

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- Russian general killed by bomb in Moscow
- Magnitude 7.3 earthquake causes widespread damage in Pacific island nation of Vanuatu
- Nadda slams Cong over Preamble amendment
- Voting showed BJP does not have 2/3 majority for constitutional amendment: Tharoor

CM Himanta attends Bhutan's 117th National Day

'Our countries moving forward with shared goals'

GUWAHATI, Dec 17: India and Bhutan are moving forward with shared goals and aspirations, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said at the Himalayan country's National Day programme there on Tuesday.

Sarma was invited to attend the National Day celebration by the Bhutan King.

"Best wishes to His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the King of Bhutan, and the wonderful people of the Kingdom on #BhutanNationalDay," Sarma, who reached Thimphu on Monday on a four-day tour, posted on X.

The National Day marks the coronation of Bhutan's first King, His Majesty Ugyen Wangchuk, in 1907, and is also an occasion to honour the sacrifices of Bhutan's forefathers.

"The people of Bhutan share a civilisational bond with Bharat and together we will scale new heights of development in the coming days," he added.

The chief minister also hoped that Bhutan would continue with its developmental efforts keeping the environment as the fulcrum of all its policy decisions. Sarma also participated in a roadshow ahead of the state's investment summit to be held next year.

In another post on the micro-blogging site after attending the celebration, the CM said, "The



colours and vibrancy of Bhutan were on unparalleled display today at the 117th National Day Celebrations in Thimphu, which Riniki and me were extremely honoured to attend."

"The warm hospitality of His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Her Majesty Jetsun Pema, the outstanding procession and performances, and the affection of the great people of Bhutan will forever be etched in our minds," he added.

Sarma said the celebrations showcased Bhutan's cultural and social heritage with people from all ages and regions joining in large numbers since Sunday night, and the lively environment at Changlimithang Stadium was indicative of the country's rich her-

itage. "As both our nations move forward in the 21st century with shared goals and aspirations, I again extend my best wishes to the people on this special occasion," he added.

Earlier on his arrival at Paro International Airport, the Assam delegation was received by Bhutan's foreign affairs and external trade minister D N Donyel and Cabinet secretary Kesang Deki.

Prime Minister Dasho Tshering Tobgay welcomed the visiting Indian dignitaries on their arrival at Thimphu. Sarma later participated in a roadshow to showcase the state's investment summit, 'Advantage Assam 2025', in the Bhutanese capital, which was attended by the Bhutan king and Tobgay. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

269 MEMBERS VOTED IN FAVOUR WHILE 198 OPPOSED

ONOE bills introduced in LS; Oppn terms move 'dictatorial'

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections were introduced in the Lok Sabha after a fiery debate on Tuesday, with the opposition terming the move "dictatorial" and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal asserting that the legislation would not tamper with the powers enjoyed by states.

The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Meghwal after a nearly 90-minute debate, followed by a division of votes. As many as 269 members voted in favour of the Bill and 198 against it.

Meghwal also introduced The Union Territories Amendment Bill, which seeks to align elections in the Union territories of Puducherry, Delhi, and Jammu and Kashmir with the Lok Sabha polls.

He said the proposed bills did not attack the

"basic structure doctrine, as claimed by the opposition".

Principles such as judicial review, federal character of the Constitution, separation of powers, secular character, and supremacy of the Constitution had not changed, Meghwal said, adding that the objections to the Bill were political in nature.

Congress member Manish Tewari opposed the introduction of the bills and termed the move an assault on the basic structure doctrine that stipulates certain features of the Constitution are beyond the amending power of Parliament. "One of the essential features is federalism and the structure of our democracy. The bills assault the basic structure of the Constitution and exceed the legislative competence of this House," Tewari, a former Union minister, said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Doval in Beijing to attend India-China SR talks to restore ties

BEIJING, Dec 17: National Security Advisor Ajit Doval arrived here on Tuesday to take part in the India-China Special Representatives' talks to be held on Wednesday aimed at restoring the bilateral ties stalled for over four years due to the military standoff in eastern Ladakh.

Doval will hold the 23rd round of the Special Representatives (SR) talks with his Chinese counterpart and foreign minister Wang Yi and was expected to discuss a range of issues to rebuild the bilateral ties following the October 21 agreement of disengagement and patrolling in eastern Ladakh between the two countries. Ahead of crucial talks, China said on Tuesday that it is ready to honour commitments based on the com-

mon understandings reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping during their meeting at Kazan in Russia on the sidelines of the BRICS summit on October 24.

"China stands ready to work with India to deliver on important common understandings reached between our two leaders, enhance mutual trust and mutual confidence through dialogue and communication, honour our commitments and promote our bilateral relations to go back to the sound and steady growth," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a media briefing when asked about SR talks. The external affairs ministry said on Monday said, "as agreed during the meeting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Justice delayed is justice denied'

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Asserting that justice delayed is justice denied, leader of opposition Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said the promises made by the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh to the family of the Hathras gangrape victim have not been fulfilled till date.

Gandhi also shared a video of his meeting with the victim's family in Hathras last week.

"Justice delayed is justice denied! But something else is happening in Hathras where the accused are roaming free and the victim's family is held hostage," the former Congress chief said in his post on YouTube along with the video. On September 14, 2020, the 19-year-old Dalit woman was brutally gang-raped by four upper caste men in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh and two weeks later, on September 28, 2020, the woman died in a hospital in New Delhi, he said.

"At 2.30 am the same night, without the consent of the woman's family, the Uttar Pradesh police forcefully cremated her body. After a long phase of destroying evidence and misleading the judiciary, today four years later, the accused (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jorhat students embark on virtual space exploration

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Dec 17: A group of 50 students from two schools here -- Shemford Futuristic School and Jorhat Government Girls' Higher Secondary and Multipurpose School -- on Tuesday had the opportunity to participate in an online virtual interactive programme with internationally renowned representatives of 'Blue Origin', a space company owned by Jeff Bezos.

It may be mentioned here that Bezos is also the founder and executive chairman of Amazon, the world's largest e-commerce and cloud-computing company.

Surojit Chaliha, principal of Shemford Futuristic School at Garmur, told this newspaper that students interacted with the Blue Origin representatives - Bailey Smoorenburg, Sanghamitra Goswami, Tim Bussman, Don Balanzat, and Lucas Sonier - through the online virtual interactive programme held at the Shemford Futuristic School. Chaliha said that the event was organised under the 'Club for the Future' initiative of 'Blue Origin', (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

No action, only big talks about farmers: PM Modi



JAIPUR, Dec 17: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday hit out at Congress, saying they talk big in the name of farmers but neither do anything for them nor let others do anything.

He also alleged the party encourages water disputes among states rather than resolving them, and said the delay in the implementation of the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) is a direct proof of the Congress' "intention".

The ERCP envisages intra-basin transfer of water within the Chambal Basin to provide it to 13 deficient districts of eastern Rajasthan.

"The Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) was delayed for so long by the Congress, this is also a direct proof of the Congress' intentions. They talk big in the name of farmers but they neither do anything themselves for the farmers nor let others do anything," Modi said. He was addressing the 'Ek Varsh-Parinaam Utkarsh' event to mark the completion of the Rajasthan government's one year in office. He also inaugurated or laid the foundation stones for 24 projects related to energy, roads, railways, and water worth over ₹

46,300 crore. The Prime Minister said the Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project (Integrated PKC-ERCP) will provide irrigation as well as drinking water facilities to 21 districts of Rajasthan and accelerate the development of both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

On various water disputes between states, he said while the BJP's policy is to promote dialogue, the Congress continues to fan water discords.

"The BJP's policy is of dialogue, not of conflict. We believe in cooperation, not opposition. We believe in solutions, not disruption. Therefore, our government has approved and also expanded the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project. As soon as the BJP government was formed in MP and Rajasthan, an agreement was reached on the Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal project," he said.

The Prime Minister noted that he had launched a big campaign to bring Narmada water to different parts of Gujarat when he was the chief minister, and charged the Congress and some NGOs who adopted (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Constitutional rights suspended in Manipur yet no issues raised: Oppn

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Opposition members from TMC and CPI(M) on Tuesday alleged that constitutional rights in Manipur had been suspended and slammed the BJP MPs for not raising the issue during the debate on the Constitution.

Participating in a discussion on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India", Trinamool Congress' Sushmita Dev said MPs of the ruling party from the Northeast region should resign as all rights ensured to people under the Constitution have been

curtailed in Manipur. "Today, I say while we debate on the Constitution which Constitutional right have you not suspended in Manipur? Liberty, expression of speech, everything is being suspended in Manipur."

"I stand here as a member of Parliament representing the Northeast, demanding the resignation of every MP from Northeast and every minister who is thumping their desk behind the Leader of the House," Dev said.

She alleged the BJP is creating different classes of citizens with

different rights in Assam. "There is no equality in the way NRC (National Register of Citizens) has been conducted," Dev said and claimed this government "wants one election, one leader, one religion".

This is not what Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar wanted for this country, she said, adding, "This is a fascist government that is at play." John Brittas CPI (M) said, "Let the Prime Minister go to Manipur, discharge his responsibilities as the prime minister of this country. Let his 11-mantra (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

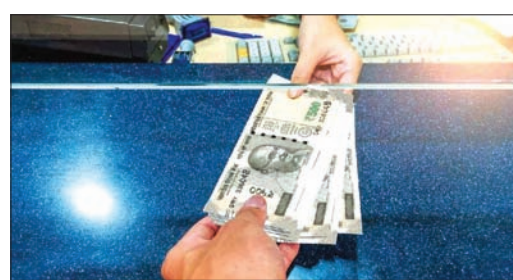
Huge leap in business activity between India and UK

LONDON, Dec 17: Business activity between the UK and India has flourished in 2024 as the value of payments received by clients in Britain from India rose by 121 per cent, according to the latest data released by HSBC UK.

The multinational bank, which highlighted the figures based on its two-way support for businesses within the India-UK corridor this week, said its data on payments and client referrals showed year-on-year growth. In the nine months to October 2024, the value of payments made by HSBC UK business clients to India reportedly rose by 32 per cent as the bank received 36 per cent more new business client referrals from HSBC India year-on-year.

"Our data shows that business between the UK and India is not only strong, it's getting even stronger, and the opportunities for expanding businesses in India are huge," said Cora McLaren, Head of International Subsidiary Banking at HSBC UK.

"India's population is not only a vast number of potential customers, within it there is a growing middle class, creating opportunities for UK businesses selling high-quality products and services. In addition, India is increasingly seen as a hub for Global Capability



Centres - from which multinational corporates run multiple strategic functions - due to the level of language and technology skills," she said.

The banking executive described it as a relationship that is working both ways as Indian businesses are increasingly doing business in the UK, "particularly those in the pharmaceutical sector in which India is a global leader".

"HSBC has ties to India which go back more than 100 years. We're very proud to be able to help ambitious UK businesses expand there and likewise welcome Indian firms operating on these shores," she added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Descendants believed to be from WW II or China's Przewalski's species

Declining feral horse population in Assam national park: NGT issues notice

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: The National Green Tribunal has issued notice to the Centre and others over the critically endangered status of the feral horses in the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in Assam.

In the order passed on December 16 in a suo motu case, a bench of NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member A Senthil Vel said the "unique" horses, found only in the national park, were facing extinction and required "urgent intervention."

Feral horses reportedly descend from the stock of domesticated horses but are untamed and roam freely.



The green body had taken cognisance of a news report indicating the animal's "dwindling" numbers

authorities. Referring to the news report, the bench said these horses were not covered under the Wildlife Protection Act and in the absence of a census, it was difficult to ascertain their conservation status.

"The matter indicates a violation of the provisions of the Biodiversity Act and Environment Protection Act. The news item raises substantial issues relating to compliance with the environmental norms," the tribunal said.

It implied as parties or respondents the secretaries of the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change and the

National Biodiversity Authority besides the directors of the Zoological Survey of India and Wildlife Institute of India and the state's chief wildlife warden.

"Issue notice to the above respondents for filing their response/reply by way of affidavit before the eastern zonal bench of the tribunal (in Kolkata)," the tribunal said. The matter will be heard on February 27.

According to the report, these horses have survived in the wild for about 80 years and were believed to be descendants of war horses either from World War II or China's Przewalski's horse species. (PTI)

NTA will be restructured in 2025: Dharmendra Pradhan

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: The NTA will not conduct any recruitment exams from 2025 and instead focus only on higher education entrance tests, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced on Tuesday.

The agency will be restructured next year and new posts are being created, he added.

The move is part of examination reforms based on the recommendations of a high-level panel set up earlier this year following alleged leaks in the National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test (NEET) medical entrance exam and a series of cancellations of others due to suspected leaks and other glitches.

The education ministry is also in conversation with the health ministry on conducting NEET in the traditional pen-and-paper mode or switching to a Computer Based Test (CBT). "The National Testing Agency (NTA) will be limited to conducting only entrance exams for higher education and not conduct any recruitment exams from next year," Pradhan told reporters.

He clarified that the Common University Entrance Test - Undergraduate (CUET-UG) would continue to be held once a year.

The high-level panel headed by former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief R Radhakrishnan (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Lower Q2 GDP growth a temporary blip; eco to improve in coming quarters: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the lower-than-expected GDP growth of 5.4 per cent in the second quarter was a "temporary blip" and exuded confidence that the economy will see healthy growth in the coming quarters.

Replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on the first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants, she said India has seen "steady and sustained" growth and its GDP growth rate has averaged 8.3 per cent in the last three years.

"The real growth rate for Q1 and Q2 of this financial year (FY25) has been 6.7 per cent and 5.4 per cent, respectively. At 5.4 per cent, the Q2 rate is slower than expected...Q2 of this financial year has been a challenging quarter for India and most other economies of the world," she said.

India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy in the world, Sitharaman said, adding that the credit goes to the people of India who are struggling and meeting their aspirations, thereby, contributing to the economy.

Termining the second quarter's less-than-expected growth as a "temporary blip", she said the economy will see healthy growth in the coming quarters.

The finance minister further said



there is no broad-based slowdown in the manufacturing sector. Half of the sectors within the overall manufacturing basket continue to remain strong.

"A generalised slowdown in manufacturing is not expected, as it is restricted to few segments...out of 23 manufacturing sectors in the Index of Industrial Production, about half of them remain strong even now," she said.

Besides, she said, the capital expenditure of the Union Government has grown by 6.4 per cent between July and October 2024.

The government has allocated ₹ 11.11 lakh crore toward capex during the current financial year.

"I think steps that we are taking

to push for growth and to sustain growth are going to this route of capital expenditure so that the multiplier effect will spread through the economy and therefore give a greater traction," she said.

For every rupee spent on the capital account, she said, the multiplier effect sometimes results in touching 4.3, whereas if you spent on the revenue account, for every one rupee, you would get only 0.98. About inflation, Sitharaman said it is better controlled in the NDA regime, whereas under the UPA, it touched double digits.

Retail inflation in April-October 2024-25 stood at 4.8 per cent, the lowest since the Covid pandemic, she noted.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, remains at a decadal low of 3.6 per cent, she added. Sitharaman said the unemployment rate has come down from 6 per cent in 2017-18 to 3.2 per cent now.

Later, the Lok Sabha passed Supplementary Demands for Grants, seeking approval of additional net expenditure of ₹ 44,143 crore in the current fiscal, mainly on account of higher spending by agriculture, fertiliser and defence ministries.

The first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants for 2024-25 sought approval to authorise gross additional expenditure of ₹ 87,762.56 crore. Of this, proposals involving net cash outgo aggregate to ₹ 44,142.87 crore and gross additional expenditure, matched by savings of the Ministries/ Departments or enhanced receipts/recoveries, aggregates to ₹ 43,618.43 crore.

The additional spending includes ₹ 6,593.73 crore towards the fertiliser subsidy scheme, about ₹ 9,000 crore for agriculture and farmer welfare, and ₹ 8,000 crore towards defence spending.

It also includes expenditure of ₹ 3,000 crore towards expenditure by the Ministry of External Affairs and ₹ 4,800 crore towards expenditure by the Home Ministry. (PTI)

First Toyota Used Car Outlet (TUCO) facility opens in Guwahati



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 17: Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) launched its first Company Owned Toyota Used Car Outlet (TUCO) in Northeast India in Guwahati, on Tuesday.

This is the third such outlet in India under the "Toyota U-Trust" brand, the first two outlets being at Bangalore and Delhi respectively, an official statement said. The facility spans approximately 4,000 square feet and can display over 15+ certified Toyota vehicles TUCO outlets serve as a comprehensive platform for customers seeking certified pre-owned Toyota vehicles. Each vehicle undergoes a rigorous 203-point inspection adhering to Toyota's global standards. "Additionally, the inspection includes meticulous documentation checks, such as service history verification", the statement further said. To enhance the ownership experience, TUCO certified vehicles come with a warranty of up to 30,000 kilometers or two years, and three complimentary services, redeemable at any Toyota service centre nationwide, it further stated.

Speaking on the used car business, Takashi Takamiya, vice president, Toyota Kirloskar Motor, said, "The expansion of TUCO with the opening of our first used car outlet in Guwahati highlights our commitment to quality, reliability, and customer satisfaction. This new outlet maintains the high standards associated with Toyota products and our exemplary service experience" "Guwahati, being a key gateway to the Northeast, holds strategic importance for Toyota's business expansion in the region. This initiative aligns with the Government of India's development plan for the Northeast, reflecting our commitment to contributing to the region's growth by enhancing mobility solutions and customer access", said Atul Sood, project vice president, Toyota Kirloskar Motor.

India doubles RE capacity in Apr-Nov, to become world's renewable energy capital: Pralhad Joshi

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Renewable energy capacity addition in the country almost doubled to 15 GW during the April-November period of this fiscal year, compared to a year ago, and the country is all set to become the renewable energy capital of the world, Union New & Renewable Energy Minister Pralhad Joshi said on Tuesday.

Addressing at CII International Energy Conference & Exhibition 2024 here, Joshi said, "in fact, over the past decade, under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has charted an extraordinary path in the renewable energy sector. Today, India is one of the world's most promising nations in the clean energy space."

The minister noted that India is not only witnessing an energy revolution but is also becoming the renewable energy capital of the world.

Between April-November of the current financial year, India added almost 15 GW of renewable energy capacity, nearly double the 7.54 GW added during the same period last year, he said.

At present, India's total installed capacity of the non-fossil fuel sector has touched 214 GW, over 14 per cent increase compared to the same month last year.

The government is transforming the entire energy sector as this transformation is driven by a strong belief that a Viksit Bharat by 2047, is closely linked to sustainable and green growth, he said, adding that the roadmap for this transition is ambitious but achievable. India is firmly committed to achieving the goal of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based generation capacity by 2030, he said.

He informed that in just last month alone, 2.3 GW of new capacity was added, which means a 4-fold in-

crease from the 566.06 MW added in November 2023. "So yes, this transformation is not just a dream, it is happening today," he stressed.

In the last three financial years alone, he informed that India has attracted USD 6.1 billion in FDI into the renewable energy sector.

He noted that the PLI (production-linked incentive) scheme with an outlay of ₹ 24,000 crore has been introduced to boost domestic manufacturing of solar panels and modules.

"We are also in the process of setting up 50 solar parks with a cumulative capacity of 38 GW by 2025-26," the minister informed.

The government under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana is empowering Indian households by enabling them to generate their own electricity through solar rooftops. The scheme targets 1 crore installations by 2026-27, with an outlay of ₹ 75,021 crore.

On the Green Hydrogen Mission, he said "under the SIGHT Programme of National Green Hydrogen Mission, we are extending support on 2 components majorly -- Component I for Electrolyser Manufacturing supported with ₹ 4,440 crore and Component II for Green Hydrogen production supported with ₹ 13,050 crore," he said.

He informed that two tranches of bidding have been completed under Component I allocating 3,000 MWPA Electrolyser Manufacturing capacity. Under Component II, 4.12 Lakh tonnes per annum (LTPA) quantity has been awarded to 10 companies, with a total subsidy of ₹ 3,055 crore.

Currently, 4.5 LTPA tender is live for green hydrogen production, and 7.39 LTPA for green ammonia (for fertilizers), he said and invited the industry to participate in full swing. (PTI)

Royal Enfield announces 'REOWN'

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 17: Royal Enfield on Tuesday, announced a significant expansion of its pre-owned motorcycle business, REOWN.

Customers and RE enthusiasts in 236 cities across India will now be able to conveniently sell their existing motorcycles and upgrade to a new ride from Royal Enfield's exciting and capable line-up.

REOWN, a transparent platform for buying and selling pre-owned Royal Enfields, was introduced in 2023 in select cities. REOWN will be available to customers through Royal Enfield's 475 dealerships in 236 cities covering 24 Indian states and union territories.

"It will uphold the company's commitment to offer a range of motorcycles that combine reliability and pure motorcycling experi-

ence". An official statement said.

Apart from network expansion, Royal Enfield also introduced its first-ever loyalty program with exchange benefits for customers who wish to upgrade from a pre-owned Royal Enfield motorcycle to a new one through REOWN's RE-to-RE exchanges.

Commenting on the expansion of the REOWN, Yadvinder Singh Guleria, chief commercial officer, Royal Enfield said, "REOWN's expansion to cover 236 cities from just select cities within a year is an extension of our promise to provide enthusiasts with a hassle-free and transparent way of owning a Royal Enfield, whether it is their first or a cherished upgrade."

REOWN is designed to meet the increasing passion and desire for Royal Enfield motorcycles among riding enthusiasts.

REOWN offers both in-store and online options, making it easy for customers to buy, sell, or exchange their Royal Enfield motorcycles.

