friendship between Nagas

the vibrant Bihu festival and the traditional Assam silk reflect the diversity and beauty of our nation's cultural fabric. "Assam's music, arts, and literature have enriched our country's mosaic, providing us with stories and traditions that unite us in our diversity," he added. The celebration featured modern creative dance by Sanjana Bordoloi, Assamese song by Monika Gogoi, Bihu dance by Astha Gogoi, and Bodo group dance by Beauty Basumatary and friends.

CEM Pramod Boro lays foundation for key BTR projects

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Dec 2: In a political surge for the UPPL party, more than 1,000 new members from different political parties joined the ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in Tamulpur district on Sunday in the presence of Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region and UPPL president.

The newly joined members came from Darrangajuli and Tamulpur blocks under the Tamulpur district committee.

CEM Pramod Boro and senior party leaders of the UPPL warmly welcomed and felicitated the newly joined members who had come from various political parties, including the BPF and Con-

He stated that the BTR government and the UPPL party have been rendering relentless services towards the welfare and development of the citizens with dedication since its inception in the BTR. He said the BTR government is committed to working for the allround development of society and has accordingly initiated many missions and visions to usher in sustainable development in the re-

He mentioned that people from across communities have been attracted to the UPPL party as it is gaining popularity among citizens through its developmental and humanitarian welfare services. Consequently, people are joining the UPPL party in large numbers day

GUWAHATI, Dec 2: Lions In-

ternational District 322G had the

privilege of hosting the Second Council Meet of Multiple Dis-

trict 322 recently at the presti-

gious Hotel Kiranshree Grand.

The event brought together 72

distinguished council members

who traveled from Odisha,

Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal,

and the North East region. The

gathering was graced by es-

teemed dignitaries, including in-

ternational director Lion Raj

Kumar Agarwal, international

director endorsee Lion Surai

Bagla, and past international di-

rectors Lion Prem Lahoty, Lion

Bishnu Bajoria, Lion GS Hora,

and Lion VK Luthra, among oth-

ers, whose presence added im-

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Dec 2: With a daylong

programme, Rangpur Sahitya Sabha

celebrated its diamond jubilee at the

Amolapatty Namghar premises on Sat-

urday. Attending the open session,

noted writer and former HoD of Eng-

lish at SMD College, Professor

Tuwaram Khanikar, said that the recog-

nition of the Assamese language as a

classical language is a certificate that

the language will not die. However, this

is not enough to keep alive a language

that is so rich in pedagogy and etymol-

ogy. Just one letter or morpheme in As-

samese can express an entire sentence,

such as ra, hu, ka, etc. Hem Baruah,

president of Rangpur Sahitya Sabha,

hoisted the flag, while Dhiren Bhuyan,

Putali Goswami, and Prema Gogoi per-

formed the tarpan. Jeuti Bora Bhuyan,

the secretary, spoke on the objectives.

mense value and inspiration.

"It is a moment of pleasure to accord a warm welcome to the UPPL family as more than 850 new members from Darrangajuli Block and 168 new members from Dwarkuchi Primary have joined our UPPL family. Together, let us further strengthen BTR's journey of peace and progress while paving the way for a brighter future for all," CEM Boro said.

Meanwhile, the CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, also laid the foundation stones for the construction of various developmental projects under Tamulpur district to augment BTR's infrastructure in the region.

The foundation stones included the following projects: Tamulpur-Goreswar Road to Hagramari village under Mukhya Mantrir Unnoto Paki Path Nirman Achoni, 2023-24; Rangia Bhutan Road to Batabari (Barkhata) under Mukhya Mantrir Unnoto Paki Path Nirman Achoni, 2023-24; Repair and renovation of the ground floor and construction of the first floor of the Bodoland Guest House; ICBP Road from NH 127D under Dwarkuchi VCDC under SOPD, 2024-25.

CEM Boro also inaugurated the newly constructed RCC Bridge at Boroliapar, the Bishnu Rabha Park at Patharpar, and the Tribal Rest House at Tamulpur LAC.

"Once completed, these projects will go a long way towards empowering the people of BTR,'

To mark the occasion, all

members were warmly wel-

comed with traditional shawls,

and at the conclusion of the

meeting, they were presented

with gift boxes containing the

renowned Assam Tea and spe-

cially designed laptop stands,

courtesy of district governor Lion Seema Goenka and SVDG

Lion Manoj Bhajanka, respec-

tively. A special highlight of the

event was the preparation and

distribution of 200 Pregnancy

Cum Newborn Kits, a heartfelt

initiative by the district in collab-

oration with the multiple, aimed

at supporting underprivileged

delight with the exceptional hos-

pitality and seamless organisa-

tion of the event. This successful

council meet was made possible

through the dedicated efforts of

the district team under the vi-

sionary leadership of DG Lion

Seema Goenka, advisor PDG

Lion Sudhir Choudhary, and

SVDG Lion Manoj Bhajanka. It

was a remarkable event that reaf-

The open session was addressed by

Dr Bharati Dutta, former professor of

Monoharidevi Kanoi College; Dr

Prakash Kotoky, former principal of

Sibsagar College; Dr Nirupama Ma-

hanta, president of Jila Sahitya Sabha;

and Dr Arundhati Mahanta, former pro-

The souvenir, edited by Mukul Nath

and Uzzal Thakur, was released along

with the following books: Maharajat

Kanti by Apurba Bhuyan; Smriti Dhara

by Jeuti Bhuyan; Moi aru Prantik by

Uzzal Kumar Thakur; Sishu Geet aru

Kabita by Ila Mohan Buraghain; Aso-

mor Luka Samajar Jilingani by Niru

Chetia; Urmimalar Covid Kalin

Sumeru Kumeru by Pranati Bora

Bhuyan; Yatra by Devajani Mahanta;

Sahitya Buranji aru Sanskriti by Prema

Gogoi. These were released by the

fessor of Gargaon College.

service and fellowship.

Rangpur Sahitya Sabha marks diamond jubilee

The members expressed their

pregnant women.

Lions International District

322G hosts council meet

State celebrates Asom Divas, honours legacy of Chaolung Sukapha

<u>HT Correspondent</u> BISWANATH CHARIALI, Dec

2: On the auspicious occasion of Asom Divas, the NCC troop of Dakhin Nagsankar HS, under the 5 Assam NCC Battalion, organised a motivational lecture for NCC cadets on Monday. The day-long program began with the NCC flag hoisting by Colonel Abraham N, the commanding officer of 5 Assam Bn, NCC, which was followed by a march past demonstrated by the NCC cadets of the school. The open session commenced with the lighting of an earthen lamp in front of the portrait of Sukapha by Trilochan Das, officer-in-charge of Sootea Police Station, and the offering of floral tributes by Ballav Chapagain,

headmaster of the school. Addressing the cadets as the chief guest, Colonel Abraham spoke about the significance of Asom Divas and the importance of observing this special day. He further elaborated on the role of the NCC in the nation-building process and encouraged cadets to put their efforts into joining the uniformed services. He briefly explained the entry process for joining the armed forces and highlighted the benefits for NCC

cadets and certificate holders in their career options.

The motivational session was also addressed by Trilochan Das, officer-in-charge of Sootea PS, as the guest of honour. He spoke about the NCC as the second line of defense and inspired the cadets to consider uniformed services as a career option. Subedar Prem Kumar, junior commissioned officer (JCO) and a veteran of the Kargil War, shared his inspiring experiences from the Kargil War, motivating the cadets to lead their lives in a positive direction and to never give up under any circum-

Earlier, the headmaster of the school, Ballav Chapagain, delivered the welcome address, while Anjan Baskota, associate NCC officer of the school, offered a vote of thanks. All proceedings of the session were conducted by Mina Thapa, assistant teacher of the school. The event was attended by Lila Kanta Sarma, Bhabani Sarma, Narad Upadhyaya, Arup Barua, Homnath Dhakal, Muniraj Sarma, teachers, along with NCC cadets, ex-cadets, and students of the

Our Demow correspondent adds: Under the patronage of the



to Chaolung Sukapha, the founder

of the Ahom Empire and the archi-

tect of Greater Assam, at his statue

located at Eco Park Hill View,

Margherita, on the occasion of

earthen lamps were lit in Chaolung

Sukapha's honour, who is known

Chaolung Sukapha, who crossed

the Patkai Hills in 1228 AD to es-

tablish the Ahom dynasty in

as the unifier of Greater Assam.

Flowers were offered, and

Asom Divas on Monday.

Demow Regional Tai Ahom Students Union and in association with the greater Demow people, the sixth annual Kendriya Sukapha Divas (Asom Divas) 2024 was organised at the Demow Jyoti Bishnu Cultural Building on Monday. The flag hoisting, moidam tarpan, along with various other programs, were organised on the day. Drawing competition, essay competition, and speech competition were held among the students on the day. In the evening, the prize distribution and felicitation program were organised. The win-

Our Margherita correspon**dent adds:** A rich tribute was paid

ners of the different competitions

gaiety and fervour, said Tunu Gogoi Saikia.

Renowned Tai language and culture researcher and retired principal of Margherita College, Pranab Gogoi; Margherita College retired vice principal, Tunu Gogoi Saikia; noted social worker of Margherita, Debojit Baruah; Tai Ahom Development Council member, Naboiit Baruah; and Chaolung Sukapha Managing Committee president, Ranjit Konwar, along with many other resourceful and distinguished persons of the Tai Ahom community, participated in the event. People from Margherita co-district area, irrespective of caste, creed, race, language, and religion, also attended. The event included a discussion focused on the unity and integration of various ethnic

The event, organised by the Chaolung Sukapha Managing Committee, was attended by dignitaries and local residents from the Margherita co-district area.

Assam, is revered as a symbol of unity and integration. It was on The committee also announced December 2, 1972, that Bhim that an earthen lamp lighting cere-Kanto Gogoi declared this day to mony would be held at Chaolung be celebrated as Asom Divas, also Sukapha's statue in the evening to called Sukapha Divas, which is further commemorate the occanow observed every year across

Amal Sarkar arrested for killing Anupam Reporters protest attack Sutradhar in Garajan murder case

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 2: Nagaon police finally arrested one person in connection with the sensational murder of four people from Garajan Pashim Amarakanda village under Garajan Police Outpost in November and also brought to light the entire episode on Monday.

While addressing a press conference at the conference hall of Nagaon police reserve on Monday evening, Swapnanil Deka, superintendent of police, Nagaon, informed that the arrested person, identified as Amal Sarkar, the younger brother of the victim Gangadhar Sarkar, unearthed the entire gruesome incident of November 22.

According to Amal Sarkar's statement, Anupam Sutradhar, the fourth with the bodies of Gunadhar Sarkar, his wife Sarudhari Sarkar, and their younger daughter Jayasmita Sarkar inside their residence, was killed by Amal Sarkar himself, SP Deka added.

Briefing about the gruesome incident, the senior police official said that Anupam Sutradhar killed Gunadhar Sarkar, his daughter Jayasmita Sarkar, and when he was about to kill his wife Sarudhari Sarkar, Amal Sarkar entered the room where the murder was taking

With no option to resist him, Amal tried to subdue Anupam. But Anupam Sutradhar was so ferocious that he leaped on Amal as well.

A scuffle ensued during which Amal Sarkar finally murdered Anupam Sutradhar on the spot, leaving Amal Sarkar with a minor injury. Amal Sarkar immediately left the

spot and set his bloodstained clothes on fire to destroy the evidence, SP Deka said, adding that Anupam Sutradhar had threatened the youth with whom Navasmita Sarkar's marriage had been arranged several times, warning him not to marry her since he had against the alleged attack broken his affair with Navasmita on a digital media person

Additionally, two cross-cases were filed by both parties in 2022, SP Deka said, adding that during the investigation by a special investigative team of police, evidence, including videos, had already been gathered in support of Anupam Sutradhar's direct involvement in the killings of the three mem-

by illegal pig traders to Amguri, Halowating,

HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, Dec 2: On Monday, E-Media Associ-Sivasagar, and ation, Rural Reporters Forum took out a procession

and his cameraman by illegal pig traders on Amguri Janjhi Highway

The news media personnel have long been exposing the illegal pig traders' racket that has been transporting pigs from Punjab and Kanpur in Sivasagar district.

and neighbouring Nagaland despite a ban on pig transportation due to an outbreak of swine fever. While the locals seized

a pig-laden truck, the contractors threatened the reporters. The reporters demanded action against the illegal pig traders.

Supporting the reporters' protest, Raijor Dal activist Ritumoni Hazarika blamed the police for protecting the illegal trade of pigs and cattle

Minor dies after botched illegal abortion in Nagaon

HT Correspondent NAGAON, Dec 2: A minor tragically passed away

under mysterious circumstances at a nursing home in Nagaon, following complications from an illegal abortion. The incident has sparked widespread outrage and calls for justice.

According to sources, the girl's mother had allegedly paid ₹ 15,000 to a doctor for the procedure. The abortion was performed at a private maternity center in Nagaon by a doctor identified as Dr Datta. Following the procedure, the girl reportedly experienced excessive bleeding and a dangerous drop in firmed the Lions' commitment to oxygen levels. She was then rushed to another private nursing home for treatment but succumbed to investigations are underway.

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Dec 2: A cooking

competition under the theme

Rasoi

Zimmedari' was successfully

organised by the Oil Marketing

Companies with the support of

all the LPG distributors within

the Hojai district at Ajmal

Modern Residential School in

The event aimed to raise

The competition witnessed

enthusiastic participation, with

16 participants showcasing

their cooking talents while ad-

hering to safe LPG handling

The panel of judges, includ-

awareness about LPG handling

and safety in cooking while

celebrating culinary skills.

Hojai on Sunday.

Hamari

'Hamari

Cooking competition promotes LPG safety

ing Halima Abdul Matin, assis-

tant professor at Nazir Ajmal

BEd College; Shilpa Khakho-

lia, proprietor of Shivam

Bharatgas Agency; and Namita

Dey Das, partner at MAA

Laxmi Bharatgas, evaluated the

participants on criteria such as

LPG safety, dish quality, pres-

tion were: Nikita Debnath, If-

tiza Ahmed, and Barsha Pandit.

pm, leaving a lasting impact on

participants and the audience

about the importance of re-

sponsible LPG use in everyday

Organisers thanked all par-

ticipants, judges, and attendees

for making the event a success

The winners of the competi-

The event concluded by 5:00

entation, and cleanliness.

The incident has drawn sharp criticism from locals, who are demanding strict action against the doctor and staff involved. In connection with the case, the police have arrested a nurse, Taslima Begum, while investigations are ongoing.

This tragedy has also brought to light the troubling issue of illegal abortions in the region. Residents allege that several clinics and nursing homes in Nagaon are involved in such unlawful practices, with little to no intervention from the Health Department. Police have registered a case against the doctor and the staff of the nursing home, and further

sonnel

and contributing to the cam-

paign's mission of promoting

Notably, the Basic Safety

Check Campaign, launched on

March 5, 2024, by Oil Market-

ing Companies, aims to cover

over 12 crore households

through door-to-door inspec-

tions conducted by trained per-

The inspections are free of

cost for customers, addressing

any safety hazards in LPG in-

stallations, with replacement of

old or non-standard hoses of-

households have been in-

spected, resulting in the re-

placement of approximately

As of now, over 8 crore

fered at discounted prices.

safety and awareness.

BroadArks Foundation and BCPL unveil Healthcare **Skill Development Program**

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Dec 2: BroadArks Foundation, in collaboration with Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL), proudly an- tion, Dr Kaveri Dutta, emphasised nounced the launch of the 'Health- the organisation's mission to create care Skill Development Program' for the fiscal year 2024-25.

The inauguration ceremony took place at BroadArks Centre, Milan Nagar, Dibrugarh, in the presence of esteemed representatives from BCPL, other distinguished guests, media friends, and an enthusiastic batch of students

This program is a key initiative under BCPL's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts, aimed at empowering local youth with industry-relevant skills in the healthcare sector.

Designed to provide a comprehensive learning experience, the program will equip participants with the necessary technical knowledge, hands-on training, and professional skills to build sustainable

careers in healthcare. Speaking at the event, a senior representative from BCPL remarked, "We are delighted to partner with BroadArks Foundation for this meaningful initiative. Investing in skill development is essential for fostering a skilled workforce, and

the socio-economic upliftment of the region through such impactful programs."

The CEO of BroadArks Foundaopportunities for skill development and employment "This initiative is a testament to

our commitment to nurturing talent and addressing the growing demand for skilled healthcare professionals. Together with BCPL, we aim to bridge the gap between industry requirements and youth capabilities," he added. The program's curriculum is de-

signed to meet industry standards and includes modules on healthcare services, patient care, and modern medical practices. Participants will also benefit

from placement assistance to help them secure meaningful employment after completing the training.

This initiative is expected to have a transformative impact on the region by not only enhancing employability but also addressing critical healthcare needs.

Dildar Neog (senior manager, BCPL), Pranjal Phukan (managing director, Axom ITI and APNI), and Pankaj Dutta (founder-director, BroadArks Foundation) were pres-

Herbal healer offers hope to patients

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Dec 2: Oujari resident Dharmeswar Medhi, near Charon Beel in Morigaon, has earned widespread recognition for his herbal remedies, which have provided relief to patients suffering from conditions such as rheumatic pain and wrist pain.

People from across the state are flocking to Medhi's home seeking his guidance and treatment for various ailments. His herbal medicines have reportedly yielded positive results, leading to recovery for numer-

Many patients have reported positive results after using the herbal medicines provided by Dharmeswar Medhi. One patient, while speaking to this correspondent, said, "I spent thousands of rupees on medical treatments for severe knee pain, which suddenly occurred while I was returning from the market on a bike recently. However, I found relief soon after using the herbal medicine prepared by Dharmeswar Medhi.'

Another diabetes patient stated, "I had high blood sugar and used insulin injections. When I started using the herbal medicine prepared by Dharmeswar Medhi, I was able to control my sugar levels, which feels like a miracle.'

In response to the recovery of patients, Dharmeswar Medhi said, "I have been practicing herbal medicine for about thirty years after offering puja to the Goddess 'Ma Bhagawati' on the bank of Charon Beel. I do not know how the patients who come to me recover so quickly. I simply prepare herbal medicines for various ailments, including painrelated and skin diseases. Patients generally recover within a month, though it may take up to six months for critical conditions.