Sellers can schedule a free-of-cost inspection for their motorcycle at any location by completing an online form. REOWN has also partnered with Adroit Auto, SAMIL & Instabid to facilitate exchanges of non-RE motorcycles as well, the statement further stated.

"Every pre-owned motorcycle listed on REOWN is certified by Royal Enfield and undergoes 200+ technical and mechanical checks and is refurbished using genuine parts at authorized Royal Enfield service centers. Furthermore, these motorcycles come with a 12 months brand warranty and include two complimentary services", it claimed.

Power saving fans, air conditioners mandatory for Delhi govt buildings: CM

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: The Delhi government has made the use of 5-star rated air conditioners and BLDC fans mandatory in its buildings, a move aimed at saving electricity and cost.

Each year various Delhi government departments consume over 2,000 million units of electricity, costing between ₹ 8.50 and ₹ 11.50 per unit.

This results in annual electricity bills exceeding ₹ 1,900 crore, a statement from the office of the Delhi Chief Minister said.

The energy-efficient appliances with star ratings will now be mandatory in all Delhi government buildings, Chief Minister Atishi said. She also holds the Power portfolio.

The decision approved by the chief minister was later sent to Lt Governor VK Saxena for his nod, it said.



Atishi said the initiative will not only reduce electricity consumption but also save the government expenditure of crores of rupees.

"Our government has prioritised energy efficiency by mandating the use of BLDC (Brush Less DC) motor fans, 5-star rated air condi-

tioners, and other energy-efficient appliances in all the government buildings," she said.

Compared to conventional fans, the BLDC fans consume 40-45 watts less power, saving approximately 96 units of electricity per fan annually. This translates to

monetary savings of ₹ 950 to ₹ 1,100 per fan each year, the statement said.

Further, the 5-star rated air conditioners save between 2,800 units and 3,042 units of electricity annually compared to regular ACs, resulting in savings of ₹ 27,000 to ₹ 29,000 per AC each year, it said.

Advancements in technology have made several energy-saving options accessible. While LED lights have already played a significant role in reducing electricity consumption, the focus is now shifting to fans and air conditioners, the statement said.

The primary objective of this initiative is to curb the rising demand for electricity and promote energy efficiency. This summer, Delhi's peak electricity demand reached 8656 MW, a significant increase from 7438 MW the previous year, it pointed out. (PTI)

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CM Himanta attends Bhutan's

"HCM Dr @himantabiswa expressed his heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, for the gracious gesture of hospitality and for gracing the #AdvantageAssam roadshow," the chief minister's office (CMO) had said in a post on X. "The remarkable gesture further strengthens the deep-rooted friendship and special bond shared between the people of Bhutan and India," it added.

Sarma, in a series of posts on the microblogging site, thanked the dignitaries of Bhutan for attending the event. He maintained that under the leadership of the Indian Prime Minister and the King of Bhutan, both nations are united by a common quest for progress and prosperity. Underlining Assam's close geographical linkage with Bhutan, Sarma said it presents numerous opportunities, ranging from closer cooperation in the upcoming Gelephu Mindfulness City, an urban development project in Bhutan, to energy generation, healthcare, tourism, and skill development. "I am confident that Assam will play a pivotal role in strengthening the timeless bond between Bharat and Bhutan," he added.

The CMO said over 100 entrepreneurs, business leaders and senior officials from the Royal Government of Bhutan participated in the business event and roadshow in Thimphu to promote 'Advantage Assam 2.0 - Investment and Infrastructure Summit 2025', scheduled on February 25-26 in Guwahati. Sarma, who is the first chief minister of Assam to visit Bhutan, is scheduled to meet the King and Queen Jetsun Pema Wangchuck and call on the Prime Minister during the visit. In another post, Sarma thanked the Bhutan PM for hosting a lunch for him and his wife. "We had very productive discussions on how the great nation of Bhutan and the state of Assam can complement each other's growth aspirations. On behalf of the people of Assam, I also extended a warm invitation to His Excellency to grace #AdvantageAssam 2.0 in February 2025," the CM said. (PTI)

ONOE bills introduced in LS;

Samajwadi Party member Dharmendra Yadav said the measure to introduce "one nation, one election" by the BJP was an attempt to bring dictatorship in the country. Union home minister Amit Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had favoured referring the bills to a joint committee of Parliament for wider deliberations at every level. "Detailed discussions can take place in the JPC. The report of the JPC will be approved by the Cabinet. Then again, there will be a discussion on this (bills) in the House," Shah said. Meghwal said he would move a resolution referring the Bills to a joint committee of Parliament.

Earlier, Trinamool Congress member Kalyan Banerjee said the bills linked the tenure of state assemblies to that of the Lok Sabha, thus undermining the mandate of the people. "The state government is not subordinate to the central government or Parliament. The bills take away the autonomy of the state assembly. It is not an election reform but just the fulfilment of one gentleman's desire and dream," he said. DMK member TR Baalu said, "The electors have the right to elect the government for five years and this right cannot be curtailed with simultaneous elections."

The opposition members also objected to Speaker Om Birla's move to call the treasury benches to speak on the bills, leading to a heated debate. Parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju said the speaker had given a ruling to allow floor leaders of all parties to speak on the introduction of the bills. "You alone do not represent Parliament, every political party has a representation here," Rijiju said. (PTI)

Doval in Beijing to attend

of the two leaders in Kazan on October 23, the two SRs will discuss the management of peace and tranquillity in the border areas and explore a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question". After the Modi-Xi meeting, which was their first after five years, external affairs minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Brazil followed by a meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on China-India Border Affairs (WMCC).

The military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh began in May 2020 and was followed by a deadly clash at the Galwan Valley in June that year resulting in a severe strain in ties between the two neighbours. Barring trade, relations between the two countries virtually came to a standstill.

The face-off effectively ended following the completion of the disengagement process from the last two friction points of Demchok and Depsang under an agreement finalised on October 21. Wednesday's SRs' meeting is regarded as significant as it is the first structured engagement between the two countries to restore the relations. The SRs meeting is taking place after a gap of five years. The last meeting was held in 2019 in Delhi. Constituted in 2003 to comprehensively address the vexed dispute of the India-China border spanning 3,488 km, the SRs mechanism over the years met 22 times. While success eluded it in resolving the boundary dispute, officials on both sides regard it as a very promising, useful and handy tool in addressing the recurring tensions between the two countries. (PTI)

Constitutional rights suspended

which he gave on the floor of the Lok Sabha, let him (PM) do that". He alleged that from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) to the Election Commission to Parliament and the media, the trust of the people has been dented considerably.

Brittas claimed that there was an "undeclared Emergency in this country". He claimed that 'One Nation One Election' is an extension of "one leader, one country, one ideology". He also demanded that a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) be appointed to probe where Hungarian-American businessman and investor George Soros' money was used. Dev claimed corporate loans are being waived whereas farmers are reeling from debts.

She claimed that the country's "middle class is the worst impacted by the tax burden" while taxation on the corporates keeps reducing because of the policies of this government. She claimed that the "two most destructive policies" of the central government, namely the note ban and the lockdown in the aftermath of Covid, destroyed the informal economy. (PTI)

Huge leap in business activity

The data comes as both governments are preparing to resume Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations next year after Prime Ministers Keir Starmer and Narendra Modi agreed to relaunch the process during their meeting on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Brazil last month.

"We very much welcome the renewed commitment made by both Prime Ministers at G20 and the intention to restart FTA negotiations early in 2025," said Richard McCallum, Group CEO of the UK India Business Council (UKIBC). "As the HSBC data show, UK-India trade is growing rapidly. This will only accelerate further when the FTA is in place... In the UKIBC's view, sustained business reforms and geopolitical factors make India a highly attractive investment destination, source of goods and services, and strategic supply chain partner for UK business across sectors," he said.

According to official UK Department for Business and Trade (DBT) statistics, the total trade in goods and services between the UK and India was GBP 42 billion in the four quarters to the end of 2024. This is expected to be significantly enhanced with an FTA, negotiations for which began in January 2022 before being paused in the fourteenth round earlier this year due to general elections in both countries. The talks are scheduled to resume in the new year, with a clear timeline yet to be officially confirmed. (PTI)

No action, only big talks

various tactics to stop it. "The Congress never wants to reduce water problems...The water of our rivers used to flow across the borders, but our farmers did not get its benefits. Instead of finding a solution, the Congress continued to promote water disputes between states," he said. PM Modi also said that the BJP is getting huge public support in different states where elections were held. "The nation has given the BJP the opportunity to serve the country for the third consecutive time in Lok Sabha. This did not happen in India in the last 60 years," he said. "Today, the BJP's double engine governments are becoming a symbol of good governance. Whatever resolution the BJP takes, it makes honest efforts to fulfil it. Today, the people of the country are saying that BJP is the guarantee of good governance," he said while lauding the work of Bhajanlal Sharma-led BJP government in the state. "In the last one year, Bhajanlal ji and his entire team have worked very hard to give new momentum and direction to the development of Rajasthan. This first year has, in a way, laid a strong foundation for the many years to come," he said. Modi said people blessed the BJP with the responsibility to serve Rajasthan for multiple terms and the party did its best. (PTI)

'Justice delayed is justice denied'

are roaming free in the same village and the victim's family is held hostage, still waiting for justice." Gandhi alleged. The promises made to them by the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh have not been fulfilled to date, he claimed. Neither have they been given a government job nor has the promise of shifting them to another place been fulfilled, Gandhi said. "In this labyrinth of casteism and power, it has become impossible for Dalits to even hope for justice," he said.

The INDIA bloc, which respects the Constitution, vows that it will protect the Bahujans from these oppressors who follow the path of Manusmriti, Gandhi said. "We will get all the promises fulfilled, we will get them justice," he said. In a post on X, Gandhi said, "Listen carefully and feel every word filled with despair of the family of Hathras rape victim. They are still in fear. Their situation confirms that it has become extremely difficult for Dalits to get justice." (PTI)

Jorhat students embark on virtual

which is aimed at encouraging inquisitive minds of career-seekers and curious students from different countries across the globe to dream about the huge potential of space exploration. The Club for the Future initiatives inspire students to pursue a career in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and contribute to building a sustainable future in space. Chaliha said that the content of the online programme highlighted the huge potential of space exploration, many valuable insights in terms of the concepts and realities of the future, as well as imagining themselves as partners in this scientific journey across the world of humanity. The Shemford Futuristic School principal said that the interaction programme of the students from Jorhat with the world-famous people of a leading space exploration company was indeed "a wonderful and inspiring experience for the students, who were delighted to participate in the event". Chaliha observed that this kind of endeavour by the school would continue in order to attract students to think critically, explore creative solutions, and see themselves as part of the future of space exploration.

NTA will be restructured in

noted that the NTA outstretched itself to accommodate diverse requests from many test indenting agencies for handling end-to-end operations of tests. "The NTA should primarily conduct entrance examinations. Enhancing its scope for other examinations may be considered after the capacity of the NTA is augmented," the panel said in its report. Suggesting restructuring of the NTA, the committee recommended 10 specific verticals, headed at the director level. The verticals will be related to technology, products and operations, test security, and surveillance. "The NTA needs to be manned with internal domain-specific human resources and a leadership team with domain expertise, proven experience, and skill sets who should take charge of the testing process in the future," it said. (PTI)

Minister Brahma distributes Anundoram Baruah Award in Chirang

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Dec 17: Minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma distributed Anundoram Baruah Award to High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) students who secured above 75% in the exam here at the Kajalgaon in Chirang district on Tuesday. A total number of 370 students passed the HSLC exam securing more than 75% were awarded with an amount of ₹ 12,000 under Anundoram Baruah Cash Award, 2024.

Meanwhile, Dr Bani Kanta Award 2024 was distributed among 580 High Secondary (HS) students, girls who secured more than 60% and boys who above 75%. A total of 5938 numbers of bicycle were distributed to class-IX students.

Assam cabinet minister, and guardian minister of Chirang, Urkhao Gwra Brahma graced the occasion and distributed the scooter, bicycle and cheque amongst the students.

During the event, BTR executive members, Saikhong Basumatary, Dhananjay Basumatary, MLAs Nirmal Kumar Brahma, Ajoy Kumar Ray were present.

Minister Brahma extended warm greetings and best wishes to all students who were accorded awards and felicitations in the district. He has expressed his hopeful that the awards would help the student to work hard, perseverance in studies for the bright future.

Main accused in

Dimarguri attack arrested

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Dec 17: Assam Police apprehended the proprietor of Greenland Bar cum restaurant Sujit Dey from the West Bengal and brought to Nagaon on Monday night.

Dey, who was absconding since month, was the main accused in Dimarguri attack where he tried to allegedly kill an old woman in front of his business establishment.

It's pertinent to mention here that Dey along with two co-accused women identified as Deepanjali Das and Mousumi Mahanta allegedly injured the old woman and her granddaughter by thrashing severely on the late evening of November 1 when the victims went to a local market.

Following the incident, local police apprehended the two women and produced them before a local court from where they were sent to judicial custody.

31 Bn SSB organises awareness campaign on 'Say No to Drugs'



HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Dec 17: In a bid to drug free society, the 31st Battalion SSB has organised an awareness campaign named 'Say No to Drugs' here at the school in Gossaigaon.

The awareness campaign was launched during the inauguration ceremony of Annual Sports Week of Little Star E M High School which started on December 16 and will conclude on December 21.

Paul Miti Kujur, principal of

New APHLC formed in Karbi Anglong

Non-political group unites for the autonomous state movement in Assam's hill districts

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Dec 17: In a landmark development for Karbi Anglong, a new All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) was formally launched on Tuesday in a meeting held at the Diphu government Boys Higher Secondary School.

This non-political organisation, though sharing the same name as the APHLC led by Jones Ingti Kathar, is an entirely different entity. Its primary goal is to create a common platform for political parties, NGOs, and social organisations to come together and raise a unified voice for the creation of an autonomous state for the hill districts of Assam.

The event witnessed strong participation from political leaders, elected representatives, and members of various socio-cultural organisations, all united under the cause of autonomy. The newly formed APHLC is headed by James Hanse as president, Pitor Tisso as general secretary, and Augustin Kramsa as chief adviser. The launch was marked by the official release of the organisation's registration certificate under the Society Registration Act, facilitated by Karbi traditional king

Longsing Ronghang, who expressed his unwavering support for the new initiative.

Ronghang, in his speech, emphasised the need for such an organisation, saying that it could unite all political parties, social organisations, and communities within Karbi Anglong to advocate for the common cause of an autonomous state. "I have been looking for such an organisation, which can lead the people of Karbi Anglong by uniting all political parties, social organisations, NGOs, and all communities and tribes to raise a single voice for an autonomous state issue," he said, further reiterating his full endorsement of the new APHLC.

The new APHLC's leaders were quick to clarify that their objective is not to form a political party but to create a broad-based platform where political and non-political groups, including youth, women, and student organisations, can come together and work towards a common goal — the creation of an autonomous state for the Karbi Anglong region. Chief Adviser Augustin Kramsa, in his welcome



address, made it clear that today's meeting was not about forming a political entity but about building unity for a cause that transcends party lines.

General Secretary Pitor Tisso also addressed the gathering, drawing attention to the historical context of the original APHLC formed in 1960 by Captain Williamson Sangma, which successfully led to the creation of Meghalaya. He explained that the new APHLC would continue in the same spirit, bringing together various political and independent groups to support the hill state movement. "In the

present context, JI Kathar's APHLC has taken up the name, but it focuses on the Sixth Schedule of its political advantage. Our APHLC, however, is dedicated to a collective effort that includes political and non-political organisations, and it is aimed at spearheading the autonomous state movement," Tisso said.

President James Hanse, in his address, reiterated the non-political nature of the organisation, emphasising that it was a platform for all those who believe in the cause of autonomy for Karbi Anglong. "Though we are a non-political or-

ganisation, we have the support of several political parties, including Congress, BJP, and others, as well as cultural and social organisations like the Hill People's Cultural Forum (HPCF) and Karbi Anglong Rong Asar Amei (KARAA). This is a movement that seeks to bring together all sectors of society to fight for a common cause," Hanse explained.

The APHLC's leaders also made a bold commitment not to contest any elections, underscoring their dedication solely to the cause of an autonomous state. They outlined plans to focus on awareness-building campaigns and advocacy efforts with both the state and central governments to expedite the process of implementing Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution. This article is crucial for providing the hill districts of Assam with greater autonomy, and the new APHLC aims to make it a priority issue.

In a significant move, the newly formed APHLC submitted a memorandum to the chief executive member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), urging the council to

pass a resolution advocating for the implementation of Article 244(A). The memorandum also called for increased public awareness efforts to educate the masses on the importance of this constitutional provision for the region's future.

The meeting was attended by several prominent dignitaries, including MLA Dorsing Ronghang, executive member of KAAC Surjya Rongphar, chairman of the Hill People's Cultural Forum Laichan Englang, and Roland Killing, president of the BJP East Karbi Anglong District Committee. The gathering also saw leaders from various other organisations come forward to express their solidarity with the cause.

The formation of this new APHLC marks a turning point in the movement for autonomy in Karbi Anglong. With strong backing from a broad coalition of political and social groups, the organisation aims to lead a united and determined push for an autonomous state, ensuring that the voice of Karbi Anglong is heard loud and clear at both the state and national levels.

Cachar gears up for 4th Good Governance Week

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 17: Cachar district is gearing up to host the 4th Good Governance Week (GGW) from December 19 to 24 under the ambitious theme, "Prashashan Gaon Ki Ore" (Administration to Villages).

Spearheaded by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, this nationwide campaign is set to bring governance closer to the people, promoting transparency, efficiency, and citizen-centric administration.

The initiative aims to create a transformative impact by enhancing service delivery and ensuring effective public grievance redressal across the region.

With an innovative structure that includes a preparatory phase from December 11 to 18 and an implementation phase from December 19 to 24, the campaign sets the stage for a week of robust administrative action.

The preparatory phase focuses on groundwork activities like mapping districts on the campaign portal and setting ambitious goals for grievance resolution.

Once this foundation is laid, the implementation phase will roll out an array of initiatives, including special grievance redressal camps in development blocks, revenue circles, and Gaon Panchayats. Online platforms like CPGRAMS and state portals will also play a vital role in swiftly addressing citizen concerns and expediting service applications.

One of the highlights of the event will be the dissemination workshop on December 23, where best practices and success stories in governance will be showcased, fostering collaboration and innovation among stakeholders. By documenting these achievements on the campaign portal, Cachar aims to create a repository of insights that can inspire similar efforts across the country.

Meanwhile, issuing a press note here on Tuesday, Cachar district commissioner, Mrudul Yadav has extended a call to action, urging all stakeholders to actively participate and contribute to making "Sushasan Saptah Prashashan Gaon Ki Ore" a landmark event. This collaborative effort underscores the district's commitment to improving the quality of governance, making it more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the needs of its citizens.

It is important to note that as Cachar district steps into the spotlight for the 4th Good Governance Week, it is poised to set a benchmark in administrative excellence. By embracing innovation, empowering citizens, and fostering accountability, the campaign represents a significant stride towards building a governance framework that truly reflects the aspirations of the people.

Include Asom Divas as holiday in NFR holiday: OBC employees

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Dec 17: OBC employees Association of NFR has urged Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) to include Asom Divas as holiday in latter's calendar.

In this regard, the Association submitted a memorandum to the general member of NFR Maligaon. The assistant general of NFR OBC employees Association Tinsukia Division Gonesh Gogoi said that Chaolung Sukapha who founded the Ahom kingdom that ruled for 6 centuries but unfortunately in NF Railway holiday calendar December 2 has not been included as holiday.

"On 2nd December 1228 AD he stepped into the largest Brahmaputra valley of Assam and began to form a largest Assamese nation with a sense of brotherhood, unity and harmony," said Gogoi.

"Chaolung Sukapha is also known as the architect of Assam as renowned litterateur journalist and eminent intellectualist Padma Borkataki marked Chaolung

Sukapha as the first Assamese as on December 2, 1228 AD Chaolung Sukapha stepped into the Brahmaputra valley of Assam and began to form a largest Assamese nation with a sense of harmony, brotherhood and unity as on this day, commemorates the arrival of the first Ahom king in Assam after crossing the Patkai Hills from Mong-Mao a kingdom in present day China," Gogoi added.

He further said, Historically it has been proved that before the arrival of Chaolung Sukapha neither there was a land called Assam and nor a single nation known as Assamese and by tying all small ethnic groups with a sense of unity, Chaolung Sukapha set out to form the largest Assamese nation and successfully assimilated different communities and Tribes.

"Assam government has celebrated as Asom Divas and declared Holiday on 2nd December since 1996 to pay tribute and remember the ideology of this great king and his legacy," Gogoi concluded.

Artificial flooding issue in Dibrugarh assessed

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Dec 17: An expert from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) visited Dibrugarh on Tuesday to assess the persistent issue of artificial flooding in the city. During last monsoon's flooding crisis, the chief minister had announced that IIT experts would be consulted to devise a permanent solution. Acting on this promise, IIT expert Rajiv Bhattacharya arrived in Dibrugarh on Monday. Accompanied by a team of engineers from the Public Works Department, Bhattacharya inspected various sections of the Dibrugarh protection drain, which runs through the city. He reviewed multiple aspects of the problem and assured that a detailed report outlining potential solutions would be submitted within a month.

Meanwhile, the Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation (DMC) initiated the cleaning of the Dibrugarh Town Protection (DTP) drain on December 7, 2024. The first phase involves removing around 30,000 cubic meters of silt and debris from the 5,000-meter-long drain, which averages 1 meter in depth and 6 meters in width. Advanced equipment, such as super suckers, pochains, and barges, is being deployed based on the requirements of each section. The project is expected to be completed by March 2025.