World AIDS Day marked with awareness and advocacy **HT Correspondent**

DIBRUGARH, Dec 2: On the occasion of World AIDS Day, an awareness programme was organised by the Socio-Educational Welfare Association (SEWA) in Dibrugarh on Monday. The event began with an awareness rally, flagged off by Salien Gogoi, principal of DHSK Commerce College.

In collaboration with the district administration and District Health Society, the rally included participation from students, community members, and youth, who raised their voices for the rights of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) and other marginalised groups.

Dr Ravi Baruah, district AIDS control officer of Dibrugarh, also attended the rally.

Following the rally, an awareness meeting and cultural programme were held at the College Auditorium of DHSK Commerce College, in line with this year's World AIDS Day theme: 'Take the Rights Path: My Health, My Right'. During the event, Arfan Hussain, vice president of SEWA, emphasised the importance of creating an environment in society that eliminates stigma and discrimination, enabling people to access health services without fear. He highlighted the significant role of mental health support in fostering an inclusive society where PLHIV and high-risk populations can

access available government health services. In his inaugural speech, Salien Gogoi, principal of DHSK Commerce College, urged the student and teaching community to dedicate time to spreading vital messages that can save lives and contribute to society



Abhijit Saikia, secretary of DLSA, spoke about the legislation protecting the rights of PLHIV and combating stigma and discrimination. He emphasised that continuous awareness efforts can reduce the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. Dr Pinky Poddar, medical officer at the OST Centre of AMCH, discussed the services provided under the harm reduction strategy of NACO.

Madhuri Bora, counsellor at the Drug Treatment Clinic of AMCH, stressed the necessity of mental health support for addicts during the de-addiction phases and addressed how unventilated emotions can put individuals at risk.

Dr Pritha Pratim Das, assistant professor of Microbiology at Lakhimpur Medical College, encouraged everyone to check their HIV status at government facilities, ensuring free and confidential services. Dr Ravi Baruah, DACO, also

spoke about the facilities available for PLHIV and HIV testing within the district.

The programme was jointly organised with the NSS unit of DHSK Commerce College and included participation from recovering addicts and the LGBTQ community.

Community members also performed a colourful cultural programme to signify their rights and advocate against dis-

The event was also attended by Dr Ajit Goswami, programme officer of the NSS unit, Altaf Hussain, general secretary of SEWA, and Dr Prabin Thakur, MO of SEWA.

The programme was anchored by Dity Changmai Baruah project manager of SEWA, and a vote of thanks was offered

by Manshi Baruah, counsellor of SEWA.

Our Biswanath Chariali correspondent adds: Assam Rifles organised a meaningful awareness program at Gyan Vikash Academy, Charduar, to educate the community about HIV/AIDS prevention and reduce stigma on the occasion of World AIDS Day. The event witnessed active participation from 127 attendees, including 51 boys, 54 girls, 7 teachers, 9 parents, and 6 Assam Rifles personnel. Through engaging discussions and activities, the program emphasised the importance of early diagnosis, safe practices, and collective responsibility in combating HIV/AIDS. Assam Rifles' commitment to spreading awareness reflected their dedication to fostering a healthier and more informed society, leaving a positive impact on students, teachers, and the community at large

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Conflict cannot survive without your participation. -Wayne Dyer

Truce in Lebanon: Welcome move

The ceasefire in Lebanon apart from giving respite to the beleaguered Lebanese, will also be a litmus test for Hezbollah on whether it can continue to flourish as a political and militant outfit in Lebanon or not. It would not be wrong to say that the whole of the world and the Middle East and in particular Lebanon took a cautious sigh of relief as the fragile ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel was announced last week. The main concern however was whether this ceasefire could hold as claims and counter claims by attacks and incursions by both the parties were reported in the first twenty-four hours. But precariously so far, the ceasefire has been held by both the parties. While fighting may be over, or at least paused, attention now shifts to another challenge facing Lebanon and Hezbollah: internal reckoning. In addition, what ace does Iran has, as it ordered its proxy to agree to a ceasefire in Lebanon. But the larger question is whether Hezbollah will be able to survive this ceasefire as a political and militant group in

For more than a year, the conflict was mostly limited to clashes in the border areas between Lebanon and Israel. However, the picture changed in September, when Israel exploded thousands of pagers used by Hezbollah members before launching a widespread bombing campaign across the country followed by a ground invasion. More than 3,900 people in Lebanon were killed and over a million displaced. While Lebanese have largely acted in solidarity with those displaced and killed by Israel, and stood by their compatriots in the face of Israeli forces, how the conflict has shifted domestic political dynamics may determine Lebanon's fate for years to come. In fact, the presence of Hezbollah and its militant arm has been a point of contention for decades in Lebanese politics. Hezbollah's victory narrative will be embraced for now by its constituency, many of whom will be relieved to be able to start going back home. But the message will be undermined without massive reconstruction, compensation, and resumption of social welfare in the face of widespread destruction and displacement. The World Bank estimates the war has caused \$8.5 billion in damage and economic losses – more than one-third of Lebanon's GDP. Hezbollah insists that money for reconstruction will not be an issue, but given that its own main backer Iran has its own economic woes and Hezbollah's unpopularity with other Middle ¬Eastern governments, it is unclear who may ¬contribute funds for reconstruction, and with

Unlike in 2006, when Hezbollah was able to ignore a similar deal that ended a war that year, the group will now have to show that it is actively complying with the terms of the ceasefire. The weak Lebanese state — already worn out by a yearlong conflict and festering economic crisis — could pay the price if it does not. That may open the door to opponents demanding the dismantling of Hezbollah, which remains a powerful representative of the country's Shias, one of its largest communities, with vast reach into the levers of the state. Perhaps nowhere will the post-ceasefire political landscape be tested more than in the country's south, much of which is inhabited by Lebanon's Shia population and therefore Hezbollah

IDPD 2024 and its relevance

a critical moment for the global community to pause and reflect on the status, rights, and contributions of individuals with disabilities. Since its inception in 1992 by the United Nations, this day has aimed to increase awareness and understanding of disability issues, promote the inclusion of people with disabilities, and encourage the participation of all members of society in advancing equality. With the theme of IDPD 2024—"Disability Leadership for a Sustainable Future"—the focus has shifted beyond merely acknowledging the challenges faced by persons with disabilities to actively recognizing and empowering their potential as leaders in creating a sustainable future for all. The relevance of this theme has never been more pronounced, as the world grapples with global crises such as climate change, economic inequality, and social exclusion. In this context, the leadership of persons with disabilities is not just valuable but essential for building a more inclusive and sustainable society.

IDPD 2024 is the recognition that sustainability is not just about environmental protection but is deeply intertwined with social, economic, and political equity. Traditional sustainability models often center on environmental issues, focusing on reducing carbon footprints, promoting renewable energy, and conserving biodiversity. However, these efforts can only be

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

effective if they also address social sustainability, which is rooted in inclusion and equity. For sustainability to be truly global and comprehensive, it must include persons with disabili-

ties, who are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, social exclusion, and economic inequality. The lived experiences of people with disabilities offer a unique perspective on how societal systems—ranging from transportation to healthcare—often fail to serve the needs of the most marginalized. By promoting the leadership of persons with disabilities, IDPD 2024 calls for a broader understanding of sustainability, one that encompasses not only environmental concerns but also the social and economic inclusion of all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

For much of history, people with disabilities have been viewed through a deficit lens, often seen as individuals in need of help or charity. This perspective has contributed to the marginalization of disabled individuals and their exclusion from leadership roles in various sectors, including politics, business, technology, and environmental sustainability. IDPD 2024 seeks to challenge this narrative by emphasizing the potential of persons with disabilities as leaders in the global movement toward sustainability. The theme underscores the idea that individuals with disabilities bring invaluable insights to the table—insights born out of their lived experiences in navigating a world that is often designed without them in mind. Their leadership is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for creating sustainable solutions that are inclusive, accessible, and equitable.

The concept of disability leadership within the context of sustainability is a relatively new but increasingly important paradigm. In many respects, persons with disabilities are the true experts in building accessible, inclusive systems because they have firsthand experience of the challenges posed by exclusionary policies, inaccessible infrastructure, and societal biases. Whether it is in the field of urban planning, where cities need to be designed to accommodate people with diverse mobility needs, or in the development of green technologies, where accessibility must be a priority, the leadership of persons with disabilities is critical to ensuring

he International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), celebrated annually on December 3, serves as jority. By positioning people with disabilities at the forefront of sustainability initiatives, IDPD 2024 calls for a more inclusive approach to tackling the world's most pressing chal-

Disability leadership is particularly vital when addressing environmental sustainability. For decades, the environmental movement has focused on issues such as climate change, deforestation, and renewable energy, yet it has often failed to account for the specific needs of people with disabilities. Many environmental initiatives, such as building sustainable cities or promoting green technologies, overlook the accessibility of these solutions for individuals with mobility impairments or sensory disabilities. Accessible public transportation, for instance, is not just an issue of convenience for people with disabilities but a matter of social inclusion. Without accessible infrastructure, disabled individuals are excluded from participating in the very solutions that could make our cities greener and more sustainable. Similarly, green spaces, which are central to the concept of sustainable cities, are often designed without considering the needs of those with physical disabilities or sensory impairments. The leadership of persons with disabilities is essential in guiding the creation of sustainable cities and technologies that are truly inclusive, ensuring that the environmental ben-

efits of these initiatives are enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their physical abilities. The role of disability leadership is

also critical in the economic sphere, where persons with disabilities have long been excluded from

the workforce. According to the World Bank, people with disabilities represent an untapped resource in the global economy, with billions of dollars in potential economic activity left on the table due to their exclusion from employment opportunities. Despite this, persons with disabilities are often marginalized in labor markets, facing discrimination, lack of accommodations, and inaccessible workplaces. The leadership of disabled individuals can help break down these barriers, not only for themselves but for future generations. By creating inclusive workplaces and ensuring that persons with disabilities are included in the design of employment policies, businesses can harness the skills and talents of a largely underutilized workforce, contributing to more sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

The benefits of disability inclusion in the workplace extend beyond the individual level. Research has shown that diverse teams—including those with disabled individuals—tend to be more innovative, creative, and effective. The unique perspectives that persons with disabilities bring to the table can lead to more effective problem-solving and better decisionmaking, which are essential in today's rapidly changing world. In the context of sustainability, this means that persons with disabilities are not just passive recipients of change but active drivers of innovation and progress. By empowering people with disabilities to take on leadership roles in business, technology, and social enterprises, IDPD 2024 highlights the importance of diversity in building a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive economy.

The leadership of persons with disabilities is also critical in the realm of social sustainability. Social sustainability involves creating societies that are just, inclusive, and equitable for all members. Yet, persons with disabilities continue to face discrimination and exclusion in many aspects of life, from education and healthcare to public spaces and social services. For too long, disability has been treated as a fringe himangshur1989@gmail.com)

issue, with policymakers often overlooking the specific needs of disabled individuals. IDPD 2024 calls for a shift in this approach, urging the global community to center disability leadership in social policies. By involving persons with disabilities in the creation of inclusive educational systems, healthcare services, and social safety nets, societies can build more equitable and sustainable systems that serve everyone.

In the realm of governance and policy-making, persons with disabilities have historically been underrepresented. Yet, their leadership is crucial to ensuring that policies are inclusive and reflective of the needs of all citizens. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has provided a legal framework for disability inclusion, but the full implementation of these rights remains a challenge in many parts of the world. By empowering persons with disabilities to take on leadership roles in governance, public administration, and international organizations, IDPD 2024 aims to ensure that disability inclusion is not just a theoretical goal but a practical reality. When persons with disabilities are involved in decision-making processes, policies become more responsive, inclusive, and effective, leading to a more sustainable and equitable future.

The technological landscape offers another key area where disability leadership is essential for driving sustainability. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on the role of technology in addressing global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and inequality. Yet, despite the promise of technology to drive positive change, much of the digital world remains inaccessible to persons with disabilities. Websites, mobile apps, and other digital platforms are often designed without considering the needs of disabled users, leading to their exclusion from the very innovations that could improve their lives. By involving persons with disabilities in the development of new technologies, societies can ensure that digital solutions are inclusive and accessible to everyone. The leadership of disabled individuals in the tech sector can help create technologies that promote sustainability and social inclusion, ensuring that the digital revolution benefits all, not just a privileged few.

The importance of disability leadership in achieving a sustainable future cannot be overstated. As the world faces unprecedented challenges, from climate change to social inequality, persons with disabilities offer a unique perspective that can drive the creation of more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable systems. The theme of IDPD 2024 serves as a call to action for the global community to recognize the leadership potential of persons with disabilities and to empower them to play a central role in shaping the future. By amplifying disability leadership, society can build a future that is not only environmentally sustainable but also socially just, economically inclusive, and accessible to all.

In conclusion, the relevance of IDPD 2024 lies in its call to acknowledge and amplify the leadership of persons with disabilities in building a sustainable future. Sustainability, in its truest form, can only be achieved through inclusion, and disability leadership is essential in driving inclusive solutions in all spheres of life-environmental, economic, social, and political. By empowering persons with disabilities to lead, society can create a future that is both sustainable and just, where everyone, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to thrive. The leadership of persons with disabilities is not just a moral imperative; it is a practical necessity for addressing the global challenges of our time. The theme of IDPD 2024 reminds us that a sustainable future is only possible if it is built by and for everyone. (The author can be reached at

World Day of the Handicapped: Breaking barriers

By: Satyabrat Borah

rorld Day of the Handicapped, now officially known as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, is observed every year on December

3. This day is dedicated to promoting the rights, dignity,

The disabilities to be more accepting and inclusive. Simple acts of kindness, respect, and understanding one can along way in making persons with disabilities. and well-being of persons with disabilities. It is a time to reflect on the challenges they face, celebrate their achievements, and work towards creating a more inclusive and accessible world for all. The day encourages us to recognize the potential of every individual and to ensure equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their abilities.

People with disabilities often encounter barriers in many aspects of life. These barriers can be physical, social, or institutional, preventing them from fully participating in society. Many face challenges in accessing education, employment, healthcare, and public spaces. The World Day of the Handicapped reminds us of the importance of removing these obstacles and building a society where everyone can thrive.

Disabilities can take many forms, including physical, intellectual, sensory, and mental health challenges. Each person's experience is unique, and it is essential to understand and respect their individual needs. This day promotes awareness about the different types of disabilities and en-

courages us to be more understanding and supportive. By learning about the experiences of persons with disabilities, we can foster a sense of empathy and work towards creating a more compassionate so-

Accessibility is a key focus of the World Day of the Handicapped. Many people with disabilities face difficulties in navigating public spaces, using transportation, or accessing information. Simple things

like ramps, elevators, and clear signage can make a significant difference in their lives. The day emphasizes the importance of designing spaces, services, and technologies that are inclusive and accessible to everyone. By making these changes, we can ensure that persons with disabilities can live independently and participate fully in society.

Education is another crucial aspect of empowerment for persons with disabilities. Many children with disabilities do not have access to quality education due to a lack of resources, trained teachers, or accessible facilities. This day highlights the need for inclusive education systems that accommodate the diverse needs of all students. By providing equal opportunities for learning, we can help children with disabilities reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities are also a significant concern. Many face discrimination in the workplace or are denied opportunities due to misconcentions about their abilities. The World Day of the Handicapped encourages businesses and employers to create inclusive work environments and provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. Hiring persons with disabilities not only benefits them but also enriches workplaces with diverse perspectives and talents.

Healthcare is another area where persons with disabilities often face challenges. Many struggle to access the medical care they need due to physical barriers, lack of specialized services, or financial constraints. The day calls for improving healthcare systems to address the needs of persons with disabilities and ensure they receive timely and quality care. Accessible healthcare is not just a basic right but also essential for their overall well-being and independ-

ence. Social inclusion and participation are vital for the dignity and happiness of persons with disabilities. Many experience isolation and exclusion due to stigma, prejuing can go a long way in making persons with disabilities feel valued and included.

Technology plays a significant role in empowering persons with disabilities. Assistive devices, software, and innovative solutions have transformed the lives of many, enabling them to communicate, learn, and work more effectively. From screen readers for the visually impaired to mobility aids for those with physical challenges, technology has opened up new possibilities. The day highlights the importance of investing in accessible technologies and ensuring they are affordable and available to all.

Advocacy and policymaking are essential for advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. Laws and policies that protect their rights, promote equality, and provide support services are crucial for their empowerment. The World Day of the Handicapped encourages governments and organizations to prioritize disability-inclusive policies and ensure their effective implementation. Public awareness

campaigns can also help change attitudes and reduce stigma surrounding disabilities. The day is also an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of persons with disabilities. Despite the challenges they face, many have excelled in various fields, including sports, arts, science, and business. Their stories of resilience, determination, and success inspire others and challenge stereotypes about disabilities. The World Day of the Handicapped recognizes their contributions and highlights the importance of providing plat-

forms for their voices and talents. Families and caregivers play a vital role in supporting persons with disabilities. Their dedication, love, and hard work often go unnoticed, but they are essential in helping their loved ones live fulfilling lives. The day acknowledges their efforts and advocates for providing them with the supnort and resources they need.

Building an inclusive society requires collective effort. Everyone has a role to play in creating a world where persons with disabilities can live with dignity and independence. Schools, workplaces, communities, and governments must work together to promote inclusion and accessibility. Individuals can contribute by being more aware, advocating for change, and supporting initiatives that benefit persons with disabilities.

The World Day of the Handicapped is also a reminder of the importance of collaboration on a global scale. Organizations, governments, and communities around the world must work together to address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Sharing best practices, resources, and knowledge can help accelerate progress towards a more inclusive world.

The World Day of the Handicapped is a day of reflection, awareness, and action. It reminds us of the importance of promoting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities and working towards a society that values diversity and inclusion. By breaking down barriers, providing equal opportunities, and fostering understanding, we can create a world where everyone can thrive. Let this day inspire us to be more compassionate, supportive, and committed to building a better future for persons with

Karunadhara'srole in achieving inclusive SDGs for persons with disabilities

By: Dipak Kurmi

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), celebrated annually on December 3rd, marks a significant opportunity to raise awareness about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs) and to promote their rights. In 2023, the theme "United in Action to Rescue and Achieve the SDGs for with and by Persons with Disabilities" reflects the global shift toward recognizing the importance of inclusivity in sustainable development. This theme underscores the collective responsibility of governments, organizations, and individuals to not only assist persons with disabilities but to actively involve them in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving these goals for and with persons with disabilities, and empowering them to contribute to the realization of the SDGs, is essential for building an inclusive world.

In this context, Karunadhara, an Assamese trust founded in 2011, stands as a shining example of the vital role played by non-governmental organizations in fulfilling this mission. The trust's efforts align perfectly with the theme of IDPD 2023, as it is dedicated to improving the lives of persons with disabilities and those suffering from severe illnesses, thereby contributing to the broader SDG framework, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 10 (Reduced In-

The Genesis of Karunadhara: A Vision of Compassion

Karunadhara was conceived by the late ShriHomenBorgohain, a distinguished Assamese author and journalist, whose work throughout his career exposed the stark realities faced by individuals with disabilities and critical illnesses in Assam. As an observer of society's often indifferent attitude toward these vulnerable groups, he was moved to act. It was his deep empathy that led to the establishment of Karunadharaan organization whose primary aim is to offer monetary succour to individuals facing physical and mental disabilities, as well as those suffering from life-threatening illnesses but lacking the financial means to access the treatment they need. The name Karunadhara itself is a reflection of this empathy. It is derived from a verse by Rabindranath Tagore, which speaks to the need for compassion and mercy in times of hardship: "When the heart is hard and parched up, come upon me with a shower of mercy. When grace is lost from life, come with a burst of song..." This powerful expression of human connection and mercy is what the organization aims to provide—an outpouring of compassion and tangible support to those most in need.

The Mission and Objectives of

jectives, all of which are centered around alleviating the suffering of disabled and critically ill individuals in Assam, many of whom lack support from their families, the government, or any other organization. Some key aspects of its mission include:

1. Financial Assistance for Disabled Persons: Karunadhara provides financial aid to individuals who are physically and mentally disabled and have no means of selfsupport. This initiative is targeted at individuals who have not received adequate assistance from the government or any other entities, ensuring that they can livewith dignity.

2. Aid for Critically Ill Persons: The organization also focuses on helping individuals who require specialized medical treatment, often beyond the means of their families, ensuring that financial constraints do not prevent them from accessing lifesaving care.

3. Awareness and Advocacy: Through the publication of literature and organizing seminars across Assam, Karunadhara educates the public about the needs and rights of people with disabilities. This awareness is crucial for garnering support from the community and influencing the government's policies regarding persons with dis-

4. Promoting Welfare and Social Inclusion: Beyond just providing financial aid, Karunadhara is committed to raising the social status of disabled individuals by encouraging their participation in society and promoting their welfare in a broader sense.

A Focus on Sustainability and Empow-

Karunadhara's work is not just about providing immediate relief—it's also about empowering individuals to become self-reliant. In line with the SDGs, particularly SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality), the trust has taken several steps to help physically and mentally disabled individuals develop their latent talents and skills. The goal is to make them self-sufficient and to bolster their morale by showing them that society cares for their well-being. By focusing on capacity building, Karunadhara enables individuals to live with dignity and contribute to the community, thus promoting the integration of persons with disabilities into mainstream society.

The organization's work is also aligned with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), as it actively collaborates with individuals. community organizations, and even corporate bodies to raise funds and support its initiatives. Although it has not yet received government funding, Karunadhara's ability to raise substantial resources through public donations demonstrates the power of collective action. As of August 2023, Karunadhara has raised and distributed over ₹4.22 crores among 2,421 beneficiaries, including 1,058 disabled individuals The trust operates on a clear set of ob- and 1,363 critically ill patients.

Impact on the Ground: Karunadhara's Achievements

The financial assistance provided by Karunadhara has been transformative for many individuals. For example, several persons with disabilities, who would have able to access treatment or live independently thanks to the trust's intervention. The ongoing awareness campaigns have also played a pivotal role in shifting public perception and making the community more inclusive toward persons with disabilities.

Additionally, Karunadhara's advocacy has prompted discussions within the state government and civil society about the responsibilities they owe to vulnerable populations. This aligns with the SDG goal of achieving universal access to services for all, regardless of their socio-economic status or physical condition.

A Future of Inclusive Action

The work done by organizations like Karunadhara exemplifies the power of local action in achieving the global SDGs. By focusing on providing for and with persons with disabilities, these efforts ensure that such individuals are not left behind in the pursuit of societal well-being and progress. In line with the theme of IDPD 2023, Karunadhara embodies the spirit of unity and collective responsibility, proving that the SDGs are not just goals for the government to achieve, but goals that require the active participation of all sectors of society, including persons with disabilities themselves. As we celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, it is important to remember that inclusion is not just about providing assistance; it is about giving persons with disabilities the tools, opportunities, and platforms they need to contribute meaningfully to society. Karunadhara's work stands as a beacon of hope, demonstrating the transformative power of empathy and collective action in the fight for a more inclusive world—one where every person, regardless of their abilities, has the opportunity to thrive.

The ongoing work of Karunadhara, coupled with the broader movement for disability rights, highlights the critical need for inclusive, sustainable development. The organization's efforts align with the global goals of achieving the SDGs for, with, and by persons with disabilities. In the coming years, it is crucial that organizations, governments, and individuals continue to work together to ensure that persons with disabilities are not only recipents of help but active participants in the creation of a more inclusive and equitable world. United in action, we can rescue and achieve the SDGs, and most importantly, ensure that the voices of persons with disabilities are heard, valued, and included in every step of this global journey. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)



Can diet help improve depression symptoms?

By: Maria Cohut

epression is such a common mental ealth disorder that it affects around % of all adults around the world, according to World Health Organization (WHO) estimates.

There are different types of depression such as major depressive disorder and persistent depressive disorder lasting for at least 2

The causes of depression are often manifold, with both genetic and situational risk factors involved — specific stressors or conditions, acting as triggers, leading to recurrent major depressive episodes.

And while targeted therapy and medication help many overcome or manage their symptoms of depression, these interventions do not work equally for everyone.

This has led researchers to cast their nets even wider in looking for all the factors that may contribute to depression, as well as for novel approaches for depression treatments and symptom management.

Recently, diet has come to the forefront of medical research, with experts debating the pros and cons of using dietary interventions to treat or even prevent different medical condi-

Over the past few years, several studies have suggested that opting for healthier diets rich in vegetables, fruit, and whole grains may help improve depression symptoms.

For instance, one study from April 2022 from the University of Technology Sydney found that men aged 18-25 years experienced an improvement in depression symptoms after switching to a Mediterranean diet. But it remains unclear what mediates the link between diet quality and mental health.

In December 2022, two studies published in Nature Communications looked at the link between gut microbiota and depression symptoms. One of the studies found that 13 types of bacteria, in particular, are associated with depression symptoms.

It may be the way in which these bacteria lead to the activation of different signals in the brain that may explain the link between the bacterial makeup of the gut and depression symptoms, researchers hypothesize.

And this is also where diet comes in: By making certain dietary changes, we may be able to influence the abundance of certain bacterial species in the gut and, by extension, the communication between the gut and the brain, leading to an improvement in depression symptoms.

In this month's installment of our In Conversation podcast, we discuss the whys and hows of diet's potential impact on mental health, specifically on depression symptoms, with one of the authors of the Nature Communications study looking at gut bacteria and depression symptoms, Dr. Najaf Amin.

Dr. Amin is a senior research associate in the Nuffield Department of Population Health at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, and one of her areas of interest is using genomics data to zero in on biomarkers of neuropsychiatric traits.

Our other guest on this month's episode is Rachel Kelly, a U.K.-based mental health advocate, writer, and journalist who has been outspoken about the ways in which dietary interventions helped treat her own instances of depression.

Kelly's book, The Happy Kitchen, sold as

compilation of healthy recipes based on information gathered from nutritional studies whose aim is to boost mood and increase energy levels

You can listen to this month's installment of our podcast below, or on your preferred streaming platform

Depression and the gut

In their study from $2\bar{0}22$, Dr. Amin and her colleagues analyzed data from 1,133 participants in the Rotterdam Study, asking whether there was a link between the composition of the gut microbiota and experiencing symptoms of depression.

The researchers found that the presence of certain microbial genera — including Eggerthella, Coprococcus, Sellimonas, Lachnoclostridium, and Hungatella — were linked to depression.

'We identified 13 microbiota, and those were associated with depression. I think most of them were protective, so they were decreased in depression. And then there were a few [bacteria] that were increased in depression," Dr. Amin explained in the podcast.

The abundance of some bacteria, in particular, such as those belonging to the Eggerthella genus, appeared to be connected to an increase in depression symptoms.

In their study, the researchers explain that these bacteria are involved in the synthesis of certain neurotransmitters, or chemical messengers, whose activity may, in turn, be involved in the expression of depression symptoms. These chemicals are glutamate, butyrate, serotonin, and gamma amino butyric acid (GABA).

Previous research has suggested that people with a diagnosis of depression have higher levels of glutamate in their systems than their depression-free peers, while lower-than-usual levels of butvrate have been linked to symptoms of depression in people with Parkinson's disease. Lower levels of GABA are also tied

And while last summer, a major review of the literature cast doubts over the prevailing theory that low serotonin levels are at least partly to blame for depression symptoms, newer small-scale studies continue to contend that the serotonin theory of depression still holds ground.

Dr. Amin and her colleagues suggest that butyrate, in particular, may be of importance in explaining the potential mechanisms through which some gut bacteria might influence mental health.

"In the gut microbiome, you have the shortchain fatty acid-producing bacteria [which synthesize the three short-chain fatty acids, including acetate, propionate, and butyrate. And all three of them, they act as energy providers also," Dr. Amin explained in the

"But they also have the ability to change the expression of a gene, [to] switch it on [or] switch it off. It doesn't change the genetic code, but what it does is it changes the levels of proteins that a certain gene is producing, so indirectly affecting what your genes are giving you," she noted.

Why might diet be key?

From making the connection between the abundance of certain gut bacteria and symptoms of mood disorders, to arguing that diet may also play a role in "feeding" or reducing the expression and severity of depression symptoms, there is just one short step, Dr. Amin pointed out.



butyrate, are synthesized by gut bacteria from a person's diet, meaning that what a person eats will necessarily influence the abundance of those substances in the human body.

"The most important part [with] butyrate is that it is responsible for maintaining the intestinal epithelial integrity," Dr. Amin explained. 'So if you eat lots of fibers, whole grains, fruits, your gut microbiota [are] really happy, especially the short-chain fatty acid-producing bacteria — they're very happy, they produce more short chain fatty acids, and the butyrate, it helps maintain this intestinal epithelial integrity.'

"So if you're not taking, let's say, enough fruits in your diet, what happens is that the number of short-chain fatty acid-producing bacteria that go down, your intestinal epithelial integrity is compromised. And what happens is, then you have the leaky gut syndrome, where the bacteria from your gut, they start migrating into the body and that creates an inflammatory response from the body, and oxidative stress. So this is why butyrate is so important — the short-chain fatty acids [...] actually they are influenced by your diet intake." – Dr. Najaf Amin

But diet also influences the abundance of certain bacterial species in the gut, and since some bacteria synthesize certain substances, having too many or too few of some bacterial species can also lead to having too much or too little of some substances in our bodies.

This is a phenomenon known as dysbiosis, which can produce undesired effects both for physical and mental health.

"Studies have shown that [...] you change your gut microbiome if you start taking a healthy diet, or when there's a healthy diet [being followed already] — [for example, the] Mediterranean diet. There are lots of studies showing already that taking [a] Mediterranean diet over a long period of time does change your gut microbiome," Dr. Amin told us.

The importance of diversity in diet

Our other guest, Rachel Kelly, shared that improving the diversity of foods in her dayto-day diet was, she felt, crucial to helping her overcome her symptoms of depression.

"I think that one of the huge changes, the

adding a lot more variety," she told us in the podcast. Kelly said she started keeping a food diary to help her track what she was eating, and what she found gave her pause: "I found it rather painful, actually, because it's [...] pretty boring writing down everything you eat. But it's quite striking what comes up, and it was just the repetition.

"You know, I've got a family, and [when it came to meals] it tended to be roast chicken on Sunday lunch, and then it was fish pie on Friday, and my supermarket order was on repeat," she said. "So one of the biggest changes was really adding lots of variety.

In short, a balanced, varied diet can help maintain bacterial balance in the gut and thus prevent or redress dysbiosis and the health problems it creates.

How does inflammation factor in?

One phenomenon that might mediate the mpact of diet and gut bacteria on mental health might be inflammation. Inflammation can contribute to many health problems, including cardiovascular diseases, a decrease in cognitive performance, and even cancer.

Recently, some research has also suggested that inflammation could impact the availability of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, thereby contributing to some symptoms of depression, such as a lack of motivation.

"We already know that about 33% of the cases [of depression] are somehow related to inflammation," Dr. Amin said in the podcast. "But the thing [is] that most of these cases of inflammation are actually having a comorbid condition like for instance, diabetes or hypertension, or any other disease that is causing the inflammation, and then [people] develop de-

"But in my own studies — two papers are coming out very soon — [I and my coleagues] have analyzed hundreds of chemicals floating in the blood. And what we found is [that it is] the energy metabolism, the oxidave stress that is disrupted.' In cells, she explained, tiny structures, or or-

ganelles, called mitochondria are responsible for producing energy. When cells undergo oxidative stress — which can be caused by a number of factors, including disease and in-

And inflammation, she noted, can be caused by a poor diet, leaky gut syndrome, or even chronic exposure to everyday stressors. "What happens is that when you are not having enough energy and also, let's say, your gut microbiota is disturbed, or there is leaky gut syndrome, and then there is inflammation in the body — mitochondria are the first organelles to get affected by that oxidative stress. And when mitochondria start breaking down, or when they are affected, not enough energy is being produced. And that's what I think is happening — [...] your body first is going to inflammation, the inflammation is killing your mitochondria and then you are not able to produce enough energy." - Dr. Najaf Amin

How to improve diet to fight depression Both Kelly and Dr. Amin believe that, by taking positive control of one's diet, people can take a step forward in fighting the symptoms of depression — or perhaps even in preventing it altogether.

While they both acknowledge that depression is a complex condition that can have multiple causes, they argue that dietary interventions can be an easy, self-empowering way of working towards better mental health.

And, importantly, a healthy diet does not come with a list of potential side effects, as does some of the most common antidepressant medication, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

A therapeutic approach to depression that comes free of life-disrupting side effects -"this is what we are working towards, you know," said Dr. Amin.

So what, then, might be some easy dietary changes that could reduce the impact of depression? Speaking from her own life experience and based on the nutrition research she has read, Kelly suggested taking small steps and not removing our sources of so-called guilty gastronomic enjoyment altogether.

For instance, she suggested that dark chocolate can be a healthier and more beneficial alternative to milk chocolate, as it contains larger amounts of key minerals, such as iron, magnesium, and zinc, as well as antioxidants.

Research has suggested that magnesium supplementation can sometimes help improve symptoms of depression, and the antioxidants could help fight the oxidative stress that Dr. Amin believes could play a role in depression.

Kelly shared some other easy dietary recommendations with us:

• First, "avoiding the crap," that is, unhealthy food and drinks that are ultraprocessed and contain added sugars, which studies have repeatedly shown are an important risk factor for health • Second, adding variety — "go to the su-

permarket and if you always buy one kind of bean, buy six kinds of beans, if you always buy one kind of flour, buy six kinds of flour," Kelly advised • Third would be to add more probiotic

foods, such as yogurt and kimchi, as well as prebiotic foods, such as leafy greens, which can help improve bacterial diversity in the gut

• Fourth, eat more omega-3-rich foods, such as oily fish or walnuts, which can have an antiinflammatory effect and may help relieve depression symptoms.

At the same time, she emphasized, diet should only be one of several approaches when it comes to fighting depression symptoms. There are many other things that people can do in a bid to feel more themselves, she

How an Indian monk contributed to the understanding of Buddhism in China

By: Ajay Kamalakaran

t a time when the concepts of nation-states, national borders and identity cards did not exist, the oasis town of Dunhuang in the Gobi Desert in northwest China was a melting pot of four great cultures: Chinese, Indian, Greek and Persian.

Traders, travellers, scholars monks, missionaries from far and wide would navigate unforgiving landscapes and rough weather to reach this town, which eventually became a hub of Buddhism in Central Asia. Among those who made the journey was an Indian Buddhist monk by the name of Dharmakşema.

Buddhism had spread to China from India through the ancient Silk Road and was thriving in the country in the 4th century CE. When word got back to India that there was a demand in China for a deeper understanding of Buddhist doctrines, Dharmaksema knew he was the person to help.

"Possessed of both eloquence and intelligence, Dharmakşema was broadly learned in both monastic and secular affairs and was well versed in mainstream Buddhist texts," says the Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, edited by Robert E Buswell Jr and Donald S Lopez Jr.

Journey to China

Much of what is known about Dharmakṣema is thanks to the re-

search of Jinhua Chen, a professor of East Asian Religions at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. In a 2004 paper titled The Indian Buddhist Missionary Dharmakṣema (385-433): A New Dating of His Arrival in Guzang and of His Translations, Chen translated Dharmakşema's biogra-

phy by his collaborator, the monk Daolang. "The Indian sramana

Tanmochen (Dharmaksema) was a

native of Central India and a descendant of a Brahman family," Daolang wrote. "His natural gifts were outstanding and his understanding bright and penetrating.

Dharmakşema's interest in Buddhism is believed to have begun at the age of six under his first teacher, a Hinayana monk by the name of Dharmayasas.

The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism throws some light on Dharmaksema's journey to monkhood. "After he met a meditation monk named 'White Head' and had fiery debate with him, Dharmakṣema recognized his superior expertise and ended up studying with him," says the dictionary. "The monk transmitted to him a text of the Mahaparinirvana Sutra written on bark, which prompted Dharmakşema to embrace the Mahayana. Once he reached the age of 20, Dharmaksema was able to recite over two million words of Buddhist texts.'

Many believed that Dharmakṣema was an expert at casting spells. He could apparently draw water from a rock and was later called the Great Divine Spell Master.

"Carrying with him the first part of the Mahaparinirvana Sutra that he received from 'White Head,' he left India and arrived in the Kucha kingdom in Central Asia," says the Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism.

The ancient kingdom existed in what is today China's Xinjiang

Uygur Autonomous Region. It was acceptability and habit of the Chionce a well-populated oasis in the Taklamakan Desert.