Young girl rescued after three days of confinement and assault

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Dec 17: A young girl, who was allegedly confined and assaulted for three days in Ledo Maulang village under Margherita sub-division, has been rescued on Monday evening by local residents and the Ledo police outpost team.

The accused has been identified as Ali Hussain, a resident of Ledo Tirap area and reportedly involved in illegal coal trading, has been detained for further investigation.

According to reports, the victim and her family often visited Hussain's fish farm to gather grass for their cattle.

On December 14, the girl visited the farm, where Hussain allegedly lured her into a secluded room under the pretext of offering tea.

Once inside, the accused report-

edly mixed an intoxicating substance in water and coerced her to consume it.

The victim claimed she was then confined and subjected to repeated assaults for three days.

Meanwhile, her prolonged absence raised concerns, leading her family to launch a frantic search. It was her younger brother who discovered her in an abandoned building after hearing her cries for help.

Locals swiftly intervened, rescuing the girl and informing the authorities.

Both the accused and the victim have been taken into custody for questioning as police continue their investigation.

The incident has triggered outrage in the local community, raising concerns over safety and demanding swift justice for the victim.

TU launches six-day course to enhance educator's skills



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Dec 17: The Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE), Tezpur University (TU) along with Malviya Mission Teacher Training Centre (MMTTC) has started a six-day course on developing online courses and programs.

The unique program which started from Monday is specifically designed to equip educators, instructional designers, and academic professionals with the essential skills and knowledge required to create effective, engaging, and accessible online

learning experiences. Inaugurating the program, Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, vice chancellor of the university said that in the last decade, online education & massive open online courses (MOOCs) have emerged as a powerful tool for democratising education. "As our country is observing transformative changes in our education system, online education with features like accessibility, flexibility, quality and ability to accommodate a large number of participants will offer learners diverse and inclusive opportunities," Singh said.

Nagaon police arrest thief and recover stolen goods

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Dec 17: In a significant breakthrough, Police have successfully recovered stolen goods and also arrested a notorious thief.

This achievement comes after a series of thefts had been reported in the small town, causing concern among the residents.

According to sources, Nagaon police have been working tirelessly to prevent criminal activities in the area and during a raid conducted on Monday night, the police were able to recover a substantial amount of stolen gold and apprehend the thief, identified as Asadul Ali alias Olta, a resident of Chokitup, Nagaon.

In addition to the thief, the police also arrested three gold traders who were found to be involved in the illegal trade of stolen gold. The arrested traders have been identified as Saddam, Akram, and Manjur Ahmed.

The police registered a case (No 1013/24) at the Nagaon Sadar police station and are currently interrogating the arrested individuals to gather more information, sources added.

Good Governance Week 2024 empowers rural communities

HT Correspondent
HAFLONG, Dec 17: The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Government of India, has announced the launch of the fourth edition of Sushasan Saptah (Good Governance Week), scheduled from December 19 to 24.

This year's theme, "Prashashan Gaon Ki Ore" (Administration Towards the Village), highlights the government's focus on strengthening governance and empowering rural communities. The Prashashan Gaon Ki Ore 2024 campaign is being conducted in two phases across Dima Hasao, as well as the rest of the country: the preparatory phase and the implementation phase.

During the week-long initiative, special public grievance redressal camps will be organised to provide citizens with direct access to address their concerns. Service delivery applications will be processed through the Sewa Setu portal, modernising public service delivery and improving accessibility.

Achievements in resolving public grievances will be featured on the DARPG portal to promote transparency and accountability.

District Commissioner Simanta Kumar Das has entrusted additional deputy commissioner Sangeeta Devi with overseeing the effective

implementation of the campaign. A special grievance redressal camp will operate at the District Commissioner's office to enhance service delivery and address public concerns.

As part of the initiative, a workshop will be conducted on December 23 to compile and submit best practices in governance on the Prashashan Gaon Ki Ore portal. This workshop will bring together insights from districts across the states to foster knowledge sharing.

Similarly, North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) principal secretary Thai Tsho Daulagupu has directed all council department heads to organise grievance redressal camps and ensure timely processing of service delivery applications through the Sewa Setu portal.

The Prashashan Gaon Ki Ore campaign is a cornerstone of 'Good Governance Week,' aiming to make development accessible at the grassroots level. By fostering transparency, efficiency, and citizen welfare, the initiative strengthens the foundation of grassroots democracy.

Central to the campaign's success is the active participation of citizens, positioning them as key contributors to the governance process and ensuring their voices are heard in the development journey.

Two NFR employees to receive 'Ati Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar'

Bravery and quick action save many lives, avert accidents

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 17: The Indian Railways has announced the prestigious 'Ati Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar' for 101 railway employees among two employees from Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) have been recognised for their outstanding dedication and timely actions that saved lives and protected railway property, an official statement said on Tuesday. Raj Narayan Kumar, loco pilot (Electrical) of Badarpur, has been honoured for his alertness and bravery while operating train 05676 UP Dhamanagar-Agartala Passenger Special.

On encountering a massive landslide at the Baramura hill ranges near Teliamura station in Tripura amid heavy rains, Kumar swiftly applied the emergency brakes, stopping the train just 100 metres from the debris and ensuring the safety of nearly 1,000 passengers.

Similarly, Rahul Kumar, senior



assistant loco pilot (Electrical) from Lumding, has been recognised for his quick thinking during the operation of train 15612 DN.

Amid severe winds and rainfall, he identified a tree dangerously close to collapsing onto the track. Acting promptly with the Loco Pilot, he applied the emergency brakes, preventing a potential accident and safeguarding both passengers and

the train. Both employees will be felicitated by honourable railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw at a grand ceremony on December 21 at Bhartiya Mandapam, New Delhi.

The Northeast Frontier Railway applauds their commitment and exemplary actions, which reflect the highest standards of service and dedication to passenger safety.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

From a small seed a mighty trunk may grow.
- Aeschylus

Appeasement gone wrong?

“Like Grandfather Nehru...” posted a Pakistani politician who was a minister in the Imran Khan regime. Fawad Hussain, clearly in awe of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, whose Palestine Tote bag and black & white check sari made an emphatic if controversial political statement, and will likely launch a fashion trend, too, if not anywhere else, at least in her parliamentary constituency Wayanad and places nearby where “All eyes On Rafa” has been trending for months since Hamas terrorists fled to Rafa and the Israel Defence Forces followed in hot pursuit. And who said Pakistan and India are two-nations? They aren’t. Not after Fawad Hussain and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra spoke in one voice. Also, both are as secular as the French and Palestinians are. Hamas, too, if it hadn’t jumped the border and carried out ‘October 7’ – dragged away over 200 hostages including young women, one of whom the Israeli Defence Forces “rescued” and she turned out to be a “Yazidi slave” of a West Bank Palestinian family, “bought from the ISIS.” Indeed, life in Palestine is full of surprises. From the beehive of tunnels, stretching right into Israel, to the underground bunkers and the arsenal stored under the operating rooms of Gaza hospitals, which keep count of those killed and injured in Israeli bombings. It can’t be Priyanka Gandhi Vadra’s fault that she didn’t know all this? There was too much happening in India to keep track.

To her credit, though, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra went ahead and voiced her solidarity with the people of Palestine, especially the children of Gaza, who the Israeli Defence Forces bombed to death in the thousands. Priyanka met the Palestine Charge-d’affaires in New Delhi and within the week, she was attired to kill in Palestinian keffiyeh! To those who haven’t seen it, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra made a pretty picture! Of elegance and purpose. Questioned by a wayward reporter, she retorted, “Now, I have to be told what to wear, too?” The statement she made with the Palestine bag resounded inside and outside Parliament. Pakistanis heard it on the other side of the Wagah. Fawad Chaudhary termed Pakistani MPs spineless for not doing a “Priyanka” in the Pakistan National Assembly, for not coming out bold and clear in solidarity with the “oppressed people of Palestine.” Just like Priyanka Gandhi, who is today more popular in Pakistan than Bushra Imran Khan. Also to her credit, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra steered clear of Hamas, the vile terrorists who still roam the underground tunnels of Gaza and Rafa, living like rodents deep in the underground warrens. Analysts are asking why Priyanka Gandhi Vadra forgot Hamas while praising the Palestinians? They are questioning Priyanka?

Point is, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra kept her focus on Palestine and Palestinians. And that made her speak of the plight of Bangladesh’s Hindus. Priyanka’s ire was on the Modi government’s total inaction in alleviating the lives of Bangladeshi Hindus? She didn’t question the Modi government’s apathy towards the Palestinians. She questioned Modi’s handling of the Bangladesh crisis. And she put the focus on Israel’s war on Gaza’s babies? Fawad Hussain identified with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Modi’s ministers did not. Fawad heaped praises on Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Modi’s ministers could not see anything beyond their flared-up nostrils. They only saw the Palestine-embellished black tote bag that Priyanka carried to Parliament and with it, Palestine!

India must not mix up border issues with economic imperatives

China’s sudden change of mind to uphold peace and tranquility with India at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and work for early resolution of outstanding issues should not be read beyond these words as framed at the joint declaration at the end of the 30th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs in Delhi, earlier this month. China seems to be willing to make a careful compromise on the border issue after a gap of almost four-and-a-half years, when the Chinese troops tried to aggressively change the status quo on the LAC in eastern Ladakh without much success.

Hopefully, the Chinese peace offer does not come with an unwritten rider that is to allow more merchandise export to the Indian market. China needs a steady export market to partially cover its shrinking trade surplus with the United States. China’s exports shrank sharply in November as Donald Trump’s imminent return to the White House brings fresh trade risks. China is out to grab the vast market in India by dumping a whole range of merchandise.

India has become China’s (including Hong Kong) second largest source of trade surplus and the fourth largest export destination after the US, South Korea and Vietnam. The world’s No. 1 exporter, China would probably settle for a small military compromise on the Ladakh border in exchange for a bigger pie of the Indian market. Last year, India’s import from China was worth \$121.97 billion, according to the UN Comtrade Data Base on international trade. US President-elect Trump has pledged to slap an additional tariff on Chinese goods. Trump wants to introduce tariffs in excess of 60 percent on Chinese merchandise. Trump’s threats have rattled China’s industrial complex, which sells goods worth more than \$400 billion annually to the US. Last year, China’s trade surplus with the US amounted to \$336 billion. As a single country, India came next. The European Union and ASEAN, representing clusters of nations, were placed ahead of India in China’s trade surplus list. China

is naturally concerned. It may be interesting to note that before the US presidential election, China had unofficially supported Democratic Party candidate Kamala Harris, a strong supporter of Ukraine in the country’s fight against Russia, to ensure that its exports to the USA were not disturbed. A Harris victory would have further escalated the Russia-Ukraine war. China probably did not mind Ukraine’s NATO-backed military resistance against Russia, its so-called key “ally”, to continue for the sake of its unhindered export to the US. Over the years, China’s massive exports to the US since the Nixon era helped the People’s Republic (PRC) become the world’s second largest economy. China’s economy was worth only \$113.69 billion in 1972 when the then US President Richard Nixon visited China to establish relations with the PRC.

after years of U.S. diplomatic policy that favoured the Republic of China in Taiwan. It also helped open a big US-China economic and trade partnership, making China a formidable economic and military power today.

In 1972, China’s communist regime, led by Mao Zedong, decided to establish a diplomatic link with the US after a gap of 23 years. Communist China had its own strategic reasons to open dialogue with the US as its relationship with the more powerful Communist neighbour, the Soviet Union, threatened to turn sour despite their shared political ideology with the USSR’s growing influence in Asia. By the late 1960s, China and the Soviet Union were involved in frequent border skirmishes threatening to verge on all-out war. President Nixon and his secretary of state Henry Kissinger decided to exploit the opportunity to rebuild a relationship with China to corner the Soviet Union in order to create a balance of power between the US and the mighty USSR. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend” Nixon had said. China’s rise to economic power started thereafter. In 1978, the country launched a major economic reform program by adopting an open-door policy to attract foreign investment and technology while maintaining its commitment to socialism.

China is now the world’s second largest economy with a GDP of around \$17.8 trillion. Donald Trump has vowed to make imports from China much dearer to slash the US trade deficit with China to rebuild its economy and push employment in the US. China needs a big and growing market such as India to keep its export-driven economy flourish. And, this might have driven China to indirectly support Democrat Kamala Harris to continue to enjoy trade concessions. Chinese exports are expected to reach a historical high this year as customers have been rushing to front-load orders in the light of President-elect Donald Trump’s threat of higher import tariffs when he takes office in January. According to analysts, China’s export growth is expected to accelerate to seven percent during the current October-December quarter from the same period last year pushing the country’s total exports this year to \$3.548 trillion.

Thus, China’s sudden change of mind to uphold “peace and tranquility with India” at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) appears to be more artificial than real. Militarily far advanced, China has already surrounded India with its considerable strategic influence over Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Nepal and more lately Bhutan. India would probably make a major mistake to link its trade and economic imperatives with the Chinese ‘peace’ offer at Galwan.

India must drastically cut down direct and indirect imports (through Nepal) and investments from China to expand its own industrial production and protect the small and medium scale sectors. Several Indian industries – such as steel, solar modules, furniture, glass, textile, paper, leather, automotive, medical, electronics goods, thermoplastic polyurethane, handicrafts and MSME clusters, such as fireworks, decorative lights, toys, silk weaving, and festive products -- are reeling under Chinese trade dumping. India must take a hard line on imports from China. The massive trade deficit with China is killing the country’s economy, erasing the value of Rupee, raising inflation and creating unemployment. India’s economic peace and prosperity are not negotiable. (IPA Service)

Fragile Secularism: Minority Persecution in Bangladesh

By: Shashanka Das

The political and social fabric of Bangladesh is currently under intense scrutiny, as its interim government faces severe allegations of failing to protect minorities, particularly Hindus, amidst escalating violence. This situation has drawn the attention of neighboring India, which has expressed concern over the targeted attacks on religious minorities. However, Bangladesh’s governing elite, led by Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus, has countered by accusing India of politicizing the issue to serve its domestic agenda, thereby framing the crisis as an “internal political issue” between the two nations.

Rising Violence Against Minorities

The persistent persecution of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh has eroded the claims of secularism espoused by the current regime. Incidents of temple desecrations, property destruction, rapes, and mass killings have surfaced repeatedly. On December 4, Bangladesh’s administration sought to dismiss these atrocities, with Yunus stating that reports of anti-Hindu violence were “exaggerated” and politically motivated.

Yunus attempted to contextualize the Islamist attacks as a reaction to the perception that Hindus were aligned with the ousted Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina. He argued that the violence was not communal but politically motivated. However, this narrative conveniently ignores the documented targeting of minorities and the tacit endorsement of such actions by the interim government.

India’s Concerns and Bangladesh’s Rebuttal

Indian officials have repeatedly raised concerns over the violence against minorities in Bangladesh. These concerns were dismissed by Nahid Islam, Bangladesh’s Information Advisor, who warned that such narratives could harm India’s domestic politics. Nahid’s remarks implied that India’s concern over minority persecution in Bangladesh was driven by “Hindutva forces” seeking to undermine harmony and democratic relations between the two countries.

Nahid’s statement ignored the extensive evidence of violence against minorities, including videos, media reports, and international criticism. Instead, Bangladesh’s administration accused India of spreading propaganda to destabilize the country’s “democratic nation-rebuilding process” and to support the Awami League’s purported fascism. This rhetoric highlights the government’s strategy of deflection rather than addressing the underlying issues.

Historical Context and Shifting Dynamics

India and Bangladesh share deep historical and cultural ties. India played a pivotal role in Bangladesh’s independence in 1971, offering military and diplomatic support during its liberation from Pakistan. This bond, however, appears strained under the current administration, which seems to have forgotten the cooperative spirit of the past.

Yunus and his interim government have sought to rewrite the narrative, portraying India as a meddling neighbor captivated by the fear that Bangladesh might become an Islamist state akin to Afghanistan without Sheikh Hasina’s leadership. Yunus urged India to abandon this “narrative,” claiming that Bangladesh’s issues with minority persecution were being exaggerated for political gain. This stance, however, fails to account for the lived realities of minorities facing violence and displacement.

The Political Mask of Violence

Yunus’s administration has consistently downplayed the severity of anti-Hindu violence, portraying it as a byproduct of political turmoil rather than communal hatred. In an interview with PTI, Yunus stated that attackers targeted Hindus because of their perceived alignment with the Awami League. He suggested that Hindus should refrain from identifying themselves by their religion to avoid persecution, a recommendation that starkly contrasts with principles of religious freedom and equality.

Despite Yunus’s assertions, reports from international observers and local media paint a grim picture. On December 3, a Muslim mob in the Sunamganj district vandalized 130 homes and 20 Hindu temples, citing a Facebook post as provocation. This was not an isolated incident but part of a larger pattern of targeted violence that includes the disruption of Hindu religious festivals, such as Durga Puja, and demands for discriminatory practices like the imposition of jizya.

The International Response

The global community has begun to take notice of the deteriorating situation in Bangladesh. Johnnie Moore, a former commissioner of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), criticized Yunus’s administration for its failure to protect minorities. He stated that “there isn’t a minority in the country that doesn’t feel under threat right now.” Such international criticism underscores the gap between Bangladesh’s claims of secular governance and the ground realities of religious persecution.

In a meeting with political party representatives, Yunus accused “big countries” of orchestrating a campaign to undermine his government. Although he avoided naming India directly, his remarks were a clear indictment of India’s role in highlighting the plight of minorities in Bangladesh. Yunus alleged that this campaign was part of an effort to delegitimize his administration and to portray the removal of Sheikh Hasina as a destabilizing event.

Yunus’s rhetoric conveniently shifts the focus away from the failings of his government and towards India as a scapegoat. This strategy not only undermines India’s legitimate concerns but also disregards the shared responsibility of both nations to uphold human rights and regional stability.

The Cost of Deflection

The ongoing violence against minorities in Bangladesh and the government’s dismissive response has far-reaching implications. By deflecting blame onto India, the interim administration risks alienating a historically supportive neighbor and eroding its international credibility. More importantly, this approach does little to address the root causes of the violence or to ensure the safety and dignity of Bangladesh’s minorities.

The persistent targeting of Hindus and other minorities is not merely a political issue; it is a human rights crisis that demands urgent attention and action. While Bangladesh’s government may seek to downplay these events as “exaggerated” or “political,” the evidence suggests otherwise. India’s concerns, far from being propagandistic, reflect a genuine alarm over the erosion of secularism and justice in Bangladesh.

As Bangladesh grapples with these challenges, it must recognize that deflection and denial are not sustainable strategies. True progress lies in acknowledging and addressing the systemic issues that enable violence and discrimination. Only then can Bangladesh hope to restore its image as a nation committed to equality, justice, and the rule of law. (The author can be reached at shashankadasnov1@gmail.com)

India and China: Seeking stability amidst tensions

By: Satyabrata Borah

India and China, two of the world’s most populous nations, share a complex relationship marked by both cooperation and contention. Their interactions span centuries, encompassing cultural exchanges, trade, and, in recent times, geopolitical rivalries. A significant aspect of their contemporary relationship revolves around the disputed border, known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which has been a source of tension and conflict.

In 2020, the Galwan Valley clash resulted in the loss of lives on both sides, bringing the longstanding border dispute into sharp focus. This incident underscored the urgent need for diplomatic engagement to ensure peace and stability in the region. In response, both nations initiated a series of diplomatic and military talks aimed at de-escalation and disengagement along the LAC.

A pivotal development in these efforts is the anticipated visit of India’s National Security Adviser (NSA), Ajit Doval, to China. Doval is expected to engage in discussions under the Special Representatives (SR) mechanism, a diplomatic channel established in 2003 to explore frameworks for a boundary settlement. This mechanism has facilitated 22 formal rounds of talks, with the last occurring in 2019.

The upcoming meeting between Doval and his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, signifies a mutual commitment to addressing the border issue. Their engagement follows a series of high-level interactions, including meetings between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping, and discussions between other senior officials. These dialogues have been instrumental in reviving mechanisms aimed at normalizing bilateral relations.

The Special Representatives mechanism was created to explore

the “framework of a boundary settlement”. Since then, 22 formal rounds of talks have been held under the mechanism, the last being in 2019. During the military standoff on the LAC that began in April-May 2020, the Special Representatives held talks several times to find ways to end the face-off.

The standoff, and a brutal clash at Galwan Valley in June the same year that killed 20 Indian soldiers and at least four Chinese troops, had taken bilateral ties to their lowest point since the 1962 border war.

The anticipated visit of NSA Doval to China is expected to further the progress made in these discussions. The focus will be on building upon the recent agreement on patrolling arrangements along the LAC, aiming to de-escalate tensions and work towards a boundary settlement.

The significance of these talks extends beyond the immediate border issues. They are crucial for the broader geopolitical landscape, influencing regional stability and international relations. Both India and China are key players in global affairs, and their relationship has implications for economic partnerships, security alliances, and diplomatic engagements worldwide.

The complexities of the India-China relationship are further highlighted by their economic interactions. China is one of India’s largest trading partners, with bilateral trade reaching significant volumes annually. However, trade imbalances and market access issues have been points of contention. The border tensions have also impacted economic relations, with increased scrutiny on Chinese investments in India and calls for diversification of supply chains.

In recent years, both nations have engaged in infrastructure development along the border areas, enhancing connectivity and asserting their strategic positions. These developments have been

viewed with suspicion by both sides, contributing to the complexities of the border dispute. The dialogues under the SR mechanism aim to address these concerns, seeking mutually acceptable solutions to prevent further escalation.