"As the people of Kucha mostly studied Hinayana and did not accept Mahayana teachings, Dharmaksema then moved to China and lived in the western outpost of Dunhuang for several years," the Princeton Dictionary says. His purpose in living in this cultural and trade hub, Daolang explains, was "Buddhist teachings"

It was around this period that Dunhuang was becoming a major Buddhist educational centre. "Owing to the geographical location of Dunhuang, a few eminent monks in history, going to and coming from the West, not only left their footprints, but also engaged in the translation of Buddhist scriptures here, e.g. Dharmaraksa (known as Dunhuang Bodhisattva), with his disciple Zhu Facheng, Kumarajiva the great translator, who also lectured on the Buddhist sutras and whose horse was commemorated with the White Horse being built, Dharmaksema, the translator of Mahaparinirvana Sutra," Chinese scholars Chai Jianhong and Liu Jinbao write in their book Dunhuang.

In the 5th century CE, when Dharmaksema arrived in Dunhuang, pilgrims from eastern China were learning "Buddhist doctrines and stories from the graceful sculptures" in the city's Mogao Caves. "In ancient

> Chinese society, ordinary people were not educated enough to read and comprehend the scripts," Chai and Liu write. "However the Buddhist teachings portrayed on the walls were concise and vivid, and therefore easy for them to understand.

> Chai and Liu add, "The painters [painted] profound Buddhist doctrine and philosophy into popularised visual form, adopting familiar and adaptable methods of representation, particularly those that were suited to the

nese, taking into account the actual demand of ordinary people in their daily lives."

Scholar and sage

Dharmaksema totally immersed himself in the life of Dunhuang, living as a pilgrim and a highly respected monk. How long he spent there is not precisely known, but it must have been years given that he would have had to master Chinese to a high level to translate Buddhist texts into it.

In one telling, his reputation in Dunhuang as a scholar and sage reached Juqu Mengxun, the ruler of a regional kingdom that invaded the oasis town around 420 CE.

"After spending several years in Dunhuang, he [Dharmakṣema] went to Guzang [present-day Wuwei, Gansu], then the capital city of a regional regime known as the Northern Liang, first established by the Chinese Duan Ye and then taken over by the non-Chinese Juqu Mengxun," Chen writes. "Under the patronage of Juqu Mengxun, Dharmakşema engaged in a series of translation projects which resulted in a number of Chinese Buddhist texts.

These texts included the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, Suvarnaprabhasa Sutra and the Bodhisattva Bhumi. "Dharmaksema is also said to have been responsible for the first Chinese version of the Lankavatara Sutra, a text fundamental for the development of Chinese Chan Buddhism in its early period," writes Chen.

Dharmakṣema's works exerted a big impact on Buddhism in China. He would first translate texts orally into Chinese and then the monks Daolang and Huigao would assist him in writing them down. Their translations were in great demand in large monasteries and ended up spreading far and wide across China.

Biographical sources suggest Dharmakşema left his work incomplete when he travelled to India after his mother's death and staved back for a while. The journey was perilous. Apart from difficult terrain and erratic weather, travellers on the old



Silk Road faced the threat of armed bandits. But Dharmakşema made it back to China and resumed his work. **Lasting legacy**

Throughout his time in China, the Indian monk's reputation for casting magic spells followed him. "The Wei Shu [Official History of the Northern and Eastern Wei, 385-550], the only secular source about Dharmakṣema, provides a very different image from that supported by his monastic biographical sources," says Chen. "We are told that Dharmakşema, a Buddhist monk from 'Kashmir,' entered Shanshan where he succeeded in seducing a royal sister called Mantoutuolin, probably thanks to his alleged skill in manipulating ghosts

to increase women's fertility." As per this story, Dharmakşema fled Shanshan – a kingdom located near the northeastern end of the Taklamakan Desert – to the lands ruled Juqu Mengxun. At first Dharmakṣema was treated like a sage, but when Juqu Mengxun came to know that the Indian monk was teaching sexual skills to female members of the royal house, he had Dharmakşema tortured and executed.

for medical purposes and his ability

There is, of course, no way to verify this account. It is a fact that Juqu Mengxun ordered the killing of the Indian monk, but many sources believe the ruler's reasons were political, not personal.

The most widely accepted version dhism. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

of the killing story goes like this: Juqu Mengxun's rival Tuoba Tao admired Dharmakṣema's esoteric expertise and requested the monk be sent to his country. This alarmed Jugu Mengxun, who thought that his rival may try to use Dharmakṣema's skills against him and so had the monk assassinated. The Indian monk was 48 at the time of his death.

"It is not clear how reliable this image of Dharmakṣema as a performer of black magic is, although it is not unlikely that he had some thaumaturgic skills as did many other mediaeval monks," Chen says.

Whatever the merit of the magic and sex stories, it is undeniable that Dharmakṣema fostered a deeper understanding of Buddhism in China. He is remembered today for his translations, especially of the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, which had a great impact on the development of Chinese Buddhist thought. The concept of fóxing or Buddha-nature - the idea that all sentient beings possess the potential to become a Buddha, or already have a pure Buddha-essence within them - first appeared in Chinese in the Indian monk's translation

of the Mahaparinirvana Sutra. Like several other visitors from ancient India, Dharmakşema was a cultural bridge between the two great civilisations. Sixteen centuries later, his legacy is still widely celebrated in Dunhuang, western China's historical and cultural centre of Bud6 THE HILLS TIMES

Established in 2002 as the world's permanent court of last resort to prosecute individuals responsible for the most heinous atrocities

Chief of International Criminal Court lashes out at US, Russia over threats, accusations

THE HAGUE (NETHER-LANDS), Dec 2: The president of the International Criminal Court lashed out at the United States and Russia for interfering with its investigations, calling threats and attacks on the court "appalling".

"The court is being threatened with draconian economic sanctions by another permanent member of the Security Council as if it was a terrorist organisation," Judge Tomoko Akane, in her address to the institution's annual meeting, which opened on Monday.

Akane was referring to remarks made by US Sen. Lindsey Graham, whose Republican party will control both branches of Congress in January, and who called the court a "dangerous joke" and urged Congress to sanction its prosecutor. "To any ally, Canada, Britain, Germany, France, if you try to help the ICC, we're going to sanction you," Graham said on Fox News.

This marks the first time the global court of justice calls out a sitting leader of a major Western

Graham was angered by an announcement last month that judges had granted a request from the court's chief prosecutor Karim Khan to issue arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his former defence minister and Hamas' military chief for crimes against humanity in connection with the nearly 14-month



The decision has been denounced by critics of the court and given only milquetoast approval by many of its supporters, a stark contrast to the robust backing of an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin last year over war crimes in Ukraine.

Graham's threat isn't seen as just empty words. President-elect Donald Trump sanctioned the court's previous prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, with a travel ban and asset freeze for investigating American troops and intelligence officials in

Akane on Monday also had harsh words for Russia. "Several elected officials are being subjected to arrest warrants from a permanent member of the Security Council,"

for Khan and others in response to

the investigation into Putin. The Assembly of States Parties, which represents the ICC's 124 member countries, will convene its 23rd conference to elect committee members and approve the court's budget against a backdrop of unfavourable headlines.

The ICC was established in 2002 as the world's permanent court of last resort to prosecute individuals responsible for the most heinous atrocities — war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression.

The court only becomes involved when nations are unable or unwilling to prosecute those crimes on their territory. To date, 124 countries have signed on to the

stitution. Those who have not include Israel, Russia and China.

The ICC has no police force and relies on member states to execute arrest warrants.

US President Joe Biden called the warrants for Netanyahu and the former defence minister "outrageous" and vowed to stand with Israel. A year ago, Biden called the warrant for Putin "justified" and said the Russian president had committed war crimes. The US is

not an ICC member country. France said it would "respect its obligations" but would need to consider Netanyahu's possible immunities. When the warrant for Putin was announced, France said it would "lend its support to the essential work" of the court.

Another member country, Austria, begrudgingly acknowledged it would arrest Netanyahu but called the warrants "utterly incomprehensible." Italy called them "wrong' but said it would be obliged to arrest him. Germany said it would study the decision. Member Hungary has said it would stand with Israel instead of the court.

Global security expert Janina Dill worried that such responses could undermine global justice efforts. "It really has the potential to damage not just the court, but international law," she told The Associated Press.

Milena Sterio, an expert in international law at Cleveland State University, told the AP that sanctions against the court could affect a number of people who contribute to the court's work, such as international human rights lawyer Amal Clooney. Clooney advised the current prosecutor on his request for the warrants for Netanyahu and

"Sanctions are a huge burden," Sterio said.

Also hanging heavy over the meeting in the Hague, are the internal pressures that Khan faces. In October, the AP reported the 54year-old British lawyer is facing allegations he tried to coerce a female aide into a sexual relationship and groped her.

Two co-workers in whom the woman confided reported the alleged misconduct in May to the court's independent watchdog, which says it interviewed the woman and ended its inquiry after five days when she opted against filing a formal complaint. Khan was never questioned. He has denied the claims.

The Assembly of States Parties has announced it will launch an external probe into the allegations. It's not clear if the investigation will be addressed during the meet-

The court, which has long faced accusations of ineffectiveness, will have no trials pending after two conclude in December. While it has issued a number of arrest warrants in recent months, many high-profile suspects remain at large. (AP)

Bangladesh court acquits Zia's son and 48 others

DHAKA, Dec 2: Bangladesh's time rivals. High Court on Sunday acquitted former prime minister Khaleda Zia's son, Tarique Rahman, and 48 others, overturning their verdicts in a deadly 2004 grenade attack on a political rally.

The ruling comes at a critical time as the South Asian country suffers political tension after longtime Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled the country to India in August following a mass uprising that left hundreds dead.

Rahman serves as the acting chairperson of Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party while in self-exile in London, and could become Bangladesh's next leader if his party is voted into power.

Rahman and the 48 others were found guilty in 2018 in the attack targeting a rally held by supporters of Hasina, who led the opposition at the time, leaving two dozen people dead and wounding about 300 others. A court sentenced 19 of them to death while Rahman got life in prison, with Zia's party accusing the ruling counterpart of being politically motivated.

A two-member judge panel scrapped Sunday the entire 2018 ruling for all 49 men, following an appeal lodged by the defendants. Shishir Monir, a defence lawyer, told reporters the court declared the trial and verdict "illegal."

"As a result, all defendants have been acquitted," he said.

Zia, who ruled the country as prime minister between 2001-2006, and Hasina are the country's most powerful politicians and long-

Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus has been the country's interim leader since Hasina left, but authorities have been struggling to enforce order amid mob justice, chaos and claims of systematic targeting of minority groups, particularly Hindus, which Yunus said are 'exaggerated."

Hasina's Awami League party blasted the court ruling in a Facebook post on Sunday, saying it wasn't "Yunus' Kangaroo court" and that the people of Bangladesh would be the ones trying those responsible for the attacks.

Zia's party welcomed Sunday's

The attorney general's office can appeal the ruling in the Supreme Court.

The Yunus-led government has not declared any timeframe for the next election, but Rahman and his party want the new election sometime soon.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami party, which shared power with Zia's party in 2001-2006 with important portfolios in the Cabinet, said it wants to allow the Yunus-led government to stay in power to bring in reforms in various sectors before a new election.

Hasina faces charges of crimes against humanity for deaths during the summer's student-led uprising. The interim government has sought help from Interpol to arrest Hasina. It is not clear if India will respond to any request from Bangladesh for Hasina's extradition under a mutual

Nepal govt accepts USD 20 million grant assistance from China

KATHMANDU, Dec 2: The Nepal government has accepted projects worth USD 20 million as grant assistance from China ahead of Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli's first official visit to the country after assuming office for the fourth time. Minister for Information and Communication Prithvi Subba Gurung talking to media persons on Sunday said the Council of Ministers meeting wished for the success of the prime minister's China visit and also decided to accept projects worth USD 20 million equivalent to Nepalese ₹ 2.70 billion as grant assistance from China. Besides, the Cabinet also decided to accept 300 million Chinese Yuan (USD 4.13 million approximately) equivalent to Nepalese ₹ 5.60 billion worth projects proposed by the government of China, according to government spokesperson Gurung.

During Oli's China visit, various projects including Tokha-Khahare Tunnel Road, Special Economic Zone construction at Corala border point of Mustang, road construction at Kimathanka of Shankhuwasabha, feasibility study of railway line in Rasuwagadhi, expansion of Kathmandu Ring Road second phase, starting bone marrow service at Chitawan Cancel Hospital will be discussed,

Oli on Monday embarked on a four-day official visit to China, his maiden trip to any neighbouring country in this term, during which he is scheduled to hold talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on various issues of mutual interest. Oli is visiting Beijing at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Li Qiang, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here said.

With the visit, Oli broke with the usual practice by Nepali prime ministers making India their first destination in the neighbourhood after assuming charge, except former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who visited China ahead of India in 2008. (PTI)

Canada's ambassador to the US says Trudeau's dinner with Trump key to getting tariffs removed

TORONTO, Dec 2: Canada's ambassador to the United States said Sunday that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was successful in getting President-elect Donald Trump and key Cabinet nominees to understand that lumping Canada in with Mexico over the flow of drugs and migrants into the US is unfair. Kirsten Hillman, Canada's ambassador in Washington, told The Associated Press in an interview that Trudeau's dinner with Trump on Friday was a very important step in trying to get Trump to back away from threatened tariffs on all products from the major American trading partner.

Hillman was at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Florida and sat at an adjacent table to Trudeau and Trump.

Trump threatened to impose tariffs on products from Canada and Mexico if they don't stop what he called the flow of drugs and migrants across their borders. He said in a social media post last Monday he would impose a 25 per cent tax on all products entering the US from Canada and Mexico as one of his first executive orders.

Hillman said Trudeau asked to see Trump in person in a phone call Monday and Trump

At the dinner, Hillman said the case was made to Trump that there is no comparison between the Canada-US border and Mexico-US border. "The message that our border is so vastly different than the Mexican border was really understood," Hillman said.

Hillman said the bulk of Friday night's dinner centred around Trump's border concerns. The ambassador said a priority of Trudeau's was to point out the degree of dif-

Hillman said there really is no comparison, noting there is essentially zero trafficking of fentanyl from Canada to the United States. She said there are seizures but authorities say those are personal use seizures and not criminal trafficking. She said that 99.8 per cent of the fentanyl seized by US authorities in the US comes from Mexico.

"Also with respect to individuals, illegal individuals crossing illegally, Canada last year was less than one per cent, 0.6 per cent were of total interceptions from Canada," Hillman said.

US customs agents seized 43 pounds of fentanyl at the Canadian border last fiscal year, compared with 21,100 pounds at the Border Patrol made 56,530 arrests at the Mexican border in October alone and 23,721 arrests at the Canadian border between October 2023 and September 2024 and Hillman said the migrant numbers are coming down since the summer.

"The facts are hard to deny," Hillman said. But Hillman said Canada is ready to make new investments in border security and there are plans for more helicopters, drones and law enforcement officers.

She also noted an agreement between Canada and the United States that allows for migrants caught crossing illegally into the United States to be sent back to Canada. She said that was talked about. She said Mexico and the US do not have a similar agreement.

At the dinner that lasted three hours, Hillman said America's trade deficit with Canada was also raised. Hillman said the US had a \$75 billion trade deficit with Canada last year but noted a third of what Canada sells into the US are energy exports and prices have been high.

"Trade balances are something that he focuses so it's important to engage in that conversation but to put it into context," Hillman

Ceasefire reached in Pakistan's Kurram after toll in clashes climbs to 133

PESHAWAR, Dec 2: A ceasefire agreement has been reached between two warring tribes in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province after 133 people were killed and 177 injured in the 11 days of clashes between them in the volatile Kurram district, an official said on Monday.

Peace has been established in the restive Kurram district, an official told a provincial cabinet meeting headed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur.

The official said authorities were working to ensure the dignified return of people displaced due to the sectarian violence.

The clashes between Alizai and Bagan tribes in the district started on November 22, after an attack on a convoy of passenger vans near Parachinar in which 47 people were killed a day

Several passengers who had sustained grave injuries succumbed later, raising the toll in the convoy killing to 57.

The death toll from the violence surged to 133, the official told the meeting.

Gandapur on Sunday emphasised the need for establishing peace in the area and ordered authorities to demolish dugouts of rival tribes

and seize their weapons. The provincial chief executive issued the directives during a grand jirga attended by elders

of the rival tribes in Kohat district. The district administration finally succeeded in arranging a lasting ceasefire on Sunday be-

tween two warring tribes engaged in a lethal gunfight, Mehsud said. The jirga (council of the tribal leaders) spoke

to elders to reopen roads and sign a peace agreement, the official said. Armed tribesmen were removed from the firing posts while police and forces have been deployed in the region, he said. The Kurram region has been facing a communication blackout, with mobile and internet services suspended and educational institutions closed. The closure of the main highway has not

only disrupted local transportation but also caused a complete suspension of trade with Afghanistan, particularly at the Kharlachi border. Previous efforts to mediate peace, including a seven-day and ten-day truce brokered by provincial officials in November, have failed to

A high-powered delegation, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry and IGP Akhtar Hayat Gandapur, had also negotiated a ceasefire last weekend, but vio-

invited him to dinner on Friday. Mexican border. On immigration, the US Taiwan's president visits East-West think tank

as China criticises his 2-day visit to Hawaii

HONOLULU, Dec 2: Taiwan's president visited a US State Departmentfunded think tank and educational institution Sunday on the second day of a two-day visit to Hawaii that's part of a Pacific island tour that has already triggered criticism from Beijing.

Lai Ching-te met and exchanged gifts with the president of the East-West Center, which is on the University of Hawaii's flagship Manoa campus. He spoke to an audience at the center but journalists were escorted out of a conference hall before he began speaking.

China's Foreign Ministry said it "strongly condemned" US support for Lai's visit and had lodged a complaint with the US. It also denounced a newly announced US weapons sale to Taiwan, a self-governing island that China claims as its own territory.

"China will closely monitor the situation's development, and take resolute and forceful measures to safeguard the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said the statement.

Hawaii was Lai's first stop on a weeklong vovage that will later take him to the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau. They account for three of the 12 countries that Taipei has formal diplomatic relations with. Suzanne Puanani Vares-Lum, president of the East-West Center, said her institution is the perfect place for Lai to visit because it promotes relations among the United States, Asia and the Pacific.

She said it's not unusual for leaders from around the world to come to Hawaii given the state's location and what makes it special. "There is something about Hawaii that allows us to really just see where we connect on a human to human

level," Vares-Lum said in an interview. Lai's predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, visited the East-West Center in 2019 and

On Saturday, Hawaii Gov. Josh Green hosted Lai at the state's emergency management agency where they discussed disaster preparedness. Green, who was an emergency room physician before becoming governor, posted on social media that he and Lai discussed how their experiences in health care informed their governance. Lai is also a physician by training and obtained a Master of Public Health degree from Harvard University.

to Lai and his delegation, highlighting Hawai'i's shared values of resilience and collaboration with Taiwan," Green said in an Instagram post. Lai also posed for photos with Hawaii

congressional representatives and state lawmakers at a dinner banquet with the Taiwanese American community. U.S. Rep. Ed Case, a Democrat who represents Honolulu in Congress, said on

social media that he told the audience that

"our ties endured on shared values and interests to advance mutual goals and meet shared challenges." It is unclear whether Lai with meet with any senior officials from the Biden administration or anyone from the incom-

President-elect Donald Trump said in an interview with Bloomberg in July that Taiwan should pay for its defense. The island has purchased billions of dollars of

ing Trump administration during his

defense weaponry from the U.S. Trump evaded answering whether he would defend the island from Chinese

military action. The new arms announced by the U.S. State Department Friday include \$385 million in spare parts and equipment for a fleet of F-16s, as well as support for tac-

tical communication system to Taiwan. The U.S. is obligated to help the island defend itself under the Taiwan Relations Act but maintains a position of strategic ambiguity over whether it would ever get involved if Taiwan were to be invaded by China. Tsai drew vocal opposition from China when she stopped in New York last year on her way to Latin America. She met with former House Speaker Kevin

McCarthy at the time. The Chinese military also launched drills around Taiwan last year as a "stern warning" over what it called collusion between "separatists and foreign forces' days after Lai, then Taiwan's vice presi-

dent, stopped over in the US. China also strongly objects to leading American politicians visiting the island as it views any official contact with foreign governments and Taiwan as an infringement on its claims of sovereignty over Taiwan. Washington switched its formal recognition from Taipei to Beijing

Philippine navy shadows Russian submarine when asked about the submarine. "Any intrusion into the West Philippine Sea, of



MANILA, Dec 2: The Philippine military deployed a navy ship and air force planes to shadow a Russian submarine. which passed through the South China Sea off the country's western coast last

eek, a security official said Monday. The Russian submarine identified itself in response to a Philippine navy two-way radio inquiry, saying it was en route home to Russia's eastern city of Vladivostok after joining an exercise with the Malaysian navy, Jonathan Malaya, assistant director-general of the National Se-

curity Council, said.

The submarine, like other foreign ships, has the right of "innocent passage" in the country's exclusive economic zone but it still sparked concern when it was spotted on Thursday about 148 kilometres off the Philippine province of Mindoro, Malaya said.

The submarine was sighted after it surfaced due to weather-related conditions, Malaya said

"All of that is very concerning," Pres-

our EEZ, of our baselines is very worrisome. So, yes, it's just another one.' Marcos used the Philippine name for

the South China Sea, where his country plus Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and other coastal states have faced an increasingly aggressive China, which claims the busy waterway virtually in its entirety. An alarming spike in territorial confrontations, particularly between Chinese

forces, starting last year has prompted closer surveillance by the United States and other Western governments of the key global trade route. The Philippines coast guard said Monday that a Chinese military helicopter flew close to fishing boats manned by Filipinos in a "dangerous act of harass-

and Philippine coast guard and naval

ment" last week at Iroquois Reef, a disputed fishing area in the South China Two Philippine coast guard patrol ships have been deployed to the area to protect Filipino fishermen, coast guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela

There was no immediate comment

ident Ferdinand Marcos Jr. told reporters from Chinese officials. (AP) lence resumed shortly afterwards. (PTI) Landmark climate change case opens at top UN court as island nations fear rising seas

THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS), Dec 2: The top United Nations court took up the largest case in its history on Monday, when it opened two weeks of hearings into what countries worldwide are legally required to do to combat climate change and help vulnerable nations fight its devastating impact. After years of lobbying by island nations

who fear they could simply disappear under

rising sea waters, the UN General Assembly

asked the International Court of Justice last

year for an opinion on "the obligations of States in respect of climate change." Any decision by the court would be nonbinding advice and couldn't directly force wealthy nations into action to help struggling countries. Yet it would be more than just a powerful symbol since it could be the

"We want the court to confirm that the conduct that has wrecked the climate is unlawful," Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh, who is leading the legal team for the Pacific

basis for other legal actions, including do-

mestic lawsuits.



island nation of Vanuatu, told The Associ-

In the decade up to 2023, sea levels have risen by a global average of around 4.3 centimeters (1.7 inches), with parts of the Pacific rising higher still. The world has also warmed 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 Fahrenheit) since preindustrial times because of

the burning of fossil fuels. Vanuatu is one of a group of small states pushing for international legal intervention in the climate crisis.

"We live on the front lines of climate change impact. We are witnesses to the destruction of our lands, our livelihoods, our culture and our human rights," Vanuatu's climate change envoy Ralph Regenvanu told reporters ahead of the hearing.

The Hague-based court will hear from 99 countries and more than a dozen intergovernmental organizations over two weeks. It's the largest lineup in the institution's nearly 80-year history.

Last month at the United Nations' annual climate meeting, countries cobbled together an agreement on how rich countries can support poor countries in the face of climate disasters. Wealthy countries have agreed to pool together at least \$300 billion a year by 2035 but the total is short of the \$1.3 trillion that experts, and threatened nations, said is needed.

"For our generation and for the Pacific Islands, the climate crisis is an existential threat. It is a matter of survival, and the world's biggest economies are not taking this crisis seriously. We need the ICJ to protect the rights of people at the front lines,' said Vishal Prasad, of Pacific Islands Stu-

dents Fighting Climate Change. Fifteen judges from around the world will seek to answer two questions: What are countries obliged to do under international law to protect the climate and environment from human-caused greenhouse gas emissions? And what are the legal consequences for governments where their acts, or lack of action, have significantly harmed the cli-

mate and environment? The second question makes particular reference to "small island developing States" likely to be hardest hit by climate change and to "members of "the present and future generations affected by the adverse effects of climate change.

The judges were even briefed on the science behind rising global temperatures by the UN's climate change body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, ahead of the hearings. (AP)

Assam Rifles, Mizoram Police seize banned 'meth' tablets

Page 7 Dec 3_Normal Pages 02-12-2024 20:25 Page 1

AIZAWL, Dec 2: Assam Rifles, along with Mizoram Police, on Monday seized banned methamphetamine tablets worth ₹ 68 crore near the India-Myanmar border in Champhai district, an officer said

Acting on a tip-off, the Assam Rifles and the police jointly launched an operation in Zokhawthar village and recovered 22.6 kg of the banned tablets, he

Methamphetamine is a powerful, highly addictive stimulant that affects the central nervous system.

During the operation, the joint team observed the movement of a suspect crossing the Tiau River with a brown sack.

On being challenged, the individual ran away towards Myanmar leaving the consignment there, the officer said. The seized contraband worth

₹ 68 crore has been handed over to the state police in Zokhawthar for further investigation and legal proceedings, the Assam Riffles officer

'In India, our Muslim brothers and sisters live without facing such hostility'

Protests erupt in Tripura over persecution of minorities in Bangladesh

HT Correspondent AGARTALA, Dec 2: Widespread

protests erupted in Agartala on Monday as demonstrators staged a sit-in outside the office of the Bangladesh assistant high commissioner, denouncing the escalating violence against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh and calling for the immediate release of ISKCON member Chinmoy Das Prabhu.

The demonstration, spearheaded by the 'Hindu Sangharsh Samity,' a right-wing organisation, saw participation from diverse sections of society.

"The illegal arrest of Chinmoy Das Prabhu by the Bangladesh interim government is both inhumane and unacceptable. Reports suggest that he has been deprived of basic needs like food. We demand his immediate release and stand firmly against these repeated



a protestor declared. She highlighted the contrasting

scenario in India, where minorities, including Muslims, coexist

"In India, our Muslim brothers and sisters live without facing such hostility. Why, then, are Hindus

will persist in our protest until the Yunus-led government ensures the release of the ISKCON leader,' she added.

BJP vice president Subal Bhowmik, who joined the protest, expressed grave concerns over the deteriorating situation for Hindu

of these attacks have surged, especially after the change in government. This protest is a united stand by various organizations to condemn these acts," Bhowmik

He also mentioned the Indian government's intervention, holding Bangladesh Prime Minister Md. Yunus accountable for inciting violence against the Hindu com-

"Md. Yunus bears the responsibility for these atrocities and for fueling anti-Hindu sentiments. Strong measures must be taken," he asserted

Tripura, which shares an 856km border with Bangladesh, has witnessed growing unrest over the persecution of Hindus in the neighboring nation, with protesters burning effigies of Md. Yunus as

Cultural extravaganza marks Day 2 of Hornbill Festival

HT Correspondent

The event held on the theme "cultural connect"

During the morning session of the cultural extrav-

Each tribe will also present one commemorative

The highlights of tribal cultural performances in-

was hosted by the deputy chief minister TR Zeliang.

heritage of Nagaland.

Over 19,000 acres of illegal poppy cultivation destroyed in Manipur since 2017: Report

IMPHAL, Dec 2: The Manipur government has destroyed a total of 19,135.6 acres of illegal poppy cultivation in at least 12 districts since 2017, according to an official report.

In Kangpokpi district, the highest of 4,454.4 acres were destroyed during the period, followed by 3,348 acres in Ukhrul and 2,713.8 acres in Churachandpur, the study – Mapping and Estimation of Opium Poppy Cultivation Area using Remote Sensing and GIS Technology – revealed. The exercise was conducted by the Manipur Remote Sensing Applica-

tions Centre under the Planning Department, based on data provided by the 'Narcotics and Affairs of Border' wing of the state police.

The other districts where illegal poppy cultivation was destroyed include 2,575 acres in Tengnoupal, 1,982.5 acres in Chandel and 1,682 acres in Senapati, the report said.

It showed that the area under poppy cultivation in nine districts in 2021-22 was 28,598.91 acres, which declined to 11,288.1 acres in 2023-

Between 2023 and 2024, poppy cultivation decreased by 32.13 per cent

compared to 2022-23, according to the study. In a post on X, chief minister N Biren Singh had last month said the state government is committed in its resolve to eradicate illegal poppy

Pema Khandu extends Assam Day greetings, hails state's progress

GUWAHATI, Dec 2: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday extended his greetings and best wishes to the people of Assam on the occasion of Assam Day

He described the state as one of unparalleled natural beauty and warm hospitality.

Khandu further asserted that Assam is progressing by leaps and bounds under the dynamic leadership of its chief minister, Himanta Biswa

"Finest greetings and best wishes on #AssamDay to all! Today, we celebrate the rich heritage, vibrant culture, and remarkable history of Assam, which is

under the dynamic leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri @himantabiswaji. From the majestic Brahmaputra River to the serene tea gardens, Assam is a land of un-

paralleled natural beauty and warm hospitality,' he wrote on the microblogging site X.

> The Arunachal chief minister also called on people to honor the spirit of unity and resilience that defines Assam. "Let's honor the

spirit of unity and resilience that defines this beautiful state. Once again, wishing the people of Assam and everyone who cherishes its legacy a joyful and proud Assam Day!" he

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL KAAC SECRETARIAT:: DIPHU

Invitation

The authority of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu, requests your kind presence at the Homage ceremony of Kajir Ronghangpi a Legendary of Karbi Heroine on 5th December, 2024, the meeting to be presided by Shri Surjya Rongphar, Hon'ble E.M. i/c Art & Culture, KAAC at Kohora, Karbi Anglong as per programme overleaf.

> Sd/-**Principal Secretary** Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, DIPHU

PROGRAMME

5th December, 2024

08:30 AM Spot Drawing Competition.

Garlanding of Statue of Kajir Ronghangpi at Kajir 10:00 AM

Ronghangpi Memorial Park, Kohora.

10:30 AM Homage by Karbi Bhaktitom Trust, KARSA, Diphu.

11:00 AM Public Meeting.

Chief Guest Dr. Tuliram Ronghang, Hon'ble Chief Executive Member,

KAAC, Diphu.

Special Guest :: 1. Dr. Numol Momin Hon'ble Deputy Speaker, Assam Legislative Assembly, Dispur.

2. Shri Darsing Ronghang, Hon'ble MLA, Assam Legislative Assembly

3. Shri Bidyasing Engleng, Hon'ble MLA, Assam Legislative Assembly

4. Shri Rupsing Teron, Hon'ble MLA, Assam Legislative Assembly

Guests of Honour::

1. All Hon'ble EMs, KAAC

2. All Hon'ble MACs, KAAC

attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh," being targeted in Bangladesh? We Celebrate wisdom of indigenous people: Peru envoy

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Dec 2: Ambassador of Peru to India Javier Manuel Paulinich Velarde on Monday called upon the people of Peru and the Nagas to continue to celebrate the wisdom of the indigenous people and look forward to partnership and collaboration in the areas of common in-

Addressing a roundtable with partner countries and partner states of Hornbill Festival 2024 at the bamboo hall at Kisama, Velarde emphasised the importance of the people-to-people connection between the Republic of Peru and the Nagas due to its shared similarities in culture and traditions.

Chairing the programme, Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) chairman and adviser to Nagaland chief minister, Abu Metha said the roundtable is a platform to forge partnerships, ties, and networking with each

He called upon the visiting dignitaries to look beyond the traditional and cultural aspects and delve into the economic prospects and opportunities that Nagaland



has to offer.

He acknowledged the Sikkim government for being very supportive towards the Hornbill festival and for participating with a large delegation.

An Invest India representative lauded the Nagaland government for promoting the Hornbill Festival as a festival of business conference, partnership and collaboration rather than mere festivity

Secretary, DIPR Sikkim, Annapurna Alley shared the similarities, advantages and disadvantages that the two states confront due to the pattern of their terrain and the scope of the tourism sector.

During the meeting, two MoUs were signed between the Nagaland higher education department and Salesforce.com India Pvt. Ltd and between the IDAN and Omsheel Foods

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR (HILLS) PANCHAYAT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG

No. PDDHE.02/Filling up of Posts/2023-24/646

Dated: Diphu the 2nd Dec' 2024

ADVERTISEMENT

It is for General information to all applicants who had applied for the post of Junior Assistant (LDA), Gram Sevak and Gram Sevika under The Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Karbi Anglong & West Karbi Anglong Districts. Vide Advisement No.:-PDDHE.02/Filling up of Posts/2023-24/610 Dated: Diphu the 3rd Oct' 2024, are requested to collect their Admit Card in the Office of The Deputy Director (Hills) P&RD, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, on working days and working hours w.e.f: 3rd December 2024. The applicants are requested to bring 2 (Two) Nos. of recent Passport Size Photograph. The schedule of Written test is mentioned below: -

Sl No.	Name of the Posts	Date of Written Examination	Reporting Time	Examination Center
1	Gram Sevika	15 th December 2024 (Sunday)	09:30 AM (Morning Shift)	Don Bosco Higher Secondary School, Rongkhelan, Diphu, Karbi Anglong.
2	Gram Sevak	15 th December 2024 (Sunday)	01:30 PM (Afternoon Shift)	- DO-
3	Junior Assistant (L.D.A.)	22 nd December 2024 (Sunday)	09:30 AM (Morning Shift)	Don Bosco Higher Secondary School, Rongkhelan, Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

General Instructions

- 1. It may be noted that some of the applications may have been rejected due to submission of incomplete/incorrect documents.
- 2. No TA/DA will be provided for this purpose.
- 3. The undersigned reserves all the rights to enhance or reduce the posts and also cancel/postpone the interview at any time without assigning any reason thereof and intimation to the candidate.

Sd/-

Deputy Director (Hills) Panchayat and Rural Development, Diphu, Karbi Anglong

Memo: PDDHE.02/Filling up of Posts/2023-24/646

Dated: Diphu the 2nd Dec' 2024

Cong workers scuffle with police in Lucknow Party delegation stopped from going to Sambhal

LUCKNOW/SAMBHAL (UP), Dec 2: Scores of Congress workers jostled with police personnel and tried to scale barricades outside the party office here on Monday as a party delegation led by its Uttar Pradesh unit chief Ajay Rai was prevented from leaving for Sambhal, which has been made out of bounds by administration after the December 24

Amid high drama, Rai, who took the driver's seat with senior party leader PL Punia seated next to him, could not leave in his car for the "fact-finding" visit even as scuffles broke out between the cops and the slogan-shouting party workers, who tried to clear the way for

Rai then stepped out to join the workers and they sat on a dharna outside the party office in protest against the police action. A large police contingent had been deployed and barricades put up since Sunday night around the Congress office in Lucknow's Mall Avenue area to prevent Rai and others from leaving for Sambhal, which was hit by violence during protests against a court-ordered

The Congress hit out at the BJP government, saying it was trying to hide its failure with its "anti-democratic" actions. Rai, who had spent the night at the Congress office along with several party workers, later said the party delegation will visit Sambhal when prohibitory orders are lifted.

Speaking to reporters after being stopped from going to Sambhal, Rai said, "The administration has told me that prohibitory orders are in place (in Sambhal) till December 10. I had told them that our party (delegation) will go there. The administration said that before December 10, they will let us

"And, the day the prohibitory orders are lifted, the Congress delegation will definitely go to Sambhal.'

To a question, Rai said, "They may extend the prohibitory order after December 10, as they are feeling afraid.



gress said.

The government is perpetrating this atrocity and injustice to hide its failures.

We will definitely go to Sambhal." In a post of X in Hindi, the Congress said, "The Congress delegation led by UP Congress President @kashikirai ji has been stopped from reaching Sambhal. This dictatorship of the UP government was strongly opposed by Congress colleagues including Ajay Rai ji.

"Our courage is not going to be broken by the arbitrariness of the government and the police. We will continue to try to establish peace in Sambhal and provide justice to the people. The struggle continues...

Before leaving for Sambhal, Rai and Punia paid tributes at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the party office.