The role of leadership in both countries is pivotal in shaping the trajectory of bilateral relations. Prime Minister Modi and President Xi have engaged in multiple dialogues, emphasizing the importance of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. Their interactions set the tone for diplomatic engagements, influencing public perception and policy directions.

Public opinion in both countries plays a significant role in the dynamics of their relationship. Nationalistic sentiments, fueled by historical narratives and media portrayals, can impact diplomatic efforts. Managing public perception is crucial for both governments as they navigate the complexities of the border dispute and seek to build trust. The international community closely monitors India-China relations, given their impact on global geopolitics. Other nations have a vested interest in the stability of the region, with implications for trade routes, security alliances, and economic partnerships. The outcome of the SR talks will be significant not only for India and China but also for the broader international community.

The anticipated visit of NSA Ajit Doval to China for the Special Representatives dialogue represents a critical juncture in India-China relations. It reflects a mutual recognition of the need for dialogue and negotiation to address longstanding issues. The outcomes of these talks have the potential to shape the future trajectory of bilateral relations, influencing regional stability and global geopolitics. As both nations engage in these discussions, the international community watches with cautious optimism, hopeful for a resolution that ensures peace and prosperity in the region.

New leadership in Syria: Challenges and opportunities in the post-Assad era

By: Dipak Kurmi

The transition of power in Syria from Bashar al-Assad to Mohammed al-Bashir, appointed Prime Minister on December 10, 2024, marks a transformative chapter in the nation’s tumultuous history. Assad’s regime, synonymous with authoritarian rule, civil strife, and international entanglements, has come to an end under the weight of external pressures and the withdrawal of Russian support. This political shift offers Syria a glimmer of hope for renewal, though it is fraught with uncertainty and immense challenges.

The departure of Assad leaves a significant power vacuum, highlighting the fragility of the state. Mohammed al-Bashir, a moderate figure recognized for his diplomatic expertise, has pledged a path of national reconciliation and reconstruction. His leadership signals a departure from the autocratic governance of the past and a potential shift toward a more inclusive and reformist approach.

However, the challenges of uniting a deeply fractured nation remain formidable. Control of Syria is fragmented among Kurdish forces, remnants of opposition groups, and radical Islamist factions, creating an environment rife with instability. For millions of displaced Syrians, enduring poverty and lacking access to basic services, the road to recovery seems long and arduous. The shattered Syrian economy further complicates matters, demanding immediate stabilization alongside long-term reconstruction.

The role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the downfall of Assad’s regime is a crit-

ical but contentious aspect of this transition. The CIA’s covert operations, including the controversial Operation Timber Sycamore, aimed to destabilize Assad’s government by arming and training selected rebel groups. These efforts, coupled with intelligence activities, cyber warfare, and psychological operations, significantly undermined Assad’s grip on power. However, the unintended consequences of such interventions, including the empowerment of extremist factions, illustrate the complexities of foreign involvement in Syria’s internal conflicts. For the United States, the strategy yielded geopolitical advantages by curbing Iranian influence, limiting Russia’s presence in the region, and advancing counterterrorism objectives. Yet, these gains must be weighed against the long-term instability they may have exacerbated.

Prime Minister al-Bashir has outlined a comprehensive roadmap for Syria’s recovery, addressing political, economic, and social dimensions. Politically, he has prioritized forming a transitional government that includes representatives from Syria’s diverse ethnic and political communities. Drafting a new constitution, with provisions to decentralize power and protect minority rights, is a cornerstone of this vision. Economically, al-Bashir’s administration aims to rehabilitate Syria’s devastated infrastructure, attract foreign investments, and combat entrenched corruption to pave the way for sustainable growth. On the social front, reintegration programs for displaced populations and former combatants are essential components of his strategy, alongside expanded healthcare and education initiatives to address the needs of war-

affected communities.

The implications of Assad’s fall and al-Bashir’s ascent reverberate beyond Syria’s borders. Regionally, these developments may recalibrate power dynamics in West Asia, diminishing Iran’s influence in Syria while creating opportunities for rapprochement with Israel. Cooperation on border security and potential economic partnerships could emerge as key areas of mutual interest.

Globally, Russia’s diminished role in Syria marks a strategic setback for Moscow. Strained by its involvement in Ukraine and the impact of Western sanctions, Russia’s resource constraints have forced a recalibration of its Middle Eastern strategy, leaving a void that other powers may seek to fill. Meanwhile, China may view Syria’s reconstruction as an avenue to expand its Belt and Road Initiative, potentially deepening its influence in the region.

Security concerns loom large in the wake of Assad’s departure. The power vacuum left behind creates opportunities for extremist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda to regain a foothold, threatening both regional and global stability. The ongoing refugee crisis, driven by persistent instability, poses additional challenges for neighboring countries and Europe. Furthermore, proxy conflicts fueled by regional rivalries and geopolitical tensions risk entangling Syria in broader frictions. This precarious situation underscores the necessity of a coordinated international response to support Syria’s transition and mitigate the risks of renewed violence.

The fall of Assad’s regime also reflects the shifting dynamics of Russian involvement in

Syria. Since its military intervention in 2015, Russia had been a staunch supporter of Assad, providing critical military and economic aid to sustain his rule. However, the prolonged conflict, coupled with domestic criticism and financial strain, led the Kremlin to scale back its commitments. This retreat not only weakened Assad’s position but also signaled a broader recalibration of Russia’s strategy in the Middle East.

For Syria’s new leadership, navigating these complexities will require balancing domestic reforms with international cooperation. Prime Minister al-Bashir’s focus on inclusivity, economic revitalization, and social healing offers a blueprint for progress, but the success of these initiatives hinges on overcoming entrenched challenges. Domestic unity, underpinned by trust-building measures and equitable representation, is critical for sustainable governance. Simultaneously, the international community must provide robust and sustained support, ranging from humanitarian aid to investments in reconstruction and security.

Syria’s transition from Assad to al-Bashir represents a pivotal moment, laden with both opportunity and risk. While the path to stability and prosperity is fraught with obstacles, a concerted effort by domestic actors and global partners holds the potential to guide Syria toward a more peaceful and resilient future. The coming months will be critical in determining whether this new chapter in Syria’s history leads to enduring progress or further turmoil. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Rice water for winter beauty

By: **Shahnaz Husain**

We're well into winter now. The merriest season of the year is here, the Holidays, shaddis, lots of winter barbecue and hot tea, pakodas. It's time to mix up your beauty arsenal, because with winter comes a whole slew of problems for your skin, nails, and hair.

At-home beauty can be as simple as going through your kitchen cabinets. Another plus point of it is completely cost-effective and easily available.

Sometimes the best solution is the simplest one, and that definitely applies to rice water.

The magical liquid Kanji or rice water is traditional home remedy used as a beauty potion for skin whitening, brightening, tightening pores, reducing black spots and make skin firmer and softer by women around the world.

Rice water, the water leftover after boiling or soaking rice in it is loaded with vitamins, minerals, and amino acids that are essential for maintaining healthy, beautiful skin during winters.

Rice water contains the nourishing antioxidant ferulic acid, as well as allantoin, an organic compound that helps soothe and heal the skin during freezing temperature. Rice water has inositol, a carbohydrate that can repair hair damaged due to extreme weather conditions and dryness during winters. It can strengthen the roots, make it smooth and silky by combating the losses due to natural atmospheric conditions.

It is commonly available in every home in India. From ancient times, when cosmetics were not available, such natural ingredients were used for beauty care.

Rice water is a natural skin toner which promotes cell growth, stimulates blood flow and keeps the skin smooth and bright in chilly weather conditions.

You can use rice water cubes to boost collagen and nourish, refresh skin. Put rice water into the ice tray and freeze it. Add cucumber too. Apply these ice cubes onto the face and uncovered areas around the face, neck and uncovered area around face etc as a toner. Rice

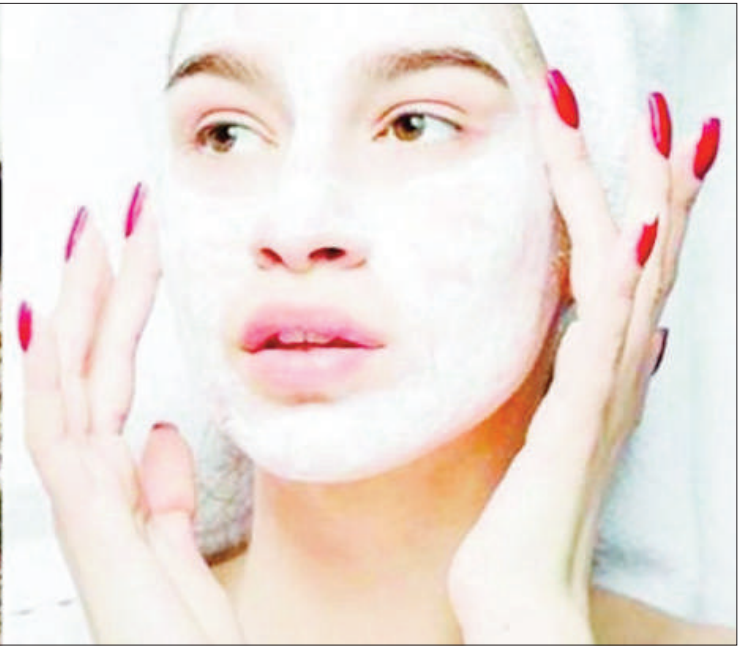
The magical liquid Kanji or rice water is traditional home remedy used as a beauty potion for skin whitening, brightening, tightening pores, reducing black spots and make skin firmer and softer by women around the world

water is great to keep the skin glowing and hydrated during winters.

You can use rice water for reducing dark patches or achieving fair complexion by mixing rice powder with raw milk to form thick paste. Apply thick paste on your face and uncovered skin and leave it for few minutes and wash it with clean fresh water. Repeat it once in a week to achieve amazing results. Although many beauty companies have launched soaps, toners, and creams etc containing rice water but it is always advisable to go for herbal homely products.

Rice water acts as excellent hair conditioner. You can add a few drops of essential oils like rosemary, lavender or tea tree oil and apply it on hair to balance PH level on the scalp and act as an excellent hair conditioner. After shampooing, apply rice water to your hair along with a few drops of lavender essential oil or rosemary essential oil. Let the rice water dry on hair in a natural environment for 15-20 minutes and then rinse with normal fresh water. Fermented rice water is rich in vitamin B which also happens to promote melanin production for hair.

Fermented rice water protects the skin from UV rays and sun tan. Leave your boiled rice water out on your kitchen in open space for 48



hours. When it starts to smell slightly sour, bottle it up and store it in your fridge. You can use fermented rice water in the same ways you can use regular rice water. Using rice water is also an effective remedy in treating sunburns. Applying it on sun-damaged skin can help the burns heal faster.

You can also prepare rice water with fermentation. In a glass jar put some rice and water (twice the quantity of rice). Keep it at room temperature for a day or two. Strain the mixture and keep the water in the fridge.

Rice wine increases the collagen in the skin, which keeps your skin supple and helps prevent wrinkling.

Rice is part of India beauty legacy which contains ferulic acid, a powerful antioxidant and allantoin which contains anti-inflammatory properties. So, whether you eat rice or not, use it in your face pack for glowing skin. The starch in rice water is said to soothe the skin in conditions like eczema. Dip a clean washcloth into the rice water, then apply it over the affected area. After 2 to 3 minutes, allow the skin to dry by itself. In fact, acne-prone skin or even skin with acne eruptions can be washed with rice water to soothe and heal the skin. It also helps to tighten the pores and refine the skin. Rice water may be applied on the face with cotton

wool and then massaged for a few minutes to revitalize the skin. In fact, rice water has an astringent effect and helps to prevent pimples and acne.

Mix corn starch powder and rice powder in 1:2 ratios. Apply the powdery material evenly on the face by using makeup brush and wash with clean water after few minutes for silky smooth skin.

Rice powder or rice flour can be used as a facial scrub. It is ideally suited to oily skin and is effective as a facial scrub. It helps to deep cleanse the skin and unclog the pores, discouraging and dislodging blackheads. It removes dead skin cells, tightens the pores and brightens the skin. Mix rice powder with curd and a pinch of turmeric. Apply on the face and rub gently on the skin with circular movements. Wash off with water.

Rice powder can also be added to ubtan or body scrubs, along with gram flour, curd, rose water, powdered lemon and orange peels, etc.

Rice wine contains antioxidant properties which prevent premature ageing and wrinkles on the skin.

Prepare thick paste of rice flour, castor oil and banana and apply over dark circles and wash it after some time with clean fresh water. It will lighten skin around eyes and keep you younger and fresh.

Take rice powder and Multani mitti in equal proportions and make a paste of it. Apply the paste on your scalp and rinse off with fresh water after 45 minutes for smooth, soft and lustrous hair.

Mix honey and rice powder and apply the thick paste on face and open areas. Leave it to dry in natural atmosphere and wash after it has dried completely.

Cook a cup of rice. Remove the water and grind it to a thick paste with honey and milk. Apply a thick layer of this paste on the face and neck and let it to dry before washing it off with lukewarm water.

Add yoghurt to the mixture of sugar and rice. Apply the paste on face and wash your face with fresh water after half an hour to get flawless, fair and attractive complexion.

It is preferable to use organic rice, clean filtered water, and rinse the rice thoroughly before use to get rid of any topical pollutants and pesticides. White rice is preferred over brown or red rice – since the water from the former has more extensive benefits.

Transcending the boundaries of food, rice offers a plethora of benefits for your skin and hair, a rather surprising beauty staple that's been used across the world. *(The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called herbal queen of India)*

Witch-hunts: Assam's hidden horror

By: **Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan**

Witch-Hunt, an inhuman and superstitious-based practice, still a harsh reality in Assam. However, this barbaric custom still prevails, in the state's rural and tribal regions, where the women (and men) are purported to be practicing witchcraft and subjected to cruellest treatment. This unseen horror, not only opens up the ways in which deep-seated prejudice pervade Assamese society, but also expresses the ways in which poverty, gender inequality, and the unavailability of education and health care are deeply flawed. The recurrence of witch-hunts is a painful lesson in the gap between advancement and the persistent hold of superstition over susceptible populations.

Community paranoia and mistrust often manifest with outward signs of witch-hunting along with poverty and illiteracy. In many Assamese villages, when no other explanation is found for a sudden death, crop failure, or illness, accusations of witchcraft begin as part of a scapegoating process. Traditional healers (ojā) are very central figures in perpetuating such beliefs. They explain natural occurrences to be supernatural, raising further suspicion. This phenomenon thrives in areas with minimal reach to science and medicine supplies, where explanations of sorrows are still founded upon folklore and myth. Upon the naming process, the accused persons are

ground for superstitious acts. Lack of proper training and knowledge will definitely help time-old notions rule in day-to-day activities of society. In such circumstances, accusations of witchcraft can frequently be used as a tool to administrate social phobias, leading to a dreadful death for the victim and family members that are not called for.

Measures for checking witch-hunting activities in Assam have seen some partial achievements. The landmark achievement is the Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention, and Protection) Act of 2015 has criminalized the act, which has strict punishment mechanisms against those indulging in accusations, violence, or ostracizing others. Also rehabilitating victims and educating society about the dangers of such practices, by law. Enforcement has been patchy, and even where societal complicity is strong, the legislation is having limited impact. Victims tend to be reluctant to report events because they may fear reprisal, and cultural normalization of witch-hunts in the countryside inhibits inquiry. Besides, the lack of coordination among law enforcement agencies, local authorities and community leaders has been a constraint to the effect of such legal instruments.

Education is an important means of debunking the superstition that underpins witch-hunting. However, the challenge goes beyond merely increasing literacy rates. It includes the task of rais-

ing the awareness of the ill effects of superstition and encouraging the scientific approach in rural communities. Community-based programmes involving local decision-makers and teachers, as well as young people, have the potential to challenge deeply held assumptions and offer alternative ontologies of what misfortune is and how misfortune shall be referred to, with what implications and consequences. Schools in the country are required to adopt the teaching of rational thinking and human rights in order to breed a cohort opposed to these ideas.

Health care is another important area in this campaign. Many of the cases of witchcraft result from the inability to cure or to diagnose diseases, particularly from rural areas where the medical facilities are either lacking or too expensive. Enhancement of the rural health facilities, provision of mobile health units, and educating the population about health conditions can alleviate unsubstantiated accusations against the witch-caring individuals. Accessible health care relieves the dependence of

traditional healers, thereby diminishing their power on the community belief. Economic empowerment is key in combating witch-hunting. Thereby, poverty and economic disruption enhance the polarization of communal and interpersonal conflict, increasing the likelihood that people will engage in violence. Alternative livelihoods, skill development programs, and financial support can alleviate the economic pressures that often underlie accusations of witchcraft. The empowerment of women economically is of highest importance, because captivity is diminished on women's side and consequently power is increased, such that women are better able to resist societal oppression.

Civil society groups and campaigners have played a vital role in bringing attention to witch-hunting and rescuing victims. Individuals like Padmasri Late Birubala Rabha, a renowned anti-witch-hunting activist, have dedicated her lives to fighting this practice. These grassroots efforts have saved so many lives and made the country and the rest of the world aware of the phenomenon. Such approaches also validate the need to approach entrenched behavioral patterns at community levels. Organizations and NGOs have to be developed in their mobilization activities aimed at educating, rehabilitation, and lobbying for victimized parties.

It is also imperative that media houses play an important role in combating this form of witch-hunting. Through the medium of the media, the survivor stories can be brought to the fore and the root causes of the violence highlighted, thereby galvanizing the attention of the public to the matter. Nevertheless, reporting of witchcraft must be carried out with delicacy to avoid the sensationalization or its re-victimization of the victims. Equitable and thoughtful coverage can help to overcome societal misconceptions and push for support towards anti-witch-hunting programs.

The witch-hunting in Assam is a black mark of its people's socio-cultural aspect. It is symbolic, not just of the failings of contemporary governance, but of a rupture of values of compassion and of justice. Stopping this kind of practice requires a multi-pronged response involving law, education, health care, and economic autonomy. It requires an active participation of governmental bodies, NGO, and grassroots communities to tackle those structural inequalities that feed the violence. In as much as it is Assam's battle against witchcraft, it is also essentially a battle for its identity. It becomes difficult to come to an agreement over the war of tradition and progress, traditional thinking and modern science. The answer to this veiled horror would be closer to the human dignity and equality society in Assam. The road ahead is long, but sustained efforts can help the state come out of the darkness of witch-hunting and provide hope to those who have suffered under its shadow. *(The Writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK)*

Are Indian wives really weaponising domestic violence and maintenance laws?



By: **Vineet Bhalla**

Are criminal law provisions relating to the payment of maintenance by husbands to their wives and cruelty by a husband against his wife being weaponised against men? The suicide of 34-year-old Atul Subhash on Monday led to this discourse gaining traction on news debates and social media.

In a 24-page suicide note and 81-minute video, Subhash alleged harassment by his wife through the filing of false cases against him for cruelty as well as monthly maintenance.

However, lawyers and academics that Scroll spoke with provided an alternative view to the popular narrative of the laws being weaponised. It is often difficult for women to pursue maintenance in courts and file complaints of cruelty by the husband with the police, they say.

Pointing to the high rate of domestic violence faced by and suicide among married women, they said that rather than misuse, these laws are actually not being used enough by women.

Rationale for such laws
Article 15(3) of the Constitution of India enables the state to make special legal provisions for women and children. This affirms the social reality of discrimination faced by women in Indian society, according to Delhi-based criminal lawyer and writer Abhinav Sekhri. "The provisions relating to maintenance and cruelty discriminate in favour of women because our society discriminates against women," he said.

Mumbai-based women's rights lawyer Flavia Agnes agreed. "A woman has to leave her family after marriage and moves in with a new family," she said. "She is in an especially vulnerable position and needs laws to protect her."

Bengaluru-based legal academic Sarasu Esther Thomas, who specialises in family law and gender, explained the rationale for Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita – the replacement for Section 498A of

“Maintenance is needed because of the lack of social security for women,” Thomas said. She pointed out the gender disparity in education, the burden of care and domestic work on women and the social pressure on wives to leave work after marriage. All these result in the wife becoming economically dependent on her husband.

the Indian Penal Code meant to protect women from cruelty in marriage – and Section 144 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita – which replaced Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code meant to provide for maintenance.

Cruelty consists of both physical violence and mental harassment, including the demand for dowry. Maintenance can be demanded by any woman unable to maintain herself.

"Maintenance is needed because of the lack of social security for women," Thomas said. She pointed out the gender disparity in education, the burden of care and domestic work on women and the social pressure on wives to leave work after marriage. All these result in the wife becoming economically dependent on her husband.

Calling the provision "essential" and "understanding of the reality of India", she said that

maintenance ensures that the breakdown of a family does not leave women destitute and allows her and her children to, as far as possible, maintain the standard of living they are accustomed to.

As for the cruelty law, she said that violence against women in the marital home is so widespread that ordinary criminal law provisions were not adequate to deal with it and a separate legal provision was needed. "The latest National Family Health Survey shows that nearly one-third of all married women face spousal violence," she said. "Do one-third of all married women file cruelty cases against their husbands?" she asked. "This indicates that the law is under-used," she said.

A lack of implementation
Experts familiar with these laws told Scroll that, far from weaponisation, in reality it is quite difficult for women to avail of the remedies of maintenance and cruelty from the criminal justice system.

When it comes to maintenance, women must face a long and arduous process in courts.

Sekhri said that even in Delhi, "where the courts are much more gender-sensitised and accessible than most other parts of the country, it is by no means easy to file maintenance cases and get favourable orders." He pointed out that court take multiple hearings and intensely scrutinise all evidence and documents. "Courts don't rush to conclusions in such cases," he said.