The UP Congress in a post on X said, "Though the BJP government, through conspiracy and misuse of power, has prevented the Congressmen under the leadership of State President Shri @kashikirai ji to go to Sambhal, we will continue to fight against the violence that took place there due to their con-

"The Congress Party will expose the conspiracy of the BJP behind the violence in Sambhal and bring out its true face before the public. This state cannot run at all with the slogan 'batenge to

The party also said that the morale of its workers was intact even in the face of police action. "We are trying to reach Sambhal to establish peace. We are

The Congress workers moving from Delhi towards Sambhal were also stopped at the UP border by the state po-

fighting! We will fight!" the UP Con-

Senior Congress leader Naseemuddin Siddiqui and former UP Congress chief Brijlal Khabri were among those who were turned back by the police.

The police had on Sunday night erected barricades outside the party's office in the state capital and the residences of its several leaders who were to accompany Rai on the Congress' planned fact-finding visit to Sambhal.

Tension has been brewing in Sambhal since November 19, when a Mughal-era mosque was surveyed on court orders following claims that a Harihar temple previously stood at the site.

Violence erupted during a second survey on November 24 as protesters gathered near Shahi Jama Masjid and clashed with security personnel. Four people died and several others were injured in the violence that ensued.

The Congress' Sambhal city president Tauquer Ahmed told reporters on Monday that the delegation of the Uttar Pradesh Congress was to reach Sambhal under Rai's leadership to offer condolences to the grieving families, take stock of the situation and appeal for

"Earlier, the district officer had imposed a ban on entering Sambhal till November 30, before that we had announced the delegation's visit on December 2. But now, the police administration is stopping everyone from coming to Sambhal. This is against democracy," Ahmed said.

Leader of the Congress Legislature Party in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly Aradhana Mishra said, "The incident in Sambhal is not just another ordinary incident. It is a big incident. The Congress delegation under Ajay Rai wanted to go there on a fact-finding mission. Since yesterday (Sunday) night, I have been placed under house arrest. Our party leaders are being stopped."

This is complete anarchy on the part of the government. The government is trying to hide its failure by citing the imposition of Section 163 (power to issue an order in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and is not allowing us to go there (Sambhal) from Lucknow," Mishra added.

The Uttar Pradesh Congress chief spent the night at the Congress committee office along with several party workers. "If prevented, we would agitate peacefully in a Gandhian way as we are followers of Mahatma Gandhi," Rai

The ban on outsiders' entry was to expire on Saturday.

The curbs under section 163 (power to issue order in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger) of the BNSS, set to expire on Sunday, have now been extended till December 31.

Members of a judicial commission on Sunday visited the Shahi Jama Masjid and other areas that witnessed violence

Inconsistencies in postal ballots and EVM results in Maharashtra: Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA



MUMBAI, Dec 2: Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Varun Sardesai on Monday claimed the trends in postal ballots and EVM results of the Maharashtra assembly polls appear inconsistent, raising doubts about the integrity of the EVM system.

Sardesai, who defeated NCP's Zeeshan Siddique to win the Vandre East assembly seat in the debut contest, also claimed a suspicious spike in voter turnout during the final two hours of polling and demanded a reply from the Election Commission.

Addressing a press conference in Mumbai, Sardesai claimed statistical anomalies were observed in the Election Commission's official data, and called for greater transparency and accountability.

"While I am not making direct allegations, the data raises several doubts that must be addressed," he said.

He said that postal ballots, which largely represent soldiers, senior citizens, essential service workers, and government employees, "generally align with the overall voter sentiment in their constituencies".

"Trends in postal ballots were consistent with EVM results in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections (when MVA won 30 out of 48 seats in Maharashtra). However, in the assembly elections, a striking divergence was

observed," Sardesai said. For example, the Maha Vikas Aghadi was leading in 31 constituencies through postal ballots, while the BJP-led Mahayuti was ahead in 16 constituencies. Yet, the final EVM results showed the MVA securing only 46 seats, while the Mahayuti tally surged to 230 seats (in assembly polls), he

Sardesai further claimed that Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray received 874 postal votes and 62,450 EVM votes in the Worli constituency in Mumbai, while his opponent Milind Deora got 522 postal votes and 54.001 EVM votes.

According to Sardesai, this "pattern" extended beyond the Shiv Sena (UBT).

"Congress leader Nana Patole was ahead by 54 per cent in postal ballots but saw a sharp 12.7 per cent drop in EVM counts,"

Similarly, NCP (SP) leader Jayant Patil, who had 70 per cent of postal votes, experienced an 18 per cent decline in EVM results, Sardesai said, adding that this trend was never observed in previous elections.

He also mentioned Kolhapur South, Tivsa, and Ghatkopar East constituencies where MVA candidates "leading in postal ballots saw significant drops in EVM counts.'

"How is it possible that in almost every case, MVA candidates experienced a 5 to 15 per cent decline in votes from postal to EVM results, while Mahayuti candidates saw an equivalent rise? This raises serious doubts about the integrity of the EVM system," he said.

Sardesai appealed to the Election Commission to "address these issues", stating that its "primary responsibility is to ensure free and fair elections.'

"Why were the trends seen in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections so dramatically different in the Assembly elections? Any doubts in the electoral process must be resolved to maintain public confidence," he

SC grants interim protection from arrest BJP serves show cause notice to party MLA and to YSR Congress social media head



NEW DELHI, Dec 2: In a relief to YSR Congress Party social media in-charge Sajjala Bhargav Reddy, the Supreme Court on Monday granted protection from arrest to im for two weeks to enable him move the high court for quashing of multiple FIRs lodged against him in Andhra Pradesh.

Refusing to quash the multiple FIRs on a plea by Reddy, a bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan said, "We do not want to bypass the high courts and they are constitutional courts. We have no sympathy for anyone and if wrong is done then they will have to face the law." It ordered, "We dispose of the writ petition with liberty to approach the high court. It goes without saying that the high court will hear both sides before passing appropriate orders. We have not expressed any opinion on merits."

It added, "Since the petitioner is apprehending his immediate arrest, which may disable him to approach the high court, we direct that the arrest of petitioner shall remain stayed for two weeks to enable him to approach the high court". The top court said that the high court may use its complete discretion to extend or decline the interim protection granted by the

Reddy claimed that the Chandrababu Naidu-led state govern-

ment was misusing these provisions of law against members of Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) to stifle dissent. Senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Siddharth Dave, appearing for Reddy, submitted that in all the FIRs lodged against him, the incident allegedly took place prior to coming of the criminal laws that

Sibal said since the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) came into force, multiple FIRs were lodged against Reddy within one week and that too based on confessional

statements of co-accused persons. Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for the state government, opposed the relief sought by Reddy and said that the accused has already been protected by the interim order of the high court. He said the accused was making all kinds of statements, and allegations against him are serious in nature.

The bench told Luthra that if he (Reddy) has done something wrong, then he must face the consequences.

Reddy in his plea said that six FIRs (details of which he has provided in the writ petition) have been lodged against him misusing provision of organised crimes under BNS to stifle dissent expressed by the opposition parties. (PTI)

Yediyurappa critic Basanagouda Patil Yatnal BENGALURU, Dec 2: B Y Vijayendra. Yatnal has final view in the matter. often targeted them and deanti-Waqf manded the BJP central

Days after he launched a month-long march that apparently did not have the state unit's sanction, Karnataka BJP MLA and known Yediyurappa critic Basanagouda Patil Yatnal has been served with a showcause notice by the party for his "continuing tirade against the state level party leadership."

BJP's Central Disciplinary Committee (CDC) has served the notice to the Vijayapura MLA and asked him to reply within 10 ten

A defiant Yatnal, responding to the notice said his commitment to the fight for Hindutva and against 'dynastic politics' will continue.

"Your tirade against the state level party leadership and your defiance of party directives and making public pronouncements and stance in contravention of party's official stand on all matters of political and public importance has been reported in media as well as by different party forums,' Om Pathak, CDC member secretary said in his show cause notice on December 1, which was shared with media on Monday.

The party said it would proceed to take a final view on the matter if Yatnal fails to give a reply within the stipulated time.

Yatnal is known as a strong critic of BJP veteran and former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and his family, especially his son and the party's Karnataka chief leadership to check Yediyurappa's 'dynastic politics' for effective fight against the 'dynastic politics' of Con-

Pathak said, "It is a matter 'great concern' that despite having been issued show cause notice several times in the past and your assurances of good conduct, the acts of indiscipline continue unabated."

Noting his seniority and long-standing in the party, Pathak said the CDC took a lenient view on the explanations submitted by him in the past.

"False and veiled allegations levelled by you against the party leaders together with defiance of the official stand of the party on matters of political and public importance, constitute a serious breach of the party discipline as defined in Article XXV of BJP Party Rules 'Breach of Discipline' section (a) and (f)," the CDC member secretary said.

"Please show cause as to why the party should not take disciplinary action against you. Your explanation should be submitted to the undersigned no later than ten days from the receipt of this notice," Pathak told Yatnal.

In the event of non-receipt of the explanation within the time stipulated herein, the Central Disciplinary Committee might assume that Yatnal has nothing to say, and it may proceed to take a

Yatnal along with, few senior BJP leaders, including MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi, Arvind Limbavali, Mahesh Kumtahalli, Madhu Bangarappa had taken out a month-long anti-Waqf march from Bidar to Chamarajanagar. The march

started on November 25 and

will conclude on December

The march is widely perceived as a show of strength by the anti-Vijayendra faction within the BJP. Yatnal has said the march was not directed against any individual but aimed at "protecting farmers, Sanatana Dharma.

Wagf Board. Reacting to the CDC notice, Yatnal said his commitment to the fight for Hindutva and 'dynastic politics' will continue.

and Hindus from eviction

notices issued by the state

"I will respond to the notice issued by the BJP Disci-Committee Chairman, while also presenting the facts regarding the current state of the BJP in Karnataka," the Vijayapura MLA said in a post on

"My commitment to the fight for Hindutva, opposition to corruption, Waqf-related issues, and dynasty politics will remain unwavering," he added. Incidentally, Yatnal had

left for New Delhi on Sunday in connection with a court case but is likely to meet the party's central leadership, sources had said

Shrikant Shinde dismisses speculation about him getting dy CM's post

THANE, Dec 2: Shiv Sena MP Srikant Shinde, the son of Maharashtra's caretaker Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, on Monday said the speculation about him getting the deputy CM's post in the new state government were false and baseless.

In a post on X, the parliamentarian also said he had the chance of becoming a minister at the Centre after the Lok Sabha polls held earlier this year, but he refused it and he wanted to focus on working for the party organisation.

More than a week after the Mahayuti clinched a massive victory in Maharashtra polls with the BJP emerging as the single largest party with 132 seats, the new government is yet to be sworn in.

The oath-taking ceremony of the Mahayuti government is scheduled for December 5 evening at Azad Maidan in Mumbai in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The name of Devendra Fadnavis has been finalised as the new chief minister of Maharashtra, a senior BJP leader claimed on Sunday

Eknath Shinde left for his native village in Satara dis-



ernment was shaping up. The caretaker CM reached Thane on Sunday after-Shrikant Shinde on Monday said the swearing-in ceremony of the Mahayuti

coalition government has been a bit delayed, and currently there are lot of discussions and rumours. He said the rumours es-

calated after his father went to the village for two days and took rest due to illhealth. "The news that I will be

the deputy chief minister has been circulating with question marks for the past two days. There is no truth to this, and all such news are baseless," the Kalyan MP said on X. He said despite an oppor-

tunity to become a minister in the central government after the Lok Sabha elections, he had turned it down to focus on strengthening the party organisation.

"I have no desire for a position of power. I make it clear once again that I am not in the race for any ministerial position in the state," he said, reinforcing his commitment to work for his Lok Sabha constituency and Shiv Sena.

Acknowledging media's enthusiasm and competition, Shrikant Shinde urged them to refrain from distorting the

"I hope that the discussions about me will at least stop now," he added.

In the recently concludes state polls, the Mahayuti won 230 of the 288 assem-

BJP to launch campaign to seek public feedback for its Delhi assembly poll manifesto



NEW DELHI, Dec 2: The BJP will reach out to various sections of society from December 5 to seek feedback for its Delhi Assembly poll manifesto under the theme "Meri Delhi Mera Sankalp BJP", party MP Ramvir Bidhuri said on Monday.

At a press conference here, the South Delhi MP also released a phone number and the #bjpsankalp2025 hashtag, inviting suggestions for the party manifesto from people through social media.

The Delhi BJP's manifesto chairman for the assembly polls said the meetings with the various sections of the society will be held at the assembly constituency and district bers of the manifesto committee were given charges for various Lok Sabha constituencies in Delhi --Parvesh Verma was given the charge of Chandni Chowk, Arvinder Singh Lovely New Delhi, Satish Upadhyay East Delhi, Ajay Mahawar North East Delhi, Kailash Gahlot and Abhishek Tandon South Delhi and former Union ministers Harsh Vardhan and Vijay Goel North West Delhi.

Senior party leaders and mem-

Former Union Meenakshi Lekhi will look after the overall coordination of various activities to gather public feedback for the party manifesto, Bidhuri said. The Delhi Assembly elections for 70 constituencies are due in Febru-

Bidhuri said video vans will be deployed in each of the 14 districts to gather public feedback. (PTI)

Sitharaman, Rupani to be BJP's central observers for Maha MLAs meet to elect leader

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: The BJP on Monday named Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani as central observers for its Maharashtra legislature party's meeting, where the MLAs will elect their leader who is likely to be the state's next chief minister.

The legislature party meeting is expected to be held on December 4 in Mumbai, sources said.

In a statement, the BJP named Sitharaman and Rupani as central observers for the meeting.

Maharashtra BJP president Chandrashekhar Bawankule has said that the oath-taking ceremony of the new Mahayuti government will take place on December 5



evening at the Azad Maidan in south Mumbai.

Though the party has made no

announcement, former chief min-

ister Devendra Fadnavis, the deputy chief minister in the outgoing government, is being seen as the frontrunner for the key posi-

The party's two main allies, the Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party, are each tipped to be given deputy CM positions in the

new government. Eknath Shinde, who is the caretaker chief minister, has already made it clear that he will not come in the way of BJP getting the chief minster's post.

In the recently concludes state polls, the Mahayuti won 230 of the 288 assembly seats. The BJP led with 132 seats, while the Shiv Sena got 57 and NCP 41 seats. (PTI)



THE HILLS TIMES 9

Flood fury overwhelms Villupuram in TN Railway suspends ops as water level rises over danger mark

VILLUPURAM, Dec 2: Villpuram district in north Tamil Nadu continued to reel under unprecedented flooding on Monday following extremely heavy rainfall, virtually blocking access to villages and residential colonies as bridges and roads overflowed, inundating huge acreage of standing crops and leaving passengers stranded as rail and road traffic was hit.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2024

Vehicles were submerged up to two feet and the roads came completely under water in several parts of Villupuram, and nearby Cuddalore, where residents were stunned by the flooding. River Thenpennai was in spate and trees were uprooted in several areas. Several houses, particularly tiled tenements, at Aragandanallur in Villupuram were almost submerged with water level rising over

Parts of Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri districts, in west Tamil Nadu, too witnessed floods unseen in the past two decades. Uthangarai in Krishnagiri district received a whopping 50 cm rainfall, Villupuram district received upto 42 cm, and Harur in Dharmapuri received 33 cm. Cuddalore and Tiruvannamalai recorded 16 cm, and all of which was from 8.30 am on December 1 to 8.30 am, on the follow-

Many vehicles, including cars and vans were dragged by floods from a road at Uthangarai into lowlying area, shocking people.

Several of the vehicles were owned by local tour operators. Road access from Uthangarai to towns such as Krishnagiri and Tiruvannamalai has been affected due

CHANDIGARH, Dec 2: The

Monday pronounced 'tankhah'

Sukhbir Singh Badal for the "mis-

takes" committed by the Shiro-

mani Akali Dal and its

government in Punjab from 2007

to 2017, directing him to perform

as a 'sewadar' and clean utensils

and shoes at the Golden Temple in

Pronouncing the order from the

'faseel' (podium) of the Akal

Takht in Amritsar, Jathedar of the

highest temporal seat of the Sikhs.

Giani Raghbir Singh, also directed

the working committee of the Shi-

romani Akali Dal (SAD) to accept

the resignation of Sukhbir Badal

as party chief, besides forming a

committee to hold elections for

the post of SAD president and of-

to withdraw the title of 'Fakhre-e-

Qaum' bestowed upon former

chief minister late Parkash Singh

Badal, father of Sukhbir Badal.

The Jathedar further announced

fice-bearers within six months.

(religious

Amritsar.

punishment) for



Meteorological Department official here told PTI that the extremely heavy rainfall was due to the presence of remnants of Cyclone Fengal in land areas. On the night of November 30, the cyclonic storm made the landfall near Puducherry.

With water rising above the danger level on an arterial bridge be-Vikravandi Mundiyampakkam in Villupuram, Southern Railway on Monday morning suspended operations in that key stretch, leading to cancellations, diversion and short termination of services, which includes express and superfast trains.

As a result, people flocked to the bus station, resulting in choatic crowds and the traffic on the key Chennai-Tiruchirappalli national highway, in and around Villupuram, was also hit in view of flood-

With temporary suspension of all train services via Villupuram, hundreds of passengers were affected and a railway official hinted at resumption of services, by comply-

Akal Takht pronounces 'tankhah' for Sukhbir

The five Singh Sahibans (Sikh

clergy) also pronounced religious

punishment for other Sikh leaders

who served as ministers in the

Akali Cabinet during 2007 to

Giani Raghbir Singh said

Sukhbir Badal, who was on a

wheelchair because of a fractured

leg, and rebel leader Sukhdev

Singh Dhindsa have been asked to

sit outside the Golden Temple

wearing the dress of 'sewadar' for

They will also perform the serv-

ice of 'sewadar' at Takht Kesgarh

Sahib, Takht Damdama Sahib,

Darbar Sahib at Muktsar and Fate-

Both Sukhbir Badal and

Sukhdev Dhindsa were asked to

clean utensils and shoes of devo-

tees at the Golden Temple for one

hour, besides listening to 'kirtan'.

the edict, Sukhbir Badal admitted

the mistakes, including pardoning

Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet

Ram Rahim Singh in a 2007 blas-

Before the pronouncement of

hgarh Sahib for two days each.

one hour each for two days.

ing with safety norms, as and when the condition improved.