Agnes said that "it takes a lot of time and money to file maintenance cases and get favourable orders and then to have them enforced or executed".

Delhi-based lawyer and women's rights researcher Mihira Sood told Scroll that the maintenance amount granted is usually "paltry and unrealistic". She said that "the process of legally securing maintenance is punishing for women."

In cruelty cases, the police is reluctant to register first information reports and both the police and courts push women to arrive at a "compromise" and withdraw the case, according to the experts Scroll spoke with. "Police doesn't register a first information report unless the complainant has physical injuries and is accompanied by a lawyer or a social worker," Agnes said. She added that even though harassment is part of cruelty as per the law, the police don't consider it sufficient and don't register cruelty complaints when there is no element of physical violence. *(Courtesy: Scroll.in)*



most likely vulnerable women who are subjected to public ridicule, social banishment, and physical torture and kill them.

The gendered character of the witch-hunt is particularly salient. Women, especially widows or single mothers or women offending against paternalistic norms are overrepresented in the target population. Their socio-economic disadvantages exacerbate the susceptibility open to false accusations. These women are silenced or punished for reasons that have little to do with superstition and more to do with property disputes, personal vendettas, or attempts to suppress their autonomy. Witch-hounding is therefore not a practice of ignorance, but systemic oppression where long-standing patriarchal control is implemented through violence and terror.

Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Chirang in Assam are all districts that have heavy inroads of poverty, illiteracy and bad health system. These districts having miscellaneous tribal groups are areas prone to various socio-economic problem which acts as an excellent breeding

Russian general killed by bomb in Moscow

Ukraine official says secret service behind it

MOSCOW, Dec 17: A senior Russian general was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security service levelled criminal charges against him. A Ukrainian official said the service carried out the attack.

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed as he left for his office. Kirillov's assistant also died in the attack.

Kirillov, 54, was under sanctions from several countries, including the UK and Canada, for his actions in Moscow's war in Ukraine. On Monday, Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, opened a criminal investigation against him, accusing him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons.

An official with the SBU said the agency was behind the attack. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to release the information, described Kirillov as a war criminal and an entirely legitimate target.

The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since its full-scale invasion in February 2022. In May, the US State Department said that it had recorded the use of chloropi-



rin, a poison gas first deployed in World War I, against Ukrainian troops.

Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and, in turn, has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat.

Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations. He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda.

The bomb used in Tuesday's attack was triggered remotely, according to Russian news reports. Images from the scene showed shattered windows and scorched brickwork.

Russia's top state investigative agency said it's investigating Kirillov's death as a case of terrorism, and officials in Moscow vowed to punish Ukraine.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, described the attack as an attempt by Kyiv to distract public attention away from its military failures and vowed that its senior military-political leadership will face inevitable retribution.

Over the past year, Russia has been on the front foot in the war in Ukraine, grinding deeper into the eastern region of Donetsk region despite heavy losses. Ukraine tried to change the dynamic with an incursion into Russia's Kursk region, but it has continued to slowly lose ground on its own territory.

Since Russia invaded, several prominent figures have been killed in targeted attacks believed to have been carried out by Ukraine.

Darya Dugina, a commentator on Russian TV channels and the daughter of Kremlin-linked nationalist ideologue Alexander Dugin, died in a 2022 car bombing that investigators suspected was aimed at her father.

Vladlen Tatarsky, a popular military blogger, died in April 2023, when a statuette given to him at a party in St. Petersburg exploded. A Russian woman, who said that she presented the figurine on orders of a contact in Ukraine, was convicted in the case and handed a 27-year sentence.

In December 2023, Illia Kiva, a former pro-Moscow Ukrainian lawmaker who fled to Russia, was shot and killed near Moscow. The Ukrainian military intelligence lauded the killing, warning that other traitors of Ukraine would share the same fate.

On December 9, an explosive device was placed under a car in the Russian-occupied Ukrainian city of Donetsk, reportedly targeting Sergei Yevsyukov, the former head of the Olenivka Prison where dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war died in a missile strike in July 2022. One other was injured in the blast. Russian authorities said they detained a suspect in the attack. (AP)

Magnitude 7.3 earthquake causes widespread damage in Pacific island nation of Vanuatu

WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND), Dec 17: A powerful magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck just off the coast of Vanuatu on Tuesday, causing widespread destruction in the South Pacific island nation as the injured began arriving at a hospital and unconfirmed reports of casualties emerged.

A tsunami warning was called off less than two hours after the quake. With communications still down hours later and official information scarce, witness accounts of casualties began to surface on social media and through patchy phone calls.

The earthquake happened at just before 1 pm at a depth of 57 kilometres and was centred 30 kilometres west of Port Vila, the largest city in Vanuatu — a group of 80 islands that is home to about 3,300,000 people. It was followed by a magnitude 5.5 aftershock near the same location, with tremors continuing throughout the afternoon and evening.

It was not immediately clear how much damage was caused as phone lines and government websites remained down. In the first official information published on social media, the Geohazards Department said its monitoring systems remained offline due to power outages.

Residents were urged to stay away from coastlines for at least 24 hours — and until tsunami and earthquake monitoring systems were operational once again. No confirmed reports of damage or casualties were provided, but accounts detailing widespread destruction filtered out on social media and in interviews.

Crowds outside the hospital Dan McGarry, a journalist based in Port Vila, told The Associated Press he heard of one death from a police officer outside Vila Central Hospital. McGarry saw three people on gurneys "in obvious distress," he said.

Doctors were working "as fast as they could" at a triage centre outside the emergency ward, he added. But the nation is not equipped for a mass casualty event, McGarry said.

Video shared by the Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation showed crowds outside



the hospital. Phone numbers for the police, the hospital and other public agencies did not connect.

A video posted on social media appeared to show crumpled buildings in Port Vila, including one that had collapsed onto its lower floors and cars parked on the street below. Amanda Laithwaite said her husband was among a group of rescuers attempting to shift the roof of the three-story building because they believed people were trapped inside, but their progress was slow without specialist machinery.

Elsewhere, a building housing a number of diplomatic missions in Port Vila — including those of the United States, Britain, France and New Zealand — was significantly damaged, several of its tenants said. But there were no reports of embassy staff unaccounted for.

Buckled windows and debris The US Embassy's Facebook page said all staff were safe, but the building was closed until further notice. The office had only opened in July, as part of a wider push by the US to expand its Pacific presence in order to counter China's burgeoning influence on governments in the region.

Australia's foreign ministry also said its workers were safe. A video on social media showed the building with some damage to its structure, including buckled windows and debris that had crumbled from walls to the ground. Other photos and videos showed items and shelves that had tumbled to the floors of shops and landslides that appeared to block some roads.

"We haven't heard at the moment about any casualties, but I will be shocked if we don't hear that bad news coming through

from Port Vila at some point," Katie Greenwood, the Fiji-based head of the Asia-Pacific regional office for the Red Cross, told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

All flights grounded McGarry said a "massive landslide" at the international shipping terminal was likely to impede the country's recovery. The airport's runway is also damaged, he said.

Port Vila's airport could not be contacted on Tuesday, but flight tracking sites suggested all flights were grounded. Some airlines in Australia and the Pacific said they had cancelled or paused flights scheduled for Wednesday and were awaiting news of the airport's status.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong told reporters that her country would provide whatever help was needed. New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters said 45 New Zealanders were registered as being in Vanuatu and his government was "deeply concerned" about the situation there.

Vanuatu has been led by four prime ministers in four years and is due to go to the polls in January for a snap election. In November, Prime Minister Charlot Salwai asked President Nikenike Vurobaravu to dissolve Parliament so he did not have to face a no-confidence vote as his recent predecessors did.

But Vanuatu is accustomed to natural disasters, including havoc wrought by cyclones and volcanic eruptions. Its position on a subduction zone — where the Indo-Australia tectonic plate moves beneath the Pacific Plate — means earthquakes of greater than magnitude 6 are not uncommon and the country's buildings are intended to withstand quake damage. (AP)

Bangladesh Law Adviser slams Modi's Vijay Diwas post, says India was merely an ally in 1971 victory



DHAKA, Dec 17: Bangladesh interim government's Law Adviser Asif Nazrul has criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's post on X commemorating Victory Day saying, "India was merely an ally in this victory, nothing more."

Victory Day or "Bijoy Dibosh" is commemorated every year on December 16 when the Pakistan military surrendered to Indian forces in 1971, bringing about the liberation of Bangladesh.

Nazrul's comment was reposted by the office of Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

Attaching a screenshot of Modi's post that paid tribute to Indian soldiers for their role in the historic victory in 1971, Nazrul wrote on Facebook in Bengali on Monday, "I strongly protest. December 16, 1971, marks Bangladesh's Victory Day. India was merely an ally in this victory, nothing more."

Yunus' Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam shared Nazrul's post, The

Daily Star newspaper reported on Tuesday.

Anti-Discrimination Student Movement Convener Hasnat Abdullah also criticised Modi's post.

Abdullah wrote on Facebook that this was Bangladesh's Liberation War and it was for the country's independence against Pakistan. He said Modi has claimed it was solely India's war and their achievement, disregarding Bangladesh's existence in their narrative.

"When India claims this independence as their achievement, I see this as a threat to our independence, sovereignty and oneness. It's necessary for us to fight against this threat by India. We need to carry on this fight," he wrote.

Modi, in a post on X, had said, "Today, on Vijay Diwas, we honour the courage and sacrifices of the brave soldiers who contributed to India's historic victory in 1971. Their selfless dedication and unwavering resolve safeguarded our

nation and brought glory to us.

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

Chief Adviser Yunus led Bangladesh Monday in marking the 54th Victory Day, his speech making no mention of founding leader Mujibur Rahman while calling deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's administration the "world's worst autocratic government".

Rahman's daughter Hasina was ousted from power on August 5 after massive student-led protests against her Awami League government.

There was also no mention of India's role in Yunus' address to the Nation on Bijoy Dibosh. India commemorates December 16 as Vijay Diwas when over 90,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered before the Indian Army, leading to the creation of Bangladesh.

India had also backed Bengali guerrillas in the fight against Pakistan Army after West Pakistan's leadership refused to acknowledge the 1970 election victory of Mujibur Rahman's Awami League.

President Droupadi Murmu and several Indian political leaders too had paid homage Monday to the heroes of the 1971 war.

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

Trump says it was 'stupid' for Biden to let Ukraine use US weapons to strike deeper into Russia

PALM BEACH, Dec 17: President-elect Donald Trump on Monday suggested that he may reverse President Joe Biden's recent decision to allow Ukrainian forces to use American long-range weapons to strike deeper into Russian territory.

Trump called the decision made by Biden last month "stupid." He also expressed anger that his incoming administration was not consulted before Biden made the move. With the loosening of the restrictions, Biden gave Ukraine long-sought permission to use the Army Tactical Missile System provided by the U.S. to strike Russian positions hundreds miles from its border.

"I don't think that should have been allowed, not when there's a possibility — certainly not just weeks before I take over," Trump said during a wide-ranging news conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort. "Why would they do that without asking me what I thought? I wouldn't have had him do that. I think it was a big mistake."

Trump's withering criticism of the Biden administration's move comes as the Democratic administration aims to push every last dollar already designated for Ukraine out the door to help repel Russia's invasion before Trump takes office on Jan. 20, with future aid uncertain.

But even as Biden tries to surge weaponry and other aid to Ukraine

in his final five weeks in office, the moment underscored that it's Trump who holds the most significant influence over how Ukraine can use its U.S.-provided arsenal in the long run. It's a critical piece of leverage he could use to try to follow through on his campaign pledge to bring about a swift end to the conflict.

Asked if he would consider reversing the Biden administration decision, Trump responded: "I might. I think it was a very stupid thing to do."

The White House pushed back on Trump's criticism, noting that the decision was made after months of deliberations that started before last month's election.

"All I can assure you is that in the conversations we've had with them since the election, and we've had at various levels, we have articulated to them the logic behind it, the thinking behind it, why we were doing it," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said of the current administration's coordination with the outgoing administration.

Trump's relationship with Russian leader Vladimir Putin has been scrutinised since his 2016 campaign for president, when he called on Russia to find and make public missing emails deleted by Hillary Clinton, his Democratic opponent. Trump publicly sided with Putin over U.S. intelligence officials on whether Russia had interfered in the

2016 election to help him, and Trump has praised the Russian leader and even called him "pretty smart" for invading Ukraine.

Vice President-elect JD Vance has said that while the U.S. has differences with Russia, it was counterproductive to approach Moscow as an enemy.

Trump on Monday reiterated his call on both Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin to negotiate an end to the war, calling the death and despair caused by the conflict "carnage."

But Trump also appeared to acknowledge that finding an immediate endgame to the war — something he has previously said he could get done within 24 hours of taking office — could be difficult.

"I think the Middle East will be in a good place," Trump said, referring to the conflict in Gaza and an unsettled Syria following the ouster of Bashar al-Assad. "I think actually more difficult is going to be the Russia-Ukraine situation."

Trump declined to say whether he has spoken with Putin since the election.

Zelenskyy met with Trump in Paris earlier this month, while the president-elect was visiting France for the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral. Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian officials have been making a forceful effort to get Trump to maintain support for Ukraine. (AP)

Taipei mayor calls for less confrontation with China

TAIPEI (TAIWAN), Dec 17: The China-friendly mayor of Taiwan's capital, Taipei, on Tuesday called for less confrontation between the sides, even as Beijing continues to send warships and fighter jets to intimidate the self-governing island democracy.

Chiang Wan-an was speaking Tuesday at the 15th Taipei-Shanghai Twin-City Forum, which is not sanctioned by Taiwan's government, whose official position is that Taiwan is already an independent country with no reason to unify with China.

Chiang put a somewhat romantic twist on his remarks, saying "I am a Taipei mayor elected by the people. I have high expectations for whether there is peace, tension, or development across the strait. I think there should be more... lights on fishing boats at dawn and less noise of (war) ships and (war) planes."

Between Monday and Tuesday, China sent 10 military aircraft and seven aircraft toward Taiwan, according to Taiwan's Defence Ministry. Four of the aircraft crossed the middle line of the Taiwan Strait that forms an unofficial border between the sides. China considers Taiwan part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, although economic ties between the sides — especially with China's financial hub of Shanghai — remain robust, with an emphasis on high-tech.

Shanghai's representative, Vice Mayor Hua Yuan, told the 102 participants that, "the people of the two sides are all one family."

Taiwan banned nine Chinese reporters from the gathering, saying they were superfluous, along with a Shanghai official for Taiwan affairs, in response to new, harsh new penalties targeting "diehard Taiwan independence separatists." Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said Beijing's move had severely disrupted already meagre bilateral exchanges and put Taiwanese residents in China at risk. Faced with China's massive military, Taiwan has been upgrading its defences with latest version F-16 fighter jets, missiles, submarines and artillery. (AP)

Political strife erupts over South Korean court as it is set to determine fate of impeached Yoon

SEOUL, Dec 17: South Korea's acting leader vowed Tuesday to convey to the world that things are back to normal following parliament's impeachment of conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, but rival parties began squabbling over the mechanics of a court ruling to determine whether to formally unseat or reinstate him.

The country's liberal opposition-controlled parliament voted to impeach Yoon last Saturday over his short-lived December 3 martial law imposition, suspending his presidential powers until the Constitutional Court determines whether to uphold or overturn the decision. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election must be held to pick his successor within two months.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, who became acting leader, has taken steps to reassure the US and other countries and stabilise markets. Presiding over a Cabinet Council meeting on Tuesday, Han said he will continuously do his utmost to inform the international society that Republic of Korea is fast regaining stability and maintain confidence with partners.

But the country's intense political strife appears to be far from over, as the rival parties began bickering over whether to fill three vacant justices' seats at the Constitutional Court.

To formally end Yoon's presidency, the nine-member court panel needs support from at least six justices. But since three seats remain vacant following retirements, a unanimous decision in favour of Yoon's impeachment is required to throw him out of office for good. Three of the court's nine justices

are directly appointed by the president. Three others are nominated by the Supreme Court head and another three by the National Assembly, and their formal appointments by the president has widely been a formality. The three seats that are currently open are to be nominated by the National Assembly two by the Democratic Party and the other by Yoon's ruling People Power Party.

The court can rule on Yoon's case only with the current six justices. But the main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which led the impeachment efforts against Yoon, has said it would speed up the process of restoring the court's nine-justice system to promote fairness and public confidence in its ruling.

But PPP floor leader Kweon Seong-dong, a Yoon loyalist, created a stir Tuesday as he voiced his objection to a Democratic Party push to fill the three vacancies. He said it would be inappropriate for Han, the acting leader, to appoint justices nominated by parliament, saying such authorities solely rest with the president.

An acting president can appoint Constitutional Court justices when there is a presidential vacancy, but not when the president's duties are just suspended, Kweon said.

Many observers say the court's current six-member configuration is advantageous for Yoon's chances to return to office, as it would only require a single justice rejecting the parliament impeachment. They note Cheong Hyungsik, one of the six justices, is a clear conservative who was directly appointed by Yoon. (AP)

Sri Lanka to save over Rs 1,000 million annually by slashing security of former presidents

COLOMBO, Dec 17: The annual saving by slashing the excessive personal security provided to former presidents would be Rs 1,200 million, parliament was told on Tuesday.

The personnel security provided to former presidents would be slashed from January 1, the government has already announced.

The Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala on Tuesday said the government's aim was to ensure the security of the entire country and the decision to cut excessive security (for former presidents) was in line with the government policy.

"We pledged to the country that we would ensure that those holding high public positions are as safe as the rest of the citizens. We wanted to end the culture of big VIP convoys speeding on our roads disregarding traffic rules,"



Wijepala said.

Wijepala said Rs 1,448 million had been spent to provide security during 2024 to ex-presidents. "This is a burden on the people in these hard times," Wijepala said.

The former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's share of expenditure was the highest with Rs 710 million for the deployment of over 310 personnel for his personal protection.

"It is not that we have personally targeted the former president Mahinda Rajapaksa," Wijepala said adding that new deployments

have come from scientific threat assessments done on the security needs of all six of them.

Wijepala said all would be provided just 60 police personnel each under the new arrangements as recommended by the committee which assessed the issue.

The opposition Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), which Rajapaksa heads, dubbed the move a political act of vengeance claiming he was still under threat from remnants of the LTTE.

He is largely credited for victory over the LTTE, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, that had run a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland in the northern and eastern provinces of the island nation for nearly 30 years before its collapse in 2009 after the Sri Lankan Army killed its supreme leader V Prabhakaran. (PTI)

Grenade found near school teacher's residence



IMPHAL, Dec 17: Unidentified miscreants placed a hand grenade near the residence of a primary school teacher in Uripok Khaidem Leikai area here, police said on Tuesday. The grenade was found early this morning near the residential gate by family members, the police said. Police personnel rushed to the spot after being informed. "Miscreants placed a hand grenade at the residence of Khomdran Pramod (47), Primary Teacher located at Uripok Khaidem Leikai Lane under Imphal Police station in Imphal West district," they said. Meanwhile, locals staged a sit-in to protest the placing of a hand grenade at the residence of Khomdran. (PTI)

Next round of tripartite meeting by the second week of January 2025
ENPO 'temporarily' accepts Centre's offer for FNT

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Dec 17: The Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) declared that it had temporarily decided to accept the offer of the government of India for Frontier Nagaland Territory (FNT), a unique arrangement with executive, legislative and financial autonomy, for six eastern districts of Nagaland.

The decision was taken at a tripartite meeting among the ENPO, Centre and Nagaland government held in New Delhi on December 13.

The meeting was convened as per the discussion held between the ENPO and ministry of home affairs committee in Guwahati on August 13 and on the direction of Union home minister Amit Shah.

At the tripartite meeting, the government of India was led by Union home secretary Govin Mohan, Nagaland government by chief secretary J Alam and ENPO by its president Chingmak Chang.

According to a release issued by ENPO president Chang and gen-



eral secretary M Honang Konyak and received on Tuesday, the ENPO delegation made its unwavering stand during the meeting very clear that the demand of the people of eastern Nagaland is for a separate state of "Frontier Nagaland".

However, the release said, the ENPO having considered the difficulties of the government of India at the present juncture had decided

to temporarily accept its offer for FNT.

It was also decided at the meeting to hold the next round of tripartite meeting by the second week of January 2025 to deliberate on some unresolved issues.

With the ongoing negotiation on FNT at an advanced stage, the ENPO said it is optimistic that the government of India under the leadership of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi will not fail in fulfilling the proposed offer for FNT in the interest of the people of eastern Nagaland.

The ENPO further expressed its confidence that Union home minister Shah and Nagaland Chief Minister Niphiu Rio would honour the statement made in Mon town on February 20, 2023, and in Tuensang town on February 21, 2023, that once the NDDP-BJP government comes to power in Nagaland, the ENPO issues will be resolved with full cooperation from the state government.

It also thanked the state government for submitting its comments as sought by the Centre on the highlights of the draft memorandum of settlement on FNT, paving the way for the tripartite meeting in New Delhi on December 13.

The ENPO further expressed its appreciation to the MHA committee led by AK Mishra for its utmost sincerity and commitment to fulfilling the aspirations of the people of eastern Nagaland without further delay.

Militant outfit members arrested over killing of labourers in Manipur



IMPHAL, Dec 17: Eight cadres of the banned militant outfit Kangleipak Communist Party (People's War Group) were arrested from Manipur's Kakching district in connection with the recent killing of two migrant labourers from Bihar, police said on Tuesday.

Search operations were launched across Manipur on December 14 to apprehend those who were involved in the killing of the two labourers, and an active member of the proscribed outfit was first apprehended from Kakching Lamkhai area on Monday, a police statement said.