Well-connected Villupuram is the easy link between Chennai, other northern parts of the state and the central and southern regions of Tamil Nadu. Villupuram is located about 160 km from state capital

As portions of a bridge was washed away, link to many villages near Aarani in Tiruvannamalai district was cut off. Similarly, bridges elsewhere, including the one at Karunapuram near Tindivanam, were submerged and water overflowed into nearby areas, virtually cutting access to villages. Water entered the Gingee government hospital prompting authorities to shift patients to hospitals elsewhere.

A farm produce warehouse was submerged at Vikravandi and many bags, containing groundnuts and other produce could be seen floating on water.

Raging flood water gushed towards low-lying areas and many

The punishment came nearly

was declared 'tankhaiya' (guilty

of religious misconduct) by the

The Jathedar also directed Akali

leaders Sucha Singh Langah, Hira

Singh Gabria, Balwinder Singh

Bhundar, Daljit Singh Cheema

and Gulzar Singh Ranike to clean

washrooms for one hour at the

Golden Temple, and then clean

utensils at the community kitchen

They will also listen to 'kirtan'

Other Akali leaders, including

Bibi Jagir Kaur, Prem Singh

Chandumajra, Surjit Singh

Rakhra, Bikram Singh Majithia,

Mahesh Inder Singh Grewal, Cha-

ranjit Singh Atwal, and Adesh

Partap Singh Kairon, were also

told to clean washrooms at the

The Jathedar had summoned

the entire Akali Cabinet from

2007 to 2017, the party's core

committee, and the 2015 internal

committee of the Shiromani Gur-

Sukhbir Badal arrived on a

wheelchair as he suffered a minor

hairline fracture on his right foot

He was declared 'tankhaiya'

after rebel party leaders, including

Chandumajra, Kaur and others,

appeared before the Akal Takht on

July 1 and sought forgiveness for

four "mistakes" during the SAD

rule between 2007 and 2017, in-

cluding failure to punish those re-

sponsible for the 2015 sacrilege incidents and pardoning Gurmeet

Ram Rahim Singh in a 2007 blas-

last month.

dwara Parbandhak Committee.

Golden Temple for one hour.

for one hour, the Jathedar said.

Akal Takht.

after taking bath.

nearby urban hubs and villages, and parts of Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri were also marooned, bearing the brunt of the rain fury.

NATION

The Pochampalli police station in Krishnagiri district came under about 3 feet water and all around the premises, water could be seen moving with huge force.

Chief Minister M K Stalin, meanwhile, inspected Villupuram on Monday and interacted with the affected people and distributed relief to them. Deputy CM Ud-hayanidhi Stalin also has held Villupuram. AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami visited Krishnagiri and urged the government to provide compensation to farmers and affected people.

On floods pushing vehicles into low-lying areas, Palaniswami said the owners, belonging to ordinary families, were dependent on vehicles for their business and batted for compensation to them.

The depression, the remnant of cyclonic storm Fengal over north Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, weakened into a Well Marked Low Pressure Area on Monday, the India Meteorological Department said. The IMD said: "The depression (Remnant of Cyclonic Storm 'Fengal') over north coastal Tamil Nadu & Puducherry moved nearly westwards and weakened into a Well Marked Low Pressure Area at 0530 hrs IST of today, the 02nd December 2024, over North Interior Tamil Nadu. The remnant low pressure area is likely to emerge over southeast and adjoining east-central Arabian Sea off north Kerala-Karnataka coasts around 3rd December 2024." (PTI)

IPS officer dies in accident

Badal, directs to clean utensils at Golden Temple HASSAN (KARANATAKA), Dec 2: A 26-year-old IPS officer on his phemy case during the SAD way to take up his first posting died in a road accident in Hassan district, police said on Monday. three months after Sukhbir Badal

Harsh Bardhan was a 2023-batch IPS officer of the Karnataka cadre and hailed from Madhya Pradesh, they said.

The accident took place on Sunday evening, when the tyre of the police vehicle he was travelling in allegedly burst near Kittane in Hassan taluk, following which the driver lost control and the vehicle hit a house and a tree on the roadside, police said.

According to police, Bardhan was on his way to Hassan to report for duty as a probationary Assistant Superintendent of Police in Holenarasipur, police said.

Bardhan sustained sev injuries and died in the hospital during the course of treatment, while the driver, Manjegowda, suffered minor injuries, a senior police officer said The IPS officer had recently

completed his four-week training at the Karnataka Police Academy in Mysuru, police said, adding his father is a sub-divisional magistrate. Karnataka chief minister Sid-

daramaiah offered condolences to the officer's family.

"Saddened to hear about the death of probationary IPS officer Harsh Bardhan in a horrific accident near Kittane border of Hassan-Mysuru Highway. It is very sad that such an accident happened while he was on his way to take charge as an IPS office. This should not have happened when years of hard work were paying off," he said in a post on 'X'. "I pray to God that Harsh Bardhan's soul rests in peace. My condolences to the family of the deceased," he added. (PTI)

Massive jams at Delhi-Noida border as police set up barricades to stop farmers' march

traffic snarls caused inconvenience to commuters crossing the Delhi-Noida border on Monday as police set up multiple barricades and deployed heavy security in view of a farmers' protest march towards the national capital.

Farmers gathered at the Mahamaya flyover on the Dadri-Noida link road and began their march around 11.30 am to press their demands for land allocation and increased compensation for their lands acquired by the government, among other things. The protest call was given by the Bharatiya Kisan Parishad (BKP).

According to the BKP, farmers from 20 districts of Uttar Pradesh, including Aligarh and Agra, took part in the march.

Carrying banners and flags of various farmer groups, hundreds of protesters crossed the initial barricades erected by Noida Police. While some climbed over the barricades, others pushed them.

They were finally stopped by police near Dalit Prerna Sthal on Noida Link Road, around 1 km from the Chilla border, an entry point to Delhi. Senior police officers tried to pacify the protesting farmers.

Due to the farmers protest and checking by police, commuters travelling via Chilla border, DND flyway, Delhi Gate and Kalindi Kuni faced heavy traffic for hours.

Aprajita Singh, a resident of Greater Noida, said the barricades put up at the Chilla border were causing major inconvenience to

"It took me about an hour to get through that stretch. Police have set up barricades on both sides of the Delhi-Noida border, causing significant traffic congestion, espevigilance and are also coordinating

cially on the carriageway from Noida to Delhi," she said.

Another commuter, Amit Thakur of Noida, said due to the heavy traffic, he ditched his car and took the metro to get to work.

"When I checked the traffic situation before leaving for my office in central Delhi, it showed heavy congestion near the Chilla border, adding an hour to the travel time. So, I decided to take the metro instead," he said.

On Sunday, Noida Police issued a traffic advisory informing commuters about route closures and di-

Delhi Police also put up multiple barricades and deployed security personnel at the Chilla border on Noida link road, DND flyway and Kalindi Kuni border.

A senior Delhi Police officer said checking was underway at border points and drones were being used for surveillance.

Additional Commissioner of Police (East) Sagar Singh Kalsi said, 'We have made adequate arrangements at east Delhi borders and have taken all precautionary measwith traffic police for smooth vehicular movement in the area.'

Joint Commissioner of Police (Southern Range) S K Jain said police are also coordinating with their Noida counterparts.

"We have two key borders in southeast district -- DND border and Kalindi Kunj. Since Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) is imposed in the New Delhi area and Parliament is in session, protests without permission are strictly prohibited.

"To manage this, we have increased security at both borders. Proper barricades, jersey barriers and hydra cranes have been deployed. We will stop those who will try to forcibly enter the city," he stated.

Currently, the situation at the border is normal, Jain said.

A group of farmers from Punjab, led by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM), has called for a march towards Delhi on December 6. The group has been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border ures, including anti-riot equip-points between Punjab and ment. We are using drones for Haryana since February 13. (PTI)

Bengaluru, parts of Karnataka to receive rainfall for next two days

BENGALURU, Dec 2: Bengaluru and other parts of Karnataka will continue to receive rainfall for the next two days owing to the impact of Cyclone Fengal that has now weakened, the India Meteorological Department said on Monday.

Bengaluru has been receiving rain since Sunday evening and as per IMD officials, Coastal Karanataka and parts of South Interior Karnataka are likely to experience widespread rainfall today, while light to moderate rainfall on

Rainfall is likely to decrease from Wednesday onwards in these regions, the officials said.

In a statement, the IMD said that clonic Storm "FENGAL") over north coastal Tamil Nadu and Puducherry moved nearly westwards and weakened into a well marked low pressure area at 5.30 am as of today, over North Interior Tamil Nadu. The remnant low pressoutheast and adjoining east-central Arabian Sea off north Kerala Karnataka coasts around December 3.

sure area is likely to emerge over

A yellow alert has been issued for Bengaluru and districts like Hassan, Mandya and Ramanagara for Monday, said C S Patil, India Meteorological Department, Bengaluru director. The widespread rainfall in Ben-

galuru and other parts of Karnataka from Sunday is due to the impact of Fengal, he said. An orange alert has been issued

for districts like Udupi, Chikmagaluru, Chikkabalbura which are expected to receive very heavy to heavy rainfall, according to IMD very heavy rain of 11 cm to 20 cm and a yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 cm and 11 cm.

December 2, scattered heavy to fishermen have been advised not to very heavy with isolated extremely venture into the above sea areas

over Kodagu district while scattered heavy to very heavy rain is very likely over Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, Chamarajanagar, Shivamogga, Chikkamagaluru and Mysuru districts.

Scattered heavy rainfall is very likely to occur over Hassan, Mandya and Ramanagara districts while moderate rains are very likely to occur at most places over Tumkur, Bengaluru Rural, Bengaluru Urban, Chikkaballapura, Chitradurga and Kolar districts.

Additionally, the IMD has forecast that light rains are very likely to occur at a few places over the remaining districts of North Interior Karnataka.

forecast squally weather with wind speed 35 kmph to 45 kmph gusting to 55 kmph as likely to prevail According to IMD statement, On along South Karnataka Coast and heavy rain is very likely to occur during the mentioned period. (PTI)

Deal to procure 26 Rafale-M jets to be inked soon: Navy chief

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: India is set to seal the proposed procurement of 26 naval variant of Rafale jets and three additional Scorpene submarines soon, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi said on Monday.

At a media briefing ahead of Navy Day, Admiral Tripathi also said that the government's approval for two SSNs (nuclear-powered submarines) indicated its faith in the country's indigenous capabilities to build

marine are currently under construction within the country as part of efforts to boost its naval power.

The Navy chief also said that 62 ships and a sub-

A large number of platforms are waiting for induction in the next one year and at least one ship will be inducted into the Navy, he said.

month, he added.

"We have redoubled efforts to include niche technologies into the force," Admiral Tripathi said. The procurement of Rafale-M (naval variant) and the Scorpene submarines is likely to be finalised next

In July last year, the defence ministry approved the purchase of the Rafale-M jets from France, primarily for deployment on board the indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

On Pakistan's efforts to increase its maritime prowess, Admiral Tripathi said the Indian Navy is ready to deal with any possible threat from neighbour-

Delhi Police arrests 3 associates of Kala Jatheri gang

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: Delhi Police arrested three associates of the Kala Jatheri gang who allegedly used to open fire outside the offices of various property dealers in the national capital for extortion, police said on Monday. The accused include Rohit

Lather (31), a fire safety expert with no prior criminal record; Ritik Lather (19), a wrestling enthusiast; and Jugesh alias Yogi (25), a rickshaw driver with a history of involvement in extortion and other crimes, police added. The investigation revealed that

the syndicate was orchestrated by Aman Lather, alias Jony, who operated from the United States, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Ankit Kumar Singh. "Aman Lather had reached the

US through the illegal 'donkey route' in February 2023. He was using the alias Jony to make extortion calls on behalf of the Kala Jatheri gang," he said.

According to police sources, after reaching the US, Aman once met gangster Goldy Brar, a close associate of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi.



The DCP said that the operation began on November 25, when police apprehended Yogi in the Dwarka area with two pistols, 11 live cartridges, and a stolen motorcycle. He had been evading capture by moving across states, including Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district. "Multiple teams were then formed to nab Rohit and Ritik. Rohit, a B.Tech graduate, played a pivotal role in the syndicate,"

Singh said. "Rohit provided logistical and support, including weapons and shelter for gang members. Ritik was another key player in the gang's operations,' the DCP added

Both suspects were arrested from their native village in Haryana, Singh said. During the investigation, police uncovered multiple high-profile extortion cases linked to the gang

in the Dwarka area. In one instance, gang members fired shots at the office of a builder in Mohan Garden on May 31, and repeated the attack the next day, leaving a slip bearing the names "Jony Bhai" and "Kala Jathedi." (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Dec 2: The National Green Tribunal has directed the Uttar Pradesh government to immediately provide specialised healthcare facilities in areas where private leaseholders conducted silica sand mining.

The green body was hearing a plea on widespread illegal silica sand mining in pockets of Prayagraj district, including Shankargarh, Pervaizabad, Lalapur, Bankipur, Janwa and Dhara. The petition claimed the unau-

thorised mining conducted without observing proper extraction mechanisms endangered people's health, causing various diseases including Silicosis, a long-term lung ailment triggered by inhaling large amounts of crystalline silica dust In an order dated November 29.

a bench of National Green Tribunal (NGT) Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava directed 12 private



NGT directs UP govt to provide specialised

healthcare in silica mining areas

leaseholders to pay compensation for violating environmental norms, while 14 of them were ordered to pay fines for the illegal extraction of groundwater at silica washing plants.

"The state of Uttar Pradesh and the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control

Board (UPPCB) in consultation and

coordination with the concerned departments shall take immediate steps to provide specialised healthcare facilities in the areas where silica sand mines are being operated by mining leaseholders," said the bench also comprising judicial member Justice Sudhir Agarwal and expert member A Senthil Vel. The tribunal also directed the au-

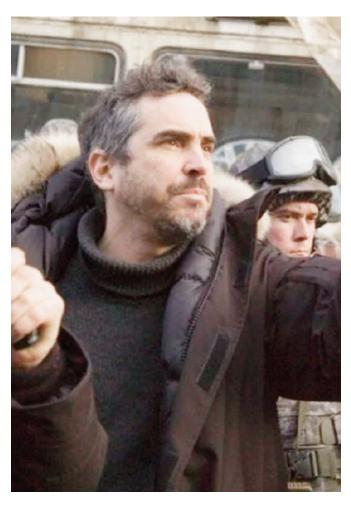
thorities concerned to immediately make arrangements for the "necessary medical infrastructure for prevention and treatment of the affected workers".

It also directed the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to prepare detailed guidelines which were to be followed and observed by the statutory regulators concerned while granting permission or consent for silica sand mining and silica sand washing plants.

"The CPCB shall look into this aspect of the matter, prepare detailed guidelines and circulate the same to all concerned, pan-India, within three months," the tribunal

Advocate Rohit Kumar Tuteia appeared before the tribunal on behalf of the petitioner. (PTI)

ALFONSO **CUARON** SAYS HE ALMOST DIRECTED A **JAMES** BOND FILM



LOS ANGELES, Dec 2: Oscar winner Alfonso Cuaron says he was once offered to direct a James Bond film, but he decided to turn it down as he was "troubled about the idea of

While Cuaron didn't reveal which Bond film he was supposed to direct, he said he eventually passed over the project after a dinner with fellow filmmaker Joel Coen.

"Ages ago I was offered a 'Bond' film. And I said, 'Yeah, cool. Maybe Bond. I am going to do one.' And then when the process started and I was going to shoot all the dialogue and stuff, there was a (separate) team doing all the action scenes. It kind of felt very weird. I was troubled about the idea of doing it," the Mexican filmmaker said during a session at the ongoing Marrakech Film Festival.

Cuaron, known for hits such as "Y Tu Mama Tambien", "Gravity", "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban", and "Roma", recalled taking Coen's advice on the Bond film.

"I had dinner with Joel Coen, and I said, 'Joel, what do you think of Bond?' And he said, 'Oh cool, I enjoy Bond.' I said, 'Would you do a Bond film?" According to the director, Coen replied: "It probably falls into the category of a film I want to watch but not do." Cuaron then said he learned the lesson that

there are "some films I prefer to watch and not do". The filmmaker also spoke about directing "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" (2004), when he had not even read the books penned by JK Rowling on which the popular fantasy film franchise was based.

"I had written 'Children of Men' (2006) that nobody wanted to do. I was unemployed. I was going to have a child. This film was offered to me, and I didn't want to do it because I didn't know anything about 'Harry Potter'." After he read the books, he said to himself: "There is something good here! I will give it a try." And "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban", the third film in the eight-part franchise, went on to become "the best" filmmaking experience.

"I learned like crazy. It was a crash course in visual effects. It was a really pleasant experience," he added. Cuaron's latest work is the Apple TV+ thriller series "Disclaimer", starring Leila George, Cate Blanchett and Louis Par-

'Singham Again', 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3' major blockbusters in Australia: producer Anupam Sharma

being just two-three per cent of Australia's population, it's a matter of pride that Bollywood films like "Singham Again" and "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3" are turning out to be blockbusters in the country, says Sydney-based filmmaker Anupam Sharma.

Punjabi movies are also gaining market share in Australia, he pointed out.

"We recently had 'Singham Again', 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3', all the major blockbusters. But one thing is very exciting, it's the Punjabi films.

"They're touching million-dollar box office, which is unheard of. We're (Indians) just two-three per cent of the population (of Australia). And they're punching above their weight," Sharma told PTI in an interview.

He was speaking on the sidelines of the recently concluded Film Bazaar, held alongside the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa.

According to trade website Box Office

Moio, "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3" and "Singham Again" earned AUD 899,742 and AUD 819,651 in Australia upon release last month. The filmmaker said Punjabi pro-

ducers have approached him to coproduce films in the language with Australian banners.

Punjabi film "Honsla Rakh", starring Diljit Dosanjh, earned AUD 639,107 upon release back in 2021 at Australian box office. Amrinder Gill's "Chal Mera Putt 2" collected AUD 643,309 in 2020, as per Box Office Mojo.

"If this is the box office they are getting, combined with the grants we are getting from Screen Australia (government agency), they're just loving it.

"Everyone is surprised because Australia has a very small film industry. Population of Australia is a bit around Mumbai's population.

So for them to be sustaining on Indian films is something very proud for us," he

Australia was the focus country at IFFI Film Bazaar this year.