"From his inputs, a police team raided a camp located at the Kakching Mamang Ching Laipham Loknung area and arrested seven more cadres of KCP (PWG) from there," the police said.

Arms and ammunition and 10 mobile phones were recovered from their possession, the police statement said.

The KCP (PWG) is a faction of the banned outfit Kangleipak Communist Party, which was accused of being involved in extortion and other crimes in Imphal Valley.

Chief minister N Biren Singh had condemned the brutal killing of young brothers, Sunalal Kumar (18) and Dasharat Kumar (17), from Bihar in Kakching district of Manipur.

"This act of terrorism is a direct assault on our values, and my deepest condolences go out to their grieving families," he had said. Singh also announced ₹ 10 lakh ex gratia for each of the bereaved family and said the case would be transferred to NIA, if needed. (PTI)

70 acres of illegal poppy cultivation destroyed in Ukhrul



IMPHAL, Dec 17: Around 70 acres of illegal poppy cultivation in three villages in Manipur's Ukhrul district were destroyed, police said on Tuesday. Thirteen huts, which were found on the poppy fields, were also burnt down during the drive on Monday, and an investigation has been initiated to identify the culprits involved in the illegal plantation, a senior officer said.

"A joint team of the Manipur Police, the forest department and the Assam Rifles conducted poppy destruction in Phalee, Tora and Champhung villages under Lungchong Maiphei (LM) Police Station in Ukhrul. Approximately, 70 acres of poppy plantation was destroyed," he said.

An FIR has been registered and

efforts are being made to identify the culprits, the police officer said.

Last week, the Manipur Police and the forest department had destroyed around 55 acres of illegal poppy cultivation in the hill range of Shihai Khullen in Ukhrul district. Notably, 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. (PTI)

M'laya minister claims blocking road bid unfortunate

SHILLONG, Dec 17: Meghalaya education minister Rakkam A Sangma recently referred to the recent threat issued by a Hindu based organization of blocking key roads of Meghalaya as very unfortunate.

"I always used to say that religious groups never make threats and they are not the proper group to give such threats, this is unfortunate. Look, religion is for peace. We worship God for peace and harmony for individuals, for the family and for the community," Sangma told reporters.

The Kutumba Surakshya Parishad (KSP) had issued a 10-day ultimatum recently for the Meghalaya government to reopen the Mawjymbuin Cave for Hindu rituals. The group has warned of blocking key roads of Meghalaya, including Jorabat near Guwahati, if their demand is not met before Christmas. (NNN)

Manipur CM appreciates ₹ 777 cr from Centre for NH 102A widening

IMPHAL, Dec 17: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union minister of transport and highways Nitin Gadkari for sanctioning an amount of ₹ 777.61 crore for the development of the Shangshak-Tengnoupal stretch of NH-102A in the state.

In a post on X, Singh said, "I express my sincere gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji for his unwavering commitment to the development of Manipur and I thank Hon'ble Minister of Transport & Highways, Shri @nitin_gadkari ji for sanctioning the budget of ₹ 777.61 crore for Shangshak-Tengnoupal Road (Package-3) section of National Highway-102A in Manipur."

"This will help fulfill the goal to unlock the potential of sustainable development in the state by advancing economic growth, connectivity, and enhancing of eco-tourism in the region," he added.

Gadkari, in an X post earlier in the day, announced the sanction of the amount.

"In Manipur, we have sanctioned a budget of ₹ 777.61 crore for the widening and improvement of the Shangshak-Tengnoupal Road (Package-3) section of National Highway-102A. This initiative, under the Annual Plan 2024-25, will upgrade the existing sin-



gle-lane road to a two-lane configuration with a hard shoulder," the Union minister said.

"Spanning 48 kilometres, the project commences at Khonglo and terminates at Kasom-Khullen. The road serves as a vital link between two key districts of Manipur, Ukhrul and Kamjong. This development is poised to enhance road capacity and service quality, significantly lowering vehicle operating costs for users. Furthermore, it is expected to catalyse the growth of tourism, thereby contributing to the socio-economic advancement of the state," he added. (PTI)

Schools association in M'laya withdraws proposed agitations

SHILLONG, Dec 17: The Meghalaya SSA Schools Association (MSSASA) recently resolved to withdraw its proposed agitations to continue the dialogue with the state government for addressing the issues pertaining to over 13000 SSA teachers in the state.

Addressing media persons, MSSASA president Aristotle C Rymbai informed that the association has taken three decisions during its general meeting held at Students' Field, Jaiaw after the government had invited them for talks on November 18 and December 4 respectively.

"We have unanimously decided to withdraw our proposed protest as we have decided to continue discussion with the government," he said.

Rymbai also added that the association has resolved to suggest and request the government to exempt all SSA teachers, who have joined on or before July 1, 2020, from clearing the Meghalaya Teachers' Eligibility Test (MTET0 examination). (NNN)

Tripura CM invites investors to tap into state's growth potential

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Dec 17: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha recently invited investors to consider setting up projects in Tripura and assured that the state government would provide all necessary support.

Saha said this while addressing the Northeast Trade and Investment Road show at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, Colaba, Mumbai.

During his address, Saha expressed his gratitude to the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) for providing a platform to enhance investment and business opportunities in the Northeast.

The chief minister highlighted that the handover of the Ministry of DoNER has significantly contributed to showcasing business and investment opportunities in the region.

"Due to historical reasons, this region has lagged behind in many aspects of development," he noted.

He added, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always regarded the Northeast as 'Ashtalakshmi' and given prime importance to its development through the Act East Policy. Tripura, with its unique geography and socio-economic landscape, stands at the crossroads of growth and opportunity. Tripura is the most peaceful state in the country and in the Northeast region. The state has vast reserves of natural gas, making it power-surplus. Tripura's economy, primarily based on agriculture and related industries, continues to drive the state's growth."

Saha informed that the state's estimated per capita income in 2024 is at an all-time high of ₹ 1.77 lakh, compared to ₹ 1.57 lakh in 2023.

"Tripura's GSDP has grown at 8.9%, making it the state with the second-highest GSDP growth rate in the Northeast region.

ZPM stakes claim to form board in Chakma council

AIZAWL, Dec 17: The Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) has staked claim to form a board in the 20-member Chakma Autonomous District Council in Mizoram's Lawngtlai district, a party leader said on Tuesday.

The ZPM, which has become the largest party after five MNF members changed sides, is still short of the majority mark to constitute a board in the council, he said.

Now, the ZPM has the support of 10 members, one short of the majority mark of 11, to form the board.

"Ten ZPM members led by Mohan Chakma met Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati on Monday at Raj Bhavan here to stake their claim to form the next board in the Chakma Autonomous District Council," the leader said.

The delegation submitted a letter to the governor, asserting their majority in the council, he said.

Kambhampati is expected to decide on the matter soon, he said. The autonomous council has been witnessing a stalemate after the removal of the Mizo Nation Front (MNF)-led body headed by chief executive member (CEM) Rasik Mohan Chakma last week. Chakma was removed through a no-confidence motion on December 11. (PTI)

Nagaland State Day inaugurated in Wokha

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Dec 17: The General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Spear Corps of Indian Army made a visit to the Special National Integration Camp organized by the National Cadet Corps (NCC) at Wokha, Nagaland. This unique camp, aimed at fostering unity and national integration among the youth, brought together NCC cadets from across the country to celebrate the diverse cultural fabric of India.

During the visit, the GOC interacted with the cadets, commending their discipline, enthusiasm, and commitment to national integration. Addressing the gathering, the GOC emphasized the critical role of youth in shaping the future of the nation and lauded the NCC's contribution in nurturing leadership, character, and a spirit of service among young citizens.

As part of the visit, the GOC also inaugurated the Nagaland State Day celebrations at the camp. The event showcased the rich cultural heritage of Nagaland, featuring traditional dances, music, and exhibitions that highlighted the state's unique identity and contributions to the nation. The vibrant celebrations provided an opportunity for the cadets to experience and appreciate the diversity of India's Northeastern region.

Department of environment, forest and climate change, department of horticulture, department of sericulture, department of employment skill, development entrepreneurship, department of tourism among others.

Second North East India Film Festival in Feb in Imphal

Feature films will have duration of 72-180 minutes, non-feature films of 30 minutes or below

IMPHAL, Dec 17: The 2nd North East India Film Festival (NEIFF) 2025 will be held in February 2025 in Imphal. This event will be organized by THOUNA, Manipur in association with Film Forum Manipur and Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), Government of Manipur under the sponsorship of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India and National Film Development Corporation.

The event aims to bring together filmmakers and producers from the eight North Eastern States—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—to celebrate and showcase their cinematic brilliance.

Y Nilachandra Singh, chairman of the Organizing Committee for the 2nd NEIFF 2025, while addressing the media today in Imphal, emphasized the growth and expanded scope of the festival. He pointed out that while the 1st NEIFF 2024, held from March 3 to 7, 2024, featured only feature films, the upcoming edition will include both Feature Films and Non-Feature Films in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of information and broadcasting. He further announced that a minimum of 25 films are expected to be screened during the festival, providing audiences with a richer and more diverse cinematic experience.

He explained that feature films will



have a duration of 72-180 minutes, while non-feature films will have a duration of 30 minutes or below. All films must be certified by CBFC during the period from January 1 to December 31, 2024. Additionally, exceptional films beyond the planned 25, including those without censor board certification, will be screened under the non-competition section.

Y Nilachandra Singh announced that the festival will be held from February 12 to February 16, 2025, at Tantha Polis Cinema, Lamphel in Imphal. The event will have 8 award categories along with a special mention award, all of which will be selected by an esteemed jury. The award

categories are best feature film, best director of feature film, best screenplay of feature film, best cinematography of feature film, best editing of feature film, best sound of feature film, the jury award of feature film and best non-feature film.

He further announced that film entries are now open, with the last date for online applications and film submissions set for January 15, 2025. The tentative date for the announcement of selected films is January 31, 2025. The inaugural function will be held at the Manipur Dance Academy, while film screenings will commence from the second day of the festival, he added. (NNN)

No. GDB/15*-ASF/C206/2022-23/480 Dated:-07/12/2024

TENDER NO.9 OF 2024-25
INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

Selected tenders affixing Non-refundable court fee stamp of RS. 8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty Five Paise) only with at validity period of 180 (One Hundred Eighty) days which will subsequently be covered and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the intending Registered Contractors of all categories of the Assam PWD (Bldg. & Roads) for submitting tender for the work below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2:30 PM 07-12-2024 to 27-12-2024 and will be opened on the date 27-12-2024 at 2:30 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx Estimated value of work	Earnest money 2% for GNL & 1% for ST/SC/OBC/MOBC	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
1	Const. of Community Hall at No.3 Bhogpur, under near Idgah. SOPD fund for the year 2024-25	15,00,000.00	Rs. 30,000/- & Rs. 15,000/-	Rs. 450/-	3 (Three month)

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the Office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up to 11:30 AM in all working days from 07-12-2024 to 27-12-2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker Cheque/Bank Draft/ Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the BDO, Goreswar Development Block.

Sd/- Block Development Officer
Goreswar Development Block

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1120

Nadda slams Cong over Preamble amendment

'Bad lot interfered with Constitution many times'

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Even a good constitution can prove to be bad if those implementing it are not good, Leader of the House in the Rajya Sabha J P Nadda said on Tuesday, asserting the "bad lot" interfered with the Indian Constitution many times.

Participating in a discussion on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India", Nadda attacked the Congress over the Emergency, amendment to the Preamble of the Constitution and also raised the Article 370 issue.

He said the nation is indebted to the members of the Constituent Assembly who shaped the Constitution.

"As the prime minister said, India is not just the largest democracy, but the mother of democracy. The architects of our Constitution knew this is not a nation in the making, it was always a nation," said Nadda, who is also the BJP president.

"As per Indian ethos, democracy comprises freedom, acceptability, equality, inclusivity and allowing citizens to lead a dignified life," he said.

The BJP leader quoted B R Ambedkar to say "however good a Constitution may be, if those who



are implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad". He also said the "bad lot has interfered with the Constitution many times".

Mentioning Article 370, which was abrogated in 2019, the BJP president blamed former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress for bringing it in the first place.

Ambedkar had opposed the provision of Article 370, while Article 35A was brought in with Presidential assent without a debate in Parliament, Nadda said.

"I am proud to say, Syama Prasad Mookerjee raised the issue of Article 370 and sacrificed his

life for it... His mother wrote to Nehru Ji and sought an investigation. But that request was ignored and this is also registered in the pages of history," he claimed. "It is a question of the good lot and the bad lot," Nadda said. "After the bad lot, we got the good lot. On August 5, 2019, we abrogated Article 370... I once again congratulate the PM. Because of his wisdom, Jammu and Kashmir is an inseparable part of India now."

He also said Congress leaders are saying they have apologised for the Emergency, but "how do we believe this?"

The 50th anniversary of the

Emergency is next year, he reminded the House and said, "We will observe anti-democracy day. We invite the Indian National Congress to join us."

"There was an attempt to murder democracy... if there is any regret in their hearts, I invite you to join us on June 25, 2025," Nadda said.

The government declared June 25 as "Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas", the day the Emergency was imposed in 1975 by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Nadda also claimed that Ambedkar, during the debates of the Constituent Assembly, had said there was no need to include the words 'secular' and 'socialist' in the Preamble of the Constitution.

"Ambedkar said there was no need to include 'secular', as the entire Constitution embodied the concept of a secular state that meant no discrimination on grounds of religion and equal rights and status of all citizens," he said.

"On the inclusion of the term socialist, he had said it is against the very grain of democracy to decide what kind of society people of India should live in," Nadda added. (PTI)

Voting showed BJP does not have 2/3 majority for constitutional amendment: Tharoor on ONOE bills

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Tuesday hit out at the government, saying voting at the introduction stage of two bills on simultaneous elections in the Lok Sabha showed the BJP did not have the two-third majority required to pass a constitutional amendment.

Two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections were introduced in the Lok Sabha after a fiery debate on Tuesday.

Opposition parties dubbed the draft laws -- a Constitution amendment bill and an ordinary bill -- as an attack on the federal structure, a charge rejected by the government.

"We (the Congress) are not the only ones that have opposed this bill. The vast majority of the opposition parties have opposed this bill and the grounds are very many, it is a violation of the federal structure of the Constitution. Why should a state government fall if the central government falls?" he told reporters in the Parliament premises.

"Why should the timetable of one who enjoys the mandate of the people be truncated because of the



timetable of another? It makes no sense. In a parliamentary system, you cannot have fixed terms. The reason that fixed terms ended in 1969 is because of the fact that we have in our country a parliamentary system... different Houses, different majorities, different coalitions, may rise and fall at different times," Tharoor said.

He added that going through the trouble of changing the system like this made no sense because it would again result in the same mess when a future government at the Centre or in the states lose the

confidence of the majority. "My view is that this entire thing is a folly. In any case, the votes today have demonstrated that the BJP does not have the two-third majority required to pass a constitutional amendment," he said.

Tharoor said the government might constitute Parliament's joint committee in such a way that it has a majority but, without a two-third majority in the House, there would not be a constitutional amendment.

"So this discussion is increasingly futile," he added. (PTI)

SFI activists stage protest against Kerala Governor



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Dec 17: The Kerala University Senate campus here on Tuesday witnessed dramatic scenes as activists of the Student's Federation of India (SFI), the students' wing of the ruling CPI(M), staged a protest against Governor Arif Mohammed Khan while he was attending a seminar.

The ruling CPI(M) and the SFI have been at loggerheads with Governor Khan over various issues for some time.

Despite the intense security laid by police, the SFI activists forcefully opened the closed gates of the campus and ran towards the Senate

Hall where Khan was participating in the seminar.

Though the police closed the doors and windows of the seminar hall and prevented the protesters from entering inside, they engaged in a minor scuffle with the law enforcers.

The SFI activists later staged a sit-in at the portals of the Senate Hall. They held a protest march through the campus and went out through the main gate.

SFI leaders, who led the protest, later accused Governor Khan of attempting to "saffronise" universities in the state.

They also criticised him over the

appointment of vice chancellors in various varsities and warned that it was only a token protest.

Meanwhile, Governor Khan, who came out after inaugurating the three-day-long seminar organised by the Sanskrit Department, lashed out at the reporters when they asked questions about the SFI protest.

When reporters asked why the protesters were not arrested, a fuming Khan told them to ask the question to the city police commissioner.

"What is my role in it? Why are you asking this question to me? Go and ask the police commissioner. How do I know? I am addressing a meeting," he said.

Accusing the media of not having an interest in academic seminars or in the number of people attending it, the Governor also alleged that it was interested only in disruptive activity.

The Governor's recent appointment of vice-chancellors to technical and digital universities in the state had invited sharp criticism from the CPI(M) which alleged that Khan bypassed the High Court's directive in making these appointments. (PTI)

Cong MLAs stage protest at assembly complex, accuse govt of crushing state under debt burden



BHOPAL, Dec 17: Congress MLAs in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday staged a protest on the premises of the assembly complex here against the Mohan Yadav-led BJP government, accusing it of crushing the state under debt burden.

The Congress legislators, led by Leader of Opposition Umang Singh, reached the Vidhan Bhavan premises by holding bowls and placards to target the state government, alleging that it was running the financial affairs in the state by procuring loans.

The opposition MLAs registered the protest on the second day of the

state legislative assembly's winter session.

By holding bowls in hands, the Congress MLAs targeted the state government over its continuous borrowing, Singhar said.

"When the leadership is weak, debt becomes a burden and people suffer," he said.

What the BJP government has done in Madhya Pradesh is not only a financial crime, but also a terrible betrayal of the state's future, the Congress leader added.

"The ruling BJP and Chief Minister Mohan Yadav put the debt burden on the people of the state

for political gains and are still begging with a bowl in hand," he alleged.

Due to the state's borrowing, there is a debt of ₹ 52,000 on every citizen in the state, Singhar claimed.

"The government is taking loans, but development is not taking place in the state. Various posts in the government are lying vacant. The state government has failed to give money for the development of tribals. It has failed to provide fertilisers to farmers and also give ₹ 3,000 per month to the beneficiaries of Ladli Behna scheme as promised," he said.

The BJP government also failed to provide a minimum support price (MSP) to paddy and wheat as promised by the party in its election manifesto, he said.

The Government wants to take loans but doesn't want the state's economy to be strong, he alleged.

In the 230-member Madhya Pradesh assembly, 164 MLAs belong to the ruling BJP, 65 to opposition Congress, while one belongs to the Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP). (PTI)

'PM favoured referring ONOE bill to JPC for wider discussions'

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Prime Minister Narendra Modi favoured detailed discussion at every level on the 'one nation, one election' bill and wanted it to be referred to a Joint Committee of Parliament, Home Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday.

Shah made the remarks in Lok Sabha when the House was hearing objections to the introduction of the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill that seeks to usher in simultaneous polls to the Lower House and state assemblies.

"When One Nation, One Election bills came up in Cabinet, PM Modi said these should be referred to the Joint Committee of Parliament. There should be a detailed discussion over it at every level," Shah said. The home minister pointed out that DMK member T R Baalu too had favoured referring the bill to a parliamentary committee.

Shah said the bill can be discussed in greater detail in the Joint Committee of Parliament. The report of the JPC will be approved by the Union Cabinet and the Bill can be discussed again in Parliament, he said. (PTI)

Odisha BJP seeks clarification from Patnaik

BHUBANESWAR, Dec 17: Odisha's ruling BJP on Tuesday sought a reply from BJD president Naveen Patnaik on his party MP Sulata Deo's statement in Rajya Sabha "targeting" President Droupadi Murmu.

Deo, while participating in the discussion on the "Glorious journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India" in the Rajya Sabha on Monday had "targeted" Murmu, who hails from Odisha, BJP Odisha spokesperson Anil Biswal said.

"Honourable President is a daughter of Odisha. She has expressed her anguish over the Kar rape case. But why is she silent on Manipur which is on boil for over the last one-and-a-half years? Why is she silent on Sambhal? There have been 1,250 rapes in Odisha in the last six months. Where is the President? When will she break her silence? Is this what our Constitution teaches us?" Deo had said.

Reacting to Deo's statement in the Upper House of the Parliament, Biswal in a post on X said:

Delhi govt not implementing many central schemes: Agri minister

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan on Tuesday criticised the Delhi government for not implementing several central schemes meant for farmers, calling it "extremely unfortunate" that farmers in the region were being deprived of crucial benefits.

Responding to a query in the Lok Sabha during the Question Hour, Chauhan urged the Delhi government to prioritise the welfare of farmers and implement beneficial schemes, particularly in areas surrounding the national capital.

"I request the Delhi government to implement farmer-centric schemes for the benefit of farmers as there is agricultural land and farming activity around Delhi," he added.

"The Centre works in coordination with state governments to ensure its schemes reach farmers. It is extremely unfortunate that the Delhi government is not availing of the benefits of many schemes, which is ultimately affecting the farmers," Chauhan said.

Referring to the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanism for organic fertilisers, the minister emphasised that the Centre directly transferred the subsidies to farmers' accounts.

He assured that farmers engaged in organic farming in Delhi would receive full support from the Centre.

"We provide direct assistance to farmers through DBT for organic fertilisers. Even in Delhi, we will fully support and help farmers practising organic farming," he said. (PTI)

Cong MPs express solidarity with B'deshi minorities

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Several Congress MPs, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, staged a protest in Parliament premises on Tuesday, demanding justice for Hindus and Christians facing atrocities in Bangladesh. The MPs protested with handbags which had 'Stand with minorities of Bangladesh' written on it. They raised slogans urging the government to ensure justice for minorities in Bangladesh.

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi was seen carrying a cream-coloured handbag to Parliament on which it was written "Bangladesh ke Hindu aur Isaiyon ke saath khade ho" (stand with the Hindus and Christians of Bangladesh). This comes a day after she expressed solidarity with the people of Palestine, carrying a handbag with 'Palestine' emblazoned on it.

Several Congress MPs led by Priyanka Gandhi had staged a protest in Parliament premises on Monday also, demanding justice for Hindus and Christians facing atrocities in Bangladesh.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha during the Zero Hour on Monday, Priyanka Gandhi had sought the government's support for those who are in pain because of the attacks in Bangladesh. "The government should raise the issue of atrocities against minorities, both Hindus and Christians, in Bangladesh. It should discuss this with the Bangladesh government and support those who are in pain," she had said. (PTI)

Nehru symbol of parliamentary democracy: RJD's Manoj Kumar Jha in Rajya Sabha

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Criticising the BJP for frequently taking jibes at the country's first prime minister, RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha on Tuesday said Jawaharlal Nehru is a symbol of parliamentary democracy against authoritarianism.

Participating in the discussion on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India" in the Rajya Sabha, Jha said that Nehru did not lose the general elections of 2014, 2019 and 2024, but it was the opposition and the Congress which were defeated.

"You (BJP) may win elections for another 100 years but you will find Nehru (still) standing because he is a symbol of parliamentary democracy against authoritarianism. He is a shield ('dhaal', 'raksha kavach')," the senior RJD leader said. Jha said people keep criticising Nehru but they should always keep in mind the situation in the country in 1946 and 1947.

"Constructing the ground floor of a house is the hardest. Nehru, Ambedkar and Patel built the foundation. You (BJP-NDA) are constructing the second and third



floors. You may construct five more floors but without the foundation, the floors are of no use. This we should always keep in mind," Jha said.

Referring to the current situation in Bangladesh, he said he had earlier read about 1971 but was now witnessing it.

Jha said had India's report on minorities been good, "we could have asked Bangladesh and Pakistan to learn from us" how minorities should be treated.

Fadnavis was in favour of inducting me in cabinet: Bhujbal

MUMBAI, Dec 17: Senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal on Tuesday launched a veiled attack on party president Ajit Pawar over his exclusion from the new council of ministers, claiming Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis was in favour of his induction in the cabinet. He said Ajit Pawar, the NCP president, makes decisions for the party like Fadnavis for the BJP and Eknath Shinde for the Shiv Sena.

Amid speculation over his "Jahan nahi chaina, wahan nahi reha" remark a day before, Bhujbal said he would speak on Wednesday after discussing with NCP workers and people from the Yeola constituency.

The prominent OBC leader said he wasn't disappointed about not being made a minister but felt humiliated by his treatment.

Speaking to reporters in Nashik, Bhujbal claimed that he was asked to contest Lok Sabha elections in May but his name was never finalised. Weeks after winning assembly elections from Yeola seat, Bhujbal said he was recently offered a Rajya Sabha seat.

"I accepted the suggestion to contest Lok Sabha elections from Nashik. When I wanted to be in the Rajya Sabha earlier this year, I was asked to fight the assembly elections. I was offered a Rajya Sabha seat eight days ago which I rejected.

"They didn't listen to me then, now they are giving it (Rajya Sabha seat). Am I a toy in your hands? he asked. Do you think whenever you tell me I will stand up, whenever you tell me I will sit down and contest the elections? What will the people in my constituency feel if I resign? he questioned.

"I have confirmed that Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis insisted on my inclusion in the state cabinet. The chief of each party in the Mahayuti alliance decides for his party. Fadnavis for BJP, Eknath Shinde for Shiv Sena, and Ajit Pawar for NCP," he said.

Fadnavis expanded his cabinet in Nagpur on Sunday and inducted 39 new members in his team -- 19 from the BJP, 11 from the Shinde-led Shiv Sena and 9 from Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). (PTI)

Simultaneous polls bill slammed

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Tuesday termed as "anti-constitutional" the bill that lays down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections and asserted that it is against federalism. Her remarks came after two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections were introduced in the Lok Sabha after a fiery debate.

Opposition parties dubbed the draft laws -- a Constitution amendment bill and an ordinary bill -- as an attack on the federal structure, a charge rejected by the government.

"Anti-constitutional bill, it is against the federalism of our nation. We are opposing the bill," she told reporters in Parliament premises. (PTI)

He also stressed that despite all challenges, the Constitution has shown the way to the country and will keep doing so even in the next 1,000 years.

Participating in the discussion, the Congress' Syed Naseer Hussain wondered why the ruling party had problems with socialism.

"Do you have objections to reservation in government and PSUs? Do you have an objection to giving land to the poor?... Don't you want poor labourers to get work under MGNREGA," he asked the treasury benches.

Referring to the prime minister's statement about 'zero tolerance against corruption', the Congress leader asked why the government was not setting up a JPC on the Adani issue or carrying out an inquiry into the electoral bonds issue.

He asked the government to conduct an inquiry into all allegations of corruption.

Hussain also emphasised that the religion of Hindustan should be democracy and the holy book should be the Constitution. (PTI)

CORRIGENDUM - 1
AGAINST E-TENDER NOTICE
 NO. : KYQ-CDO-ETP-02-24-25;
 DATED: 30-11-2024

E-TENDER NOTICE NO. KYQ-CDO-ETP-02-24-25; dated: 30-11-2024 against the work- Construction of ETP waste water recycling plant for reuse of discharge water of mechanized laundry/Kamakhyia at Coach Maintenance Depot Kamakhyia may be treated as **CANCELLED** on Administrative reasons. For details, please visit www.irops.gov.in

Sr. CDO, Guwahati
NORTH EAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers with a smile

Badlapur sexual assault case probe complete



MUMBAI, Dec 17: The Badlapur sexual assault case investigation is over and a senior police officer has been suspended for dereliction of duty, the Maharashtra government told the Bombay High Court on Tuesday.

Two charge sheets have been filed against the slain accused in the case and trustees of the school, the HC was told.

Two police constables were given a strict warning for not taking the case seriously.

Public Prosecutor Hiten Venegaonkar, appearing for the Special Investigation Team (SIT) which investigated the case, told a division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Prithviraj Chavan that the probe was complete and the SIT disbanded.

Two girls, aged four and five, were allegedly sexually assaulted in the toilet of their school in Badlapur in Thane district by an attendant in August, leading to a huge outrage and staging of protests.

The arrested accused was killed in an alleged retaliatory firing by police when he was being shifted in a police vehicle in September.

A departmental inquiry was initiated against Badlapur police station officials for delay in registering an FIR and investigation.

"A lady officer, who was the senior police inspector of Badlapur police station, has been suspended after the departmental inquiry. Her two-year increment has also been stopped," Venegaonkar told the

court.

He added that two charge sheets have been filed against the slain accused and the trustees of the school.

"The probe in the case is over and the SIT is disbanded," Venegaonkar said.

The HC had taken suo motu (on its own) cognisance and ordered the formation of a committee of experts to examine the safety of children in schools and other educational institutions.

Venegaonkar told the bench on Tuesday that the committee would submit its report in January 2025.

The court posted the matter for further hearing on December 19 on the issue of granting police protection to the parents of the slain accused who had apprehended an attack by certain persons.

Venegaonkar told the court that the parents had declined police protection but expressed apprehension about targeting their house.

"A police constable has been deployed outside their house," he said.

Advocate Amit Katarnaware, appearing for the parents of the slain accused, however, said they didn't decline police protection.

The bench said the parents should appear before it on Thursday. The HC, earlier this month, came down heavily on the state Crime Investigation Department (CID) for taking "lightly" the probe into the killing of the Badlapur school sexual assault case accused in a shootout. (PTI)

Prayers offered to Lord Hanuman in reopened Sambhal temple

SAMBHAL (UP), Dec 17: Devotees thronged the Khaggu Sarai area here on Tuesday to offer prayers to a Lord Hanuman idol that was discovered in the Bhasma Shankar temple, reopened last week after being shut for 46 years. Tuesday is dedicated to the worship of Lord Hanuman.

"The temple was cleaned around 4 am. A 'chola' (cloth meant for gods and goddesses) was offered to Lord Hanuman and the Hanuman Chalisa recited," said the temple's priest Shashikant Shukla.

He added that "shringaar (decoration)" of Lord Shiva was also done in the temple's sanctum sanctorum. The Shri Kartik Mahadev Temple (Bhasma Shankar temple) was reopened on December 13 after the authorities said they stumbled upon the covered structure during an anti-encroachment drive.

The temple housed an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivaling. It had remained locked since 1978. The temple also has a well nearby.

Meanwhile, the owner of a house opposite the temple that was flagged for encroachment said he

would remove the structure.

Shukla, the temple priest, said devotees had started coming to the temple from near and far.

He added that his "heart aches, thinking of the years that the idols had remained in darkness".

He also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the district magistrate and the superintendent of police for the temple's reopening. Vikki Kumar, a devotee who came to the temple, said, "Such an ancient temple has opened after 46 years. Tuesday, being devoted to Lord Hanuman, I have come to visit with my family."

On Monday, three damaged idols were found inside the temple well, officials had said.

The temple is situated just over a kilometre from the Shahi Jama Masjid where violence took place on November 24 during a protest over a court-ordered survey of the mosque. The Sambhal district administration has written to the Archaeological Survey of India for carbon dating of the temple and the well. (PTI)

DRDO should expand R&D efforts to include hybrid, kinetic, non-kinetic warfare areas: Parl panel

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Underlining that the ongoing conflict in the international arena has revealed the "hazards of a hybrid warfare", a parliamentary panel has recommended that the DRDO should expand its R&D efforts to enhance combat readiness against any non-conventional warfare and security threats.

In its report tabled in Parliament on Tuesday, the committee has noted "with concern that out of 55 projects, 23 were not completed within the stipulated time".

"Although, 571 projects worth Rs 34161.58 cr have been successfully completed and closed during the last 10 years (1 Jan 2012 -- till date), with respect to projects which were partially successful or unsuccessful, eight such projects worth Rs 770.31 cr were stage closed during this period," the report said.

The report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence is titled -- 'Action Taken by the Government on the Observations/ Recommendations contained in the Forty-Second Report (17th Lok Sabha) of the Standing Committee on Defence on the subject -- A Review of the Working of the De-



fence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)".

The committee in its report recalled that in its 42nd report (17th Lok Sabha), it was of the opinion that the DRDO should establish their research laboratories in premier institutes of technologies such as the IITs and IISc, Bengaluru so that students having interest in defence and military technology can be motivated to undertake further research in the area.

In this regard, the defence ministry has submitted that in response to the recommendation of the committee, the DRDO has instituted

various DRDO Industry Academia-Centre of Excellence (DIA-COE) in various IITs, IISc and central universities across the country for research engagement with academia and industries, it said.

The committee said it expresses its "satisfaction at the extant mechanism" in DRDO for research engagement with academia and industries.

It further said that the panel in its "original report had also urged the DRDO to focus more on new and emerging areas of technology applications such as artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics" for fur-

thering their research-base and also exploring the possibility of AI's application in various systems and sub-systems developed by them.

"Further, the committee feel that the ongoing conflict in the international arena has revealed, to a great extent, the hazards of a hybrid warfare, with both kinetic and non-kinetic operations. Keeping in view such drastic transformation in the warfare technology, the Committee feel that there is a need for fervid focus on research and development in the field of hybrid warfare, especially kinetic and non-kinetic warfare," the report said.

"Therefore, the committee recommend that the DRDO, in collaboration with academia and industries, should further broaden their R&D efforts to include areas such as hybrid, kinetic and non-kinetic warfare as well as anti-drone capabilities including sea drones and interceptive drones by according highest priorities in order to enhance our combat readiness against any non conventional warfare and security threats," it added.

Under the 'Recommendation

(Para No. 7)', the panel shared its earlier recommendation and the reply of the ministry.

The ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under -- "DRDO plan to expand its research activities in the areas of quantum technologies, artificial intelligence, cognitive technologies, smart materials, asymmetric technologies, terahertz, directed energy systems, high power electromagnets, etc."

The committee said it has been given to understand that the armed forces personnel "face certain difficulties" in the remote and far-flung border areas owing to their dependence on conventional sources of energy only.

"The Committee feel that DRDO, being one of the most advanced research organisation, should explore avenues for tapping new and renewable sources of energy such as solar and wind in those far-flung areas to ensure energy security for the armed forces personnel deployed in the remotest border areas for meeting their obvious daily needs. The Committee would like to be informed of the measures undertaken in this regard," the report added. (PTI)

ED conducts fresh raids in PMLA case against Pak nationals' owned betting portal

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: The Enforcement Directorate Tuesday said it has conducted fresh searches against the operatives of a betting website, owned by some Pakistani nationals, that also was involved in "illegal" broadcast of Men's T20 Cricket World Cup matches.

The searches were undertaken by the federal agency between December 10-12 in Delhi, Mumbai and Pune in the case against the portal named 'Magainwin'.

The ED's case, filed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), is based on an FIR registered by the cyber crime unit of the Ahmedabad Police in Gujarat. Bank deposits worth ₹ 30 lakh were frozen during the raids apart from seizure of "incriminating" documents, the ED said in a statement.

Magainwin, according to the agency, is a "betting" website "guised" as a gaming portal which is "actually owned" by Pakistani nationals. The operations of this website are mostly handled by In-

dian nationals working or settled in Dubai, it said.

"The betting games being shown on the website are originally played in the Philippines and other countries which allow betting activities," it said.

However, as per the investigation, the same is "re-telecast" on Maginwin's website by copying the APIs (application programming interface) of the original games. The agency said betting activities like deposits, placing of betting and withdrawal are "controlled" by the "owners" of Maginwin.

The ED claimed its probe found that the money, deposited in the bank accounts by the players/bettors, was "diverted" through layers of "shell and mule" bank accounts and further the profit part of the owners were invested in crypto assets, withdrawn in cash or sent to Dubai through Hawala channels.

The winning amounts of the players/bettors were transferred to their bank accounts through mer-

chant accounts of various shell companies maintained with payment gateways. These amounts were also transferred to the player's bank account through domestic money transfer (DMT), it said.

A "launch party" for the portal, where several "B-town celebrities" attended and endorsed Maginwin, is also under the scanner of the agency.

These celebrities also did video and photo-shoots for Maginwin and posted it on their social media accounts for its "promotion". Advertisements were also done through hoardings out of home (OOH) in various parts of India including Gujarat and Maharashtra, the ED found.

The profits generated by these betting websites is more than 50 per cent of the total deposits made by the players, it said.

The agency said it has conducted as many as 68 searches in this case till now and has seized funds and assets worth a total ₹ 3.55 crore. (PTI)

Budaun court to decide on Dec 24 whether to hear Shamsi masjid vs Neelkanth temple case

BUDAUN (UP), Dec 17: A court in Budaun will on December 24 decide whether a hearing will be held in the Jama Masjid Shamsi versus Neelkanth temple case.

The dispute started in 2022 when Mukesh Patel, the then convener of Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, claimed that the Neelkanth Mahadev temple existed at the Jama Masjid Shamsi mosque site.

He sought permission to worship in the structure.

Advocate Anwar Alam, representing the Muslim side, on Tuesday said he presented a copy of the Supreme Court order in the court along with the application. He recalled that the Supreme Court ordered on December 12 that in such cases, the lower court should neither pass any order nor take a decision on

the survey. Alam said if the lower court cannot pass any order, then there is no justification for hearing such cases. "Such hearings will only waste the court's and our time," he added.

While presenting his arguments in the court, the Hindu side's lawyer, Vivek Rander, said the Supreme Court has never said anywhere that the ongoing hearing should be stopped.

He said the apex court has clearly ordered that the cases in which the hearing is going on cannot be stopped, but the lower court cannot issue any kind of order or interim order.

Rander also said the Muslim side's lawyers are deliberately presenting such arguments to delay the case so that maximum time can be wasted. (PTI)

India's future lies in empowering people, argues AAP's Jasmine Shah in his book 'The Delhi Model'

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: AAP leader Jasmine Shah's new book 'The Delhi Model', calls for a paradigm shift in Indian governance, asserting that the future of the nation lies in empowering the people.

The book, launched by AAP supreme Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday, explores how the Delhi government's focus on human capital development, education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability has led to remarkable outcomes.

Analysing the policies of the AAP in Delhi, Shah argues that the city's success is a result of prioritising public welfare over corporate interests and tax cuts.

Shah, who previously worked as the deputy director at MIT's Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab and holds a master's in public administration from Columbia University, critiques the conventional "trickle-down" economic model.

He emphasises that Delhi's approach is a stark departure from this "outdated" theory, focusing instead on policies that uplift people, particularly the marginalised. "The Delhi Model focuses on



human capital development and better service delivery for all citizens, as opposed to the failed models of tax cuts and corporate incentives, epitomised by states like Gujarat," Shah said during the book launch.

One of the central themes of the book is the city's reform-driven education system.

Shah highlights that over 25 per cent of the Delhi state budget has been allocated to improve infrastructure, recruit teachers and enhance educational outcomes.

Initiatives like the Happiness Curriculum and Mission Buniyaad have tackled basic literacy and nu-

meracy issues while promoting holistic development among students, he says in the book and argues that these measures offer a scalable solution for other states facing educational inequality.

In the healthcare sector, Shah discusses the 'Quality Healthcare for All' initiative that provides free, cashless treatment for Delhi residents in partnership with private hospitals. The initiative covers high-end diagnostic tests, life-saving surgeries, and even ambulances, cutting down response times to 18 minutes.

Shah notes that this model has significantly improved healthcare

accessibility and affordability for thousands of Delhiites.

The book also addresses Delhi's efforts to combat air pollution, one of Delhi's most persistent challenges.

The Delhi government invested in 40 real-time air quality monitoring stations by 2022, the highest number in India, helping create targeted action plans. Additionally, the 2023 launch of India's first real-time source apportionment lab has enabled the government to identify and curb specific pollution sources, the book stated.

In his analysis, Shah states the Delhi Model presents an alternative to traditional governance methods, focusing on public welfare and human development. He suggests that empowering people, rather than prioritising corporate interests, is the key to building a more equitable future for India.

The book advocates for a shift in policy-making that places the welfare of citizens at the forefront, particularly those from marginalised communities, and claims that the AAP's Delhi Model serves as a roadmap for other states grappling with systemic challenges. (PTI)

BJP leader lauds Bangladeshi lawyer Rabindra Ghosh for fighting for jailed Hindu monk

BARRACKPORE (WB), Dec 17: Senior BJP leader Arjun Singh on Tuesday met Bangladeshi lawyer Rabindra Ghosh, who has been defending jailed Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das, in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district and felicitated him for his efforts in standing by the rights of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

The meeting, in which Hindu monk Kartick Maharaj was present, took place at the residence of Ghosh's son in Barrackpore area, where the lawyer is currently staying for medical purposes.

Ghosh, also the president of Bangladeshi Minority Watch, has been vocal about the plight of minorities in Bangladesh and has faced life threats for defending Chinmoy Krishna Das.

"We appreciate Rabindra Ghosh's courage in fighting for justice for Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. His relentless efforts, despite threats to his life, inspire us," Singh said after the meeting.

Kartick Maharaj echoed Singh's sentiments, emphasising the importance of standing up for the rights of oppressed communities.

"Rabindra Ghosh's commitment to justice reflects the true spirit of humanity. It is our duty to support him in this cause," Maharaj said. Ghosh expressed gratitude for



the recognition and reiterated his commitment to defending persecuted minorities.

"It is heartening to receive such support. The situation of minorities in Bangladesh is dire, and I will continue to fight against injustice," he said.

The lawyer also highlighted the "deteriorating" condition of minorities in Bangladesh under the current interim government led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

"The interim administration's violence on fundamentalist and violence is alarming. It's a travesty of justice," he added.

Earlier this month, Chinmoy Krishna Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal Interna-

tional Airport.

Denied bail, Das has been sent to jail till January 2 next year.

Ghosh had alleged that Das was booked on false charges for his efforts to rally the Hindu community in Bangladesh.

Human rights groups, including Ghosh's NGO, in Bangladesh have documented several cases of violence, land grabs, and forced conversions targeting Hindus in recent months.

"The international community must take notice of these atrocities. Unity among minority communities is crucial in demanding their rights," Ghosh said.

The BJP has been critical of the interim government in Bangladesh, accusing it of failing to protect minorities. (PTI)

Delhi's air quality in 'severe' category, minimum temp 5.9 deg C



NEW DELHI, Dec 17: The air quality in the national capital was in the 'severe' category on Tuesday morning with an AQI of 427 while the minimum temperature was 5.9 degrees Celsius, two notches below normal.

Out of 35 monitoring stations, 28 recorded air quality in the 'severe' category while some breached the 450 mark, classified as 'severe plus.'

The remaining seven stations recorded air quality in the 'very poor' category, according to the Sameer app, which provides hourly data from the Central Pollution Control Board.

An AQI of 400 or higher is deemed 'severe' and it can have an adverse effect on both healthy individuals and people with medical conditions.

The weather department said, "Mainly calm winds prevailed over Delhi during the past 24 hours, bringing down visibility from 800 meters in shallow fog at Palam on Monday to 350 meters in moderate fog at Safdarjung on Tuesday morning."

It added that moderate fog conditions (visibility between 200m and 500m) are likely to persist in Delhi over the next two days due to the expected prevalence of calm or easterly surface winds. Humidity

was 97 per cent at 8:30 am.

The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to settle at 24 degrees Celsius and 5 degrees Celsius, respectively.