Sharma, who helped in the production of "Dil Chahta Hai", "Heyy Baby", and "Salaam Namaste" in Australia, said the local government saw how these Indian movies were promoting the country and that's how talks to bring the talent from both the regions together started progressing.

"All this combined with a co-production treaty being active has created the most fertile grounds to share stories between two cultures...

"At the same time, as a filmmaker, I'm

excited because outside

India, particularly

with diasporic Indi-

ans and people of di-

verse backgrounds, it

is a big movement to

tell our stories our-

selves. We have

and telling us our stories. Sharma also thanked Screen Australia. a federal government agency charged

enough people from the West coming

with supporting Australian screen development, production and promotion, and other Australian film resources.

He also spoke about his 2015 feature directorial debut "unIndian", which starred Indian actor Tannishtha Chatterjee and Australia cricket great Brett Lee in his first film role. The Sydney-set film revolves around Will (Lee), who teaches Australian English to immigrants, falls in love with Meera (Chatterjee), an Australian woman of Indian origin and a sin-

gle mother. Lee may be a former Australian speedster to many cricket fans but Sharma said he always knew him as a "performer" after doing a TV commercial and a series with him. "The moment he said yes, we had the film funded in four days, all by Indian fans, high net

worth individual

the search

began

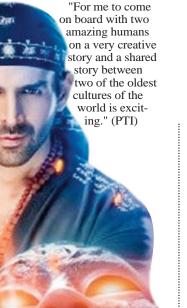
fans of his from

Australia... Then

ally good actress to compliment him, someone who was a star as well as an actor. But not a diva. And we couldn't have got someone better than Tannishtha Chatterjee for that," he recalled.

He is next set to produce "Bidjara Kumari", billed as the first film to explore Australian Aboriginal and Indian cultures. Also on board are Richard Jemison and Jodi Bell, who are Aboriginal First Nation producers.

The story follows a First Nation girl Tasha from Australia who comes to India in search of her father.



Vikrant Massey announces break from films, says 'time to recalibrate'



NEW DELHI, Dec 2: In a rare instance of an actor announcing that he's taking a break from films, "12th Fail" star Vikrant Massey on Monday announced that it was time for him to "recalibrate" and go back home. The announcement comes weeks after the release of his latest movie "The Sabarmati Report" on the aftermath of the Godhra train burning of 2002. He said during promotions of the film, which released on November 15, that he had received death threats on social media but is not worried as it is

Massey, who recently garnered success and acclaim with 2023's "12th Fail" and the recent Netflix movie "Sector 26", thanked fans for their "phenomenal" support in the last few years. "But as I move forward, I realise it's time to recalibrate and go back home. As a Husband, Father & a Son. And also as an Actor (sic)" the 37-year-old wrote on Instagram. Massey welcomed his first child, son Vardaan, with actor-wife Sheetal Thakur in February. The actor, also known for TV series "Balika Vadhu", films "Lootera", "A Death in the Gunj", and "Cargo" as well as web series "Mirzapur", said he has one more release lined up for 2025.

"So coming 2025, we would meet each other for one last time. Until time deems right. Last 2 movies and many a years of memories. Thank you again. For everything and everything in between. Forever indebted! (sic)" he wrote. It's an unusual though not unprecedented move.

In 2019, Zaira Wasim, the breakout star of sports drama "Dangal", announced her "disassociation" from acting, saying she was not happy with the line of work as it interfered with her faith and religion. Veteran actor Vinod Khanna also shocked his fans when, at the height of his career, he left Bollywood to follow his spiritual guru, Osho Rajneesh, to Oregon in the United States in 1982. (PTI)

LUCKNOW STORYTELLER CAPTIVATES AUDIENCES IN RUSSIA WITH DASTAN ON RAJ KAPOOR, SHAILENDRA

LUCKNOW, Dec 2: Lucknowbased storyteller Himanshu Bajpai enthralled audiences in Russia over the weekend with his dastan centered on the friendship between legendary filmmaker Raj Kapoor and lyricist Shailendra.

"Dastan Raj Kapoor-Shailendra Ki" (The Story of Raj Kapoor-Shailendra), a dastangoi performance which Bajpai presented at the Indian Embassy in Moscow on Saturday, commemorated the birth centenary of the 'Showman of Hindi Cinema'.

December 14, 2024 marks the 100th birth anniversary of Raj Kapoor. Bajpai's performance, translated from Urdu into Russian by Pragati Tipnis, resonated with both Indian and Russian audiences.

Deputy Chief of Mission Nikhilesh Giri praised Bajpai's sto-

rytelling for transporting the audience to the bygone era.

"It's a mesmerising art form, and Bajpai is instrumental in bringing it to new heights. We hope to invite him back to Russia next year," Giri

said at the event.

According to Tipnis, this was the first time that people in Russia experienced the "magnificent Indian tradition" of dastangoi.

Dastangoi is a centuries-old traditional art of storytelling in Urdu. Derived from the Persian words 'dastan' (story) and 'goi' (to tell), it involves narrating long, intricate tales with dramatic flair.

"The dastan performances have brought the two nations closer," she added. Bajpai performed the same 'dastan' on Sunday at the world-famous Writers' Village in Peredelkino, a hub for global literary figures established during the Soviet era under the aegis of authors like Maxim Gorky.

"This was the first Indian cultural programme hosted at the prestigious venue," Bajpai told PTI from Moscow over phone.

Raj Kapoor, the filmmaker and actor of iconic Hindi films "Awara", "Barsaat", "Shree 420", "Mera Naam Joker", and

"Sangam", found large audiences in the erstwhile Soviet Union with his movies and music enjoying popularity in the country. His long-time friend Shailendra penned lyrics for many of his films.

During his performance, Bajpai said the dastan begins with a story in post-independence India when Shailendra recited his powerful poem "Jalta Hai Punjab" at a poetry recital which was attended by Raj

"Impressed by Shailendra's work, Raj Kapoor requested him to write for his films, but Shailendra declined, stating he did not write for money," added Bajpai. However, in 1949, when Shailen-

dra needed financial assistance, Raj Kapoor lent him Rs 500, a handsome amount at the time, marking the beginning of a lifelong friendship. "The story delves into the creation of iconic songs like 'Awara Hoon', which Shailendra wrote without hearing the film's plot, and which was initially rejected by Raj Kapoor before becoming a milestone in Indian cinema," he said.

Bajpai recounted another anecdote which explored the origins of the song "Ramaiya Vastavaiya" from the iconic 1955 film "Shree



Star-studded Saudi Arabian, Japanese, Chinese clubs setting the pace in Asian Champions League

Led by Cristiano Ronaldo, Rivad Mahrez and Aleksandar Mitrovic. Saudi Arabian clubs are dominating the western zone of the AFC Champions League Elite but, in the east, Japan is on top with Chinese clubs bouncing back after a difficult period.

Al-Ahli, Al-Hilal and Al-Nassr are first, second and third in the western zone group, the 24 teams in the tournament are divided into two groups of 12 and are already guaranteed a place in the pre-quarter-finals.

It has not been easy, however. Like the European version, Asia's top-tier tournament has expanded the number of group-

stage games from six to eight putting extra demands on even the cashed-up Saudi Arabian clubs. "The tournament is very difficult, it is similar to the UEFA Champions League," said Al-Hilal boss Jorge Jesus.

"If we want to succeed, we must manage in the required manner. Pressure and fatigue are the fate of big clubs that compete in all tournaments and we are up to the task.'

With the domestic seasons in East Asia already over, there are fewer demands on clubs in action on Tuesday and Wednesday and the three Chinese teams are in the top eight with seven points



After years of financial problems and clubs folding, fans are enjoying the relative success of the clubs especially as the national team has won two of its last three qualifiers to keep hopes of the 2026 World Cup alive. Shanghai Shenhua and Shanghai Port are in the running as are Shandong Taishan.

"In the AFC Champions League, all our preparations are 100%, and our efforts are also 100%," Tang Tian, Shandong assistant coach, said. "We will review and prepare for the away game against Kawasaki and strive for a satisfactory result."

Kawasaki Frontale is one of three Japanese clubs in the top four. Vissel Kobe is top and will seal its knockout stage place if it defeats South Korea's Pohang Steelers. "When we looked at the competition in the beginning, it was always in our thinking that we would need three, four wins to go through," Kobe coach Takayuki Yoshida said. "Now, we're close but we have an important game in Korea next."

Yokohama F Marinos will be close to doing the same if it can defeat Central Coast Mariners of Australia.

John Hutchinson spent ten years as a player at the A-League club and is now the fourth Australian to coach Yokohama, succeeding Harry Kewell in July who followed Kevin Muscat and Ange Postecoglou.

Under Hutchinson, Yokohama has won its last five games to climb into seventh in the J League and third in the Champions League, following last week's defeat of Pohang.

"I'm happy with the boys and their performance," Hutchinson. "We ended up with the three points and have our game against Australia's Central Coast Mariners next. We want to win that game to climb the table." The Mariners, Australia's sole representative in the tournament, have just one point from five games and are in desperate need of a win. (AP)

WE HAVE FOUND THE RIGHT MIX, SAYS HARDIK PANDYA



Indians skipper Hardik Pandya has expressed his delight at the way things panned out for them in the IPL mega auction in Jeddah and said the franchise has "found the right mix"

The star all-rounder said they had a clear plan of having a blend of youth and experienced players.

'I was in touch with the table as well, exactly who we are going for, and I think we came out pretty well from the auction and how the team is looking," he said in an MI video posted on social media.

"We have found the right mix, which is experienced players, like Boulty (Trent Boult) is back, Deepak Chahar, who has been around, and at the same time, young guns like Will Jacks, Robin Minz and Rickelton, who are fresh.

'So, I think we have done pretty well. We have covered all the bases.'

Explaining the auction dynamics, Pandya admitted that while the entire process is thrilling, it is important to keep the emotions in check, especially while going for a particular player the team des-

always tricky. When you are best part is that Mumbai Indiwatching it live, it is very ex-

you want this player," he explained.

"But sometimes, you just lose. (So), it's very important to not be very so emotional, and in the end, we have to create a whole team.

'Mumbai Indians has the facility to make them flourish'

MI bought quite a few uncapped young players --Naman Dhir, Robin Minz, Vignesh Puthur, Arjun Tendulkar, Bevan John Jacobs, Venkata Satyanarayana Penmetsa, Raj Angad Bawa, Shrijith Krishnan and Ashwani

Referring to these youngsters, Pandya urged them to work hard and said that MI possesses the best facilities to help them develop into top cricketers.

young guns who are joining Mumbai Indians this year is that if you are here, you have that spark, you have that talent, which the scouts have seen," he stated. "They found me, they found

"My message to all the

Jasprit, they found Krunal, they found Tilak. They all eventually played for the

"All you have to do is show The auction dynamics are up, train, work hard, and the ans has the facility to make

World Chess C'ship: Gukesh, Liren eye breakthrough after hat-trick of draws



SINGAPORE, Dec 2: Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh and defending champion Ding Liren will be aiming to break the deadlock after three consecutive draws when they square off in the seventh round of the World Chess Championship here on Tuesday, having stayed on equal footing for most part of the interesting showdown.

Hailed as the favourite to win by many chess pundits, the 18year-old Gukesh, who is the youngest ever challenger to the title, has not been able to really show his class and has often depended on the Chinese to play safe or make mistakes in decent positions. The two are currently locked at three points each.

for Gukesh after a loss with white pieces, the second game was a confidence-booster for the Indian as Liren barely did anything and allowed an easy draw.

Gukesh won the third game but only after Liren miscalculated from what may have been a promising position.

In the fourth game Gukesh played solidly again when Liren gave nothing away out of an irregular opening and it was again

a draw. At this point, it was clear that Liren was banking on Gukesh to make mistakes

Game five saw Gukesh fighting for the initiative yet again and went too far as he came under threat in the resulting endgame. Liren yet again failed to spot them and it was another draw.

The sixth game of many world championship matches have massive history and this time too, it was not disappointing for the fans. In the last World championship, Liren had beaten Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia in the sixth game and back in 1972, Bobby Fischer had beaten Boris Spassky in what is a favourite of many chess fans across the world even today.

Gukesh turned down an early draw vide repetition and was worse. However, the nature of the position remained complicated and Liren did not risk things in the queen and rook endgame that was the fourth draw of the match out of six games.

As far as the openings go, Liren has chosen three different moves with his white pieces to start the game while Gukesh has stuck to a Classical approach using only King and Queen's pawn in the beginning. "I think so far it has been good I still can improve my play, there are lot more games, considering I was trailing after the first game I am happy to be here, it is too early," Gukesh remarked when asked if he was satisfied with his play thus far at the end of the sixth game.

On Tuesday, the Indian will play with white.

Going by the proceedings so far, things are not particularly clear and as of now, there are no favourites. Gukesh has been his general ambitious self while Liren has shown aggression only when necessary, often missing out on key moments. (PTI)

Head quashes rumours of divide in Australian camp ahead of pink ball Test

ADELAIDE, Dec 2: Australian big-hitter Travis Head on Monday asserted there is no "divide" between his team's struggling batters and its potent bowling attack as they geared up to bounce back in the pink-ball Test against India, starting here on December 6. Australia suffered an embarrassing 295-run loss as their batters struggled to cope with the bouncy Perth pitch, managing just 104 & 238 in their two innings.

On day three of the Test, pacer Josh Hazlewood, who picked four wickets in first essay, made a comment that seemed to sug-

I'm good to go: Marsh

ahead of pink ball Test

gest frustration with the team's batters. triggering speculation of tensions in the dressing room.

Head said there was no reason to doubt the dressing room dynamics.

"It can be put to bed. We hold high expectations for both sides (batting and bowling) and it's a very individualised sport," Head said. "So batters, we want to hold our own we know how good our bowlers have been for us in the past and they've got us out of trouble a lot. As a batting group, we know that if we get enough runs on the board, we put ourselves in a great position.

"As a batter myself, I try to take a whole lot of pride in what I do, and knowing that if I can set it up for the big boys, that they can knock it down for us, so definitely no divide," he explained.

Hazlewood was questioned about Australia's approach to day four, given they were 12/3 in pursuit of 534.

"You probably have to ask one of the batters that question probably, I am sort of relaxing and trying to get a bit of treatment, and I am looking mostly to next Test," Hazlewood had said.

The Australian top-order comprising the likes of Usman Khawaja, Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne crumbled at Perth. Labuschagnem, in particular, has been

woefully out of form and several former players have called for his exclusion from the side but Head backed him to get some big runs. "Knowing Marnus, he would have worked on a few things over the last few days and it would have been hard to probably keep him out of the nets," he

Women's Asian Champions Trophy win was important for India for LA 28 buildup, says Rani Rampal

tralia's seam bowling allrounder Mitchell Marsh has allayed concerns about his injury, declaring himself "good to go" for the pink ball second Test against India, which begins here on December 6.

The 33-year-old had felt discomfort after bowling after bowling 19.3 overs in the opening Test, which Australia lost by 295 runs at Perth, but Marsh has confirmed his fitness ahead of the second Test at Adelaide Oval. Australia had included uncapped Tasmania all-rounder Beau Webster in the squad due

to doubts over Marsh's fitness. However, Marsh has assured that he is ready for the challenge. Asked about any fitness concerns, Marsh told Channel Nine: "The body's all good,

yep. Nah, nah, I'm good to go." "I'll be there," he added after arriving in Adelaide on Monboost for Australia, who are also dealing with the absence of senior pacer Josh Hazlewood, who pulled out of the pink ball Test due to a side strain.

In Hazlewood's absence, pacer Scott Boland could join Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins in the pace attack.

Marsh, who has been managing a recurring ankle injury, also underwent surgery that saw him miss parts of the 2022-23 summer. While his bowling workload has been limited, his primary role has been as a specialist batter. Since returning to the Test side following a memorable century in last year's Ashes, Marsh has accumulated 803 runs at an average of 44.61

in 11 matches. In Perth, he scored 47 off 67 balls, emerging as the only Australian batter apart from Travis Head (89) to put up a fight in the opening Test. (PTI)

ROHTAK, Dec 2: Former captain Rani Rampal believes the Asian Champions Trophy title was an important feat for the Indian women's hockey team as it kick started its preparation for the Los Angeles Olympics on a rousing note. The Indian women's hockey team produced a dominant show to win its third Asian Champions Trophy title after struggling to win matches the entire year, which culminated in its failure to

qualify for the Paris Games.

"The Asian Champions trophy win was very important for our women's hockey team in terms of build up. It started the buildup for 2028 LA Olympics. It's a good start. Under coach Harendra Singh the team will do well," Rani told PTI. The-29-year-old signed off her career as one of India's most decorated hockey players after leading the women's team to its best-ever finish at the Olympics -- a fourth show at the

Tokyo Games in 2021

She was roped in as the national coach for sub-junior women's team before she officially announced her retirement last

"My experience was great, learnt a lot while working with the sub juniors. They were young girls who were coming from similar background as me, it was easy to understand their issues and to guide them," Rani said. "I told them 'if I can do it (be

successful) then all of you can also do it.' They need guidance and I tried to give that to them by sharing my experience with them," she said of her experience as coach. The former striker will serve as a mentor for the Soorma Hockey Club in the upcoming Hockey India League, which will also have a women's tournament for the first time.

Rani made her international debut in 2008 as a 14-year-old in



the Olympic qualifiers. And the former captain knows the pressure a young athlete experiences. As a coach and mentor she

hopes to help youngsters manage the burden of expectations.

"I am going to be a mentor for Soorma club so I will try my best to fulfil that role to the best of my abilities. There is a lot of pressure on young athletes to perform

will like to help them. "Pressure is normal but I will try and tell them how to perform even under pressure. So I will try my best to share my experience and knowledge that I have gath-

mentally and emotionally. So I

ered over the years with them,"

Asked if she aspires to coach the Indian women's team in the future, she said "One task at one time, I want to focus on the role I have for the next two months.'

Hockey was among sports like badminton, wrestling and cricket that were axed from the official programme for the Commonwealth Games 2026 in Glasgow, Scotland, a decision that has left Rani disappointed.

"It is quite said hockey has been removed form the CWG because when hockey wins a medal it's not one but 18 medals. Imagine 18 players come from different places, villages. Even if they come from 8 different states they inspire so many chilldren from those states. "This tournament is good and the CGF (Commonwealth Games Federation) should think about the decision," she

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