The Centre's air quality panel for Delhi-NCR on Monday imposed the strictest Stage 4 curbs under the winter air pollution control plan, including a ban on all construction activities, as the region's air quality deteriorated to 'severe' due to unfavourable weather conditions.

Stage 4 curbs under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for winters also include a ban on the entry of polluting trucks carrying non-essential goods into Delhi and mandatory shifting of school classes, except those for X and XII, to hybrid mode.

The decision to impose Stage 4 curbs came just hours after the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) implemented restrictive measures under GRAP Stage 3, following Delhi's AQI breaching the 350 mark in the afternoon.

During winters, Delhi enforces restrictions under GRAP, which categorises air quality into four stages -- Stage I (Poor, AQI 301-300), Stage II (Very Poor, AQI 301-400), Stage III (Severe, AQI 401-450), and Stage IV (Severe Plus, AQI above 450). (PTI)

Sonakshi Sinha criticises Mukesh Khanna for 'DISTASTEFUL' COMMENTS AGAINST HER FAMILY

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Bollywood star Sonakshi Sinha has slammed veteran actor Mukesh Khanna for making "distasteful statements" against her upbringing and family while criticising her for lack of knowledge about Ramayana. Back in 2019, Sonakshi incorrectly answered a question about the Hindu epic during her appearance on popular quiz show "Kaun Banega Crorepati" (KBC), hosted by Amitabh Bachchan. Khanna, who had criticised the actor back then, re-counted the incident during a recent interview with RJ Sid-dharth Kannan.

In her response, Sonakshi, 37, posted a long note addressing Khanna, 66, on her Instagram Stories on Monday night. "Dear Sir, Mukesh Khanna ji... I recently read a statement you made saying that it's my father's fault I did not answer a question about the Ramayana correctly on a show I attended many, many years back," she wrote. The actor asked Khanna to stop bringing up the same incident to make "news at the expense" of her and her family. "... The next time you decide to say anything about the values my father has instilled in me... please re-



member it's because of those values that I have only said what I said, very respectfully, after you decided to make some distasteful statements about my upbringing." Sonakshi said though she "blanked

out" during her appearance on "KBC", she wondered how Khanna could forget the lessons to "forgive and forget" taught by Lord Ram himself. "If Lord Ram can forgive Manthara, if he can forgive Kaikeyi... if he can even forgive Ravan after the great battle was done, surely you can let go of this extremely small thing in comparison... not that I need your forgiveness," added the "Da-haad" star. In the interview with Kannan, Khanna, 66, blamed Sonakshi's father, veteran actor and TMC MP Shatrughan Sinha, for not teaching Sonakshi about Ramayana. "People got angry, 'She doesn't know'. I said it's not Sonakshi's fault; it's her father's fault. Why did you not tell your kids? Why did you let them be so modern?" he said. (PTI)



'HEAVEN ON EARTH': DILJIT DOSANJH SHARES GLIMPSES OF KASHMIR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

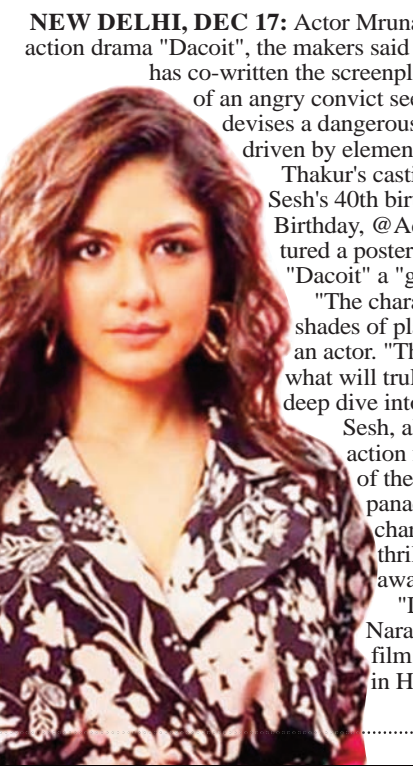


SRINAGAR, Dec 17: Actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh set social media abuzz with the videos of his visit to various tourist spots in Kashmir, including a temple, a Muslim shrine and a gurdwara. In a series of Instagram posts, the Punjabi singing sensation shared clips of offering prayers at the Adi Shankaracharya temple in the Zabarwan hills on the banks of the iconic Dal Lake, the Khanqah shrine in old city and a gurudwara in Rainawari area of Srina-

gar. "KASHMIR THE HEAVEN ON EARTH," Diljit captioned the video shared on Monday night. In other clips, the actor can also be seen interacting with locals, exchanging pleasantries with people of all ages, and wading through a vast expanse of land covered by fallen red leaves of Chinar trees. Diljit, who is currently touring the country as part of his 'Dil-Luminati India Tour 2024', then posted a video of

sipping the traditional Kashmiri tea Kahwah during his shikara ride in the Dal Lake. "Dal Lake Star Mustaq Bhai Ka Kahwah & Adnan bhai ka Rabab (sic)" he captioned the clip on social media. The singer, known for songs "5 Taara", "Kinni Kinni", "Lover", and "GOAT", will next perform in Mumbai on December 19. (PTI)

Mrunal Thakur joins Adivi Sesh in action drama 'Dacoit'



NEW DELHI, DEC 17: Actor Mrunal Thakur is set to star opposite Adivi Sesh in the upcoming action drama "Dacoit", the makers said on Tuesday. The film will be directed by Shaneil Deo, who has co-written the screenplay with Sesh. According to the makers, "Dacoit" is the story of an angry convict seeking vengeance on his ex-girlfriend who betrayed him. "He devises a dangerous plan to trap her, setting the stage for an intense action drama driven by elemental forces - love, betrayal, and revenge," read the plotline. Thakur's casting announcement in "Dacoit" was made on the occasion of Sesh's 40th birthday. "Yes I gave up. But loved with a true heart. Happy Birthday, @AdiviSesh #DACOIT," read the caption of the post which featured a poster from the film. In a statement, the "Sita Raman" star called "Dacoit" a "great mixture of rustic storytelling". "The character I'm set to depict in the film will allow me to explore shades of playing an on-screen character that I haven't explored before as an actor. "This proposition mixed with the genre and script of Dacoit is what will truly make it a treat to watch for the audiences. I can't wait to deep dive into the world envisioned by Shaneil," she added. Sesh, also known for "Major" and "Goodachari", said it's a "solid action film with a touching love story". "Mrunal has brought some of the finest characters to life on the big screen, bringing a unique panache to each role. Her exceptional ability to elevate every character she portrays makes her truly remarkable. We are thrilled to welcome Mrunal to the 'Dacoit' team and eagerly await going head-to-head on the big screens," he added. "Dacoit" is produced by Supriya Yarlagadda and Suniel Narang and presented by Annapurna Studios. The shooting on the film is currently on in Hyderabad. It is being shot simultaneously in Hindi and Telugu languages. (PTI)



Zakir Hussain could have been young Salim in 'Mughal-e-Azam'

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Zakir Hussain was seven when he performed in public for the first time. It was around the same time that he met director K Asif on the sets of "Mughal-e-Azam" for what was almost an audition for the role of the young Prince Salim. But it was not meant to be. His father, the tabla legend Alla Rakha, intervened and said his son was going to be a musician. And Hussain, who went on to be one of the most accomplished tabla players in history, fulfilled his father's prophecy. Hussain died at a San Francisco hospital on Monday due to complications arising from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease. He was 73. The tabla maestro recalled his early brush with

the movies in Nasreen Munni Kabir's book "Zakir Hussain: A Life in Music". "Did I tell you that I auditioned for young Prince Salim's role in Mughal-e-Azam?" he is quoted as saying. The filmmaker K Asif and his father knew each other, both regulars at Mohan Studio. While Alla Rakha was on the studio's payroll, Asif, known for his obsession with detail and grandeur, was busy building the famous 'Sheesh Mahal' set for the song "Jab pyaar kiya toh darna kya". "Abba's man Friday, Shaukat, took me to Mohan Studio one day. Shaukat has passed away now. Besides working for my father, he would moonlight as a film extra. So Shaukat took me to see Asif Sahib because he

had asked Abba to send me over. I remember they were filming on the Sheesh Mahal set, and I met Dilip Kumar Sahib there. "He looked at me, cupped his hands around my face and lifted my chin so that he could take a closer look. He turned to Shaukat and said: 'Asif ke paas le jaana' [Take him to Asif]. So that was that," reads the book. Before Asif could say anything, Alla Rakha had a change of heart and said, "Nahin, yeh actor nahin banega, yeh music karega. musician hoga (No, he will not become an actor, he'll play music and become a musician)." "It was hardly a real audition. I don't think there were proper auditions in those days. Someone just looked at an aspiring actor and said: 'Isko le lete hain'

[Let's take him]. No one used to ask the actor to read lines or anything like that. That's not how it was done... I don't know what the outcome was but apparently my father had a change of heart," Hussain recalled. The young Salim was ultimately played by actor Jalal Agha in the film that released in 1960 and is considered an all-time classic. Hussain took his father's legacy of tabla to new heights and the silver screen did beckon later on in life. Hussain acted in the Merchant Ivory film production "Heat and Dust", "The Perfect Murder" and "Saaz". His last screen appearance was in Dev Patel's "Monkey Man", a beautiful scene where Patel's character trains in boxing to the beats of the tabla. (PTI)

Can 'Guru' Gambhir and Nayar offer cogent solutions to technical flaws in batters?

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are coping maximum criticism for being walking wickets during the ongoing Test series against Australia but even Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant haven't shown the patience needed to survive Down Under, indicating a larger problem.

Patience is a virtue that one develops over time and Kohli had once showed how it's done during his golden phase between 2014 and 2019. KL Rahul, blessed with sound technique, has displayed that during the current series with scores of 77 and 84 in Perth and Brisbane.

In case of Jaiswal, save his second innings knock of 161 at Perth, a shuffle across the crease is making him a candidate for leg-before.

Gill loves to play on the rise outside the off-stump and away from his body and could be impatient when one bowls the stump and even for Pant, a compulsive stroke player, the ball that leaves him from five metre length with adequate bounce, is creating issues.

So, will head coach Gautam Gambhir and his deputy Abhishek Nayar, who is highly regarded in Mumbai cricket circuit for being a "Mind Coach and Life Coach rolled into one", do anything about it? A former India great, who didn't wish to be named, offered his perspective.

"Not all great players or players of repute happen to be great coaches. They might have done some incredible things as players and knew what to do and how to react during a particular situation,"



the veteran of 100-plus Tests said. "But coaching is science and not many can tell why certain things need to be done. Even Gautam used to play with hard hands and dab towards slips in Australia and England.

"You can still work with younger guys but difficult to mould the older ones who don't get enough time to work on their game in a packed calendar," he added.

Watching the dismissals of especially Kohli in Australia, which seemed like a replay of previous ones, has led to growing concerns.

Everyone understands the technical flaw, but can anyone provide

the corrective measures to break the rut?

Rohit, barring the England tour in 2021, he does not really have a track record in SENA countries in Tests. But with Kohli, the problem of reaching for deliveries on and outside the off-stump has resurfaced once again and has been a persistent issue for quite some time. Sanjay Manjrekar's tweet is worth taking note of.

"I guess the time has come to scrutinise the role of a batting coach in the Indian team. Why major technical issues have remained unresolved for so long with certain Indian batters?" he asked.

Manjrekar's view raises questions on the role of Sanjay Bangar, Vikram Rathour, and now Nayar. Their official designation might be assistant coach, but they essentially are batting coaches.

Devang Gandhi, who was a touring selector between 2016-17 to 2020-21, had a more nuanced take compared to the veteran India star. "It would be very easy to target Nayar as a low hanging fruit or for that matter Gautam," Gandhi, who has coached the Delhi Ranji team and Bengal U-19, told PTI during a conversation.

"But they have just come into system. To discuss or nudge a player, first you need to be around

for some time and once there is some kind of mutual trust between the two, you can offer him solutions. But at this level, it is more about the experienced player's own mental make-up."

So what is Kohli's problem? Gandhi, a former Test opener and an NCA Level-2 coach, believes it's all about his mental approach.

"...if you watch his training videos that are available for public, I find him doing all the right things. During training he is playing close to his body. But the moment it is the match situation, the hands are moving towards those channel deliveries like conditioned reflex or muscle memory," he explained.

Gandhi then blamed it on the rising T20 engagements.

"The moment his bat is away from the body, the bat-face will open up towards cover. Now this is a white ball problem of hitting through the line. In India the ball will hit the bottom of the bat but in Australia, it will towards the upper part. "What solution can Gambhir or Nayar possibly give, apart from telling him to not play those deliveries? "After 30 Test hundreds, Virat doesn't need to be told that but at 36, does he have that patience to accept that now if he scores a hundred, it will be off 200 balls and not 140 like earlier times? Can he hide those extra 60 balls?" Gandhi questioned.

Sachin Tendulkar's epic 241 in the 2004 New Year's Test in Sydney is often cited as a prime example of patience. He didn't hit a single cover drive until he scored his double hundred. (PTI)

Women's soccer world champion Spain drawn with Italy, Belgium and Portugal in Euro 2025 group



LAUSANNE, Dec 17: World Cup winner Spain will chase a sweep of major women's soccer titles at the 2025 European Championship after drawing a group with Italy, Belgium and Portugal. A European title would complete the set for Spain women after winning the inaugural UEFA Nations League in February for coach Montse Tomé, who took over when the team and federation was in turmoil after the 2023 world title win in Sydney. Tomé is the only female coach in Spain's Euro 2025 group.

Euro 2025 host Switzerland will open the 16-nation tournament against Norway on July 2 in Basel. The group also includes Iceland and Finland.

The past two European champions, titleholder England and Euro 2017 winner the Netherlands, landed in a strong group with top-seeded France and Wales.

France and England reunite next July 5 in Zurich after coming through the same qualifying group, in which they traded away wins in a five-day spell and France finished on top of the standings.

"We had some beautiful matches in May and June. It's a very good challenge," France coach Laurent Bonadei said.

Germany, the record eight-time European champion, was drawn with Denmark, Poland and Sweden, the inaugural winner in 1984. Basel's St. Jakob Park stadium also will host the final on July 27.

More than 700,000 tickets are publicly available for the 31 games being hosted in eight Swiss

cities. Switzerland has the responsibility to continue the momentum in European women's soccer after three successful major tournaments.

France hosted the 2019 Women's World Cup, won by the United States; host England won the Euro 2022 final against Germany watched by more than 87,000 fans at Wembley Stadium; and Spain and England played for the 2023 world title at the first 32-team tournament, hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

"For me it is the perfect moment for this tournament to come here," said retired Swiss great Lara Dickmann, a two-time Champions League winner with Lyon.

"It will be a game-changer for us," Dickmann told The Associated Press. "It's going to be really important for the Swiss population but also for the Swiss media, Swiss politics, on any level that takes part in football."

Switzerland will start against Norway — which lost the 2023 World Cup opening game against New Zealand — one month after the same teams meet in a Nations League group that also includes Iceland.

Switzerland coach Pia Sundhage said she aimed to field her best team in what will be a final competitive warmup for Euro 2025.

"Confidence can take any team anywhere," said Sundhage, the Swedish veteran who led the U.S. to back-to-back Olympic titles in 2008 and 2012. (AP)

West Ham share points with Bournemouth after late drama on England's south coast

BOURNEMOUTH, Dec 17: Enes Ünal scored a superb free kick in the last minute of normal time to rescue a point for Bournemouth in a 1-1 home draw against West Ham in the Premier League.

Both sides struggled to break down their opponent and goalkeepers made timely saves at each end.

But in the 87th minute, just when it looked like a 0-0 draw was on the cards, West Ham took the lead thanks to a VAR-assisted penalty.

After a video review, referee Chris Kavanagh adjudged the ball to have struck Tyler Adams' hand and Lucas Paqueta made no mistake from 12 metres.

That would have been hard on Bournemouth, which enjoyed the better of the second half but came up against the man of the match in West Ham goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski.

But in the 90th minute, Ünal curled a free kick into the top corner to give the Cherries a deserved share of the points.

"Credit to him, big moment, especially the reaction as well, I thought the boys were brilliant," Bournemouth forward Ryan Christie told broadcaster Sky. "And it was a moment of magic to get us level." There will be debate over the penalty decision and Christie lamented what he said was inconsistent decision-making from officials.

"I thought it was harsh," Christie said. "I know his hand is high but he's so close to the ball. We didn't get one last week

against Ipswich from a similar scenario. "It's a bit frustrating because we dominated. But it's good to get a point in the end."

The comeback was another example of Bournemouth's late resilience. The south coast side has picked up nine points from losing positions this season, better than everyone bar Aston Villa and Manchester City. Bournemouth climbed into sixth place, just two points behind Manchester City, while West Ham was 14th. (AP)

Inter stuns Lazio 6-0 to remind rivals of its title aspirations in Serie A

ROME, Dec 17: Inter Milan scored four times in a 12-minute spell either side of halftime and added another couple late on to rout Lazio 6-0 in a lopsided contest of Serie A title contenders. Lazio was unbeaten at home in Serie A and it matched Inter for most of the first half in front of its own fans at the Stadio Olimpico.

However, four minutes from halftime Hakan Çalhanoğlu put Inter ahead from the penalty spot and Federico Dimarco doubled the lead seconds before the break when he volleyed home a cross from Denzel Dumfries.

Lazio started the game without regular defender Alessio Romagnoli and Samuel Gigot replaced center half Matias Gila midway through the first half.

When Gigot was forced off at

half-time coach Marco Baroni was forced to reshuffle his back four again but the lack of experienced heads in the center of defense was evident from the restart.

Nicolò Barella made it 3-0 six minutes into the second half with a sumptuous 30-meter volley and Dumfries rose above everyone to head home the fourth two minutes later. Carlos Augusto showed some nice footwork in the box to make it 5-0 in the 77th minute and Marcus Thuram got his 11th goal of the season in the final minute to heap on the misery for the home side. The result meant Inter was alone in third place, three points behind leader Atalanta and one behind Napoli with a game in hand.

Lazio remained fifth. (AP)

Australia pacer Hazlewood suffers calf injury, to undergo scans

BRISBANE, Dec 17: Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood is likely to miss the remainder of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India due to a right calf strain that he sustained during the ongoing third Test at the Gabba, Cricket Australia said on Tuesday.

The niggle has also ruled Hazlewood out of the Brisbane Test, weakening Australia's bowling attack.

"Josh Hazlewood has sustained a right side calf strain which will prevent him from playing any further part in the Test match against India in Brisbane," Cricket Australia said in an official statement.

"He is likely to miss the remainder of the Test series."

On Tuesday, the New South

Wales player bowled just one over before walking out of the field following a discussion with captain Pat Cummins, senior cricketer Steven Smith and team physio Nick Jones. Hazlewood later underwent scans to ascertain the severity of the injury.

The 33-year-old had nicked off star India batter Virat Kohli on Monday, the third day of the match, with a fine delivery outside the off-stump.

Hazlewood made his return to the side for the third Test after missing the Pink Ball Test at Adelaide due to a side strain.

He had replaced fellow pacer Scot Boland, who played in the day-night Adelaide Test, in the Australia eleven for the ongoing Brisbane Test. (PTI)

Mandhana moves to top 3 in both ODI and T20I rankings

DUBAI, Dec 17: India's vice-captain Smriti Mandhana has surged three places to second in the latest ICC Women's ODI rankings while climbing one spot to third among T20I batters, following her stellar displays against Australia and the West Indies. The left-hander struck 105 in the final match of the series against Australia in Perth and 54 in the first game of the ongoing T20I rubber against the West Indies in Mumbai to headline the latest rankings update released here on Tuesday.

Mandhana is the lone Indian batter in the top 10 as her skipper Harmanpreet Kaur moved down two spots to 13th while Jemimah Rodrigues climbed six places to 15th and Harleen Deol moved up nine rungs to 64th. Among bowlers, Deepti Sharma has slipped two spots to five.

India seam bowler Arundhati Reddy has shot up 48 places to 51st after a haul of four for 26 while Renuka Thakur has moved up from 28th to joint

England opener Tammy Beaumont advanced two places to 11th after an unbeaten 65 helped clinch the South Africa series 2-1.

Ashleigh Gardner has moved up one place to 16th with a 50 in Perth. Tahlia McGrath has progressed from 32nd to 24th with an unbeaten 56, and Annabell Sutherland is up 15 places to 29th after a match-winning 110.



Gardner is also up two places to a career-best-equaling third position in the bowling rankings with a haul of five for 30 and has moved up from fourth to second in the all-rounders' list. Sutherland is in the top 20 of the bowling rankings.

Others to move up in this list include South Africa's Marizanne Kapp, who has gained two slots to reach fourth position after a haul of three for 24, and the England trio of Charlie Dean (up two places to seventh), Nat Sciver Brunt (up one place to 16th) and Lauren Bell (up four places to 21st) Kaur moves back into top 10

In the T20I rankings, Kaur is in the top 10 and Rodrigues has gained six slots to reach 15th position after a fine 73 against the West Indies.

In the bowling rankings, Deepti has moved up two places to take the second position in the bowling rankings and Titas Sadhu is up to 52nd.

For the West Indies, all-rounder Deandra Dottin has advanced 21 places to 59th after a half-century while Qiana Joseph (up 22 places to 65th among batters) and Karishma Ramharack (up six places to 20th among bowlers) are other notable gainers. (PTI)

A year of chaos, and heartbreaks for Indian wrestling but not without hope for future

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: In an ideal world, politics and sport are not meant to be mixed. But then the world of Indian wrestling was far from ideal in 2024 with Vinesh Phogat's Olympic dejection and the never-ending administrative chaos pulling down a once flourishing sport.

From the time when Wrestling Federation of India elections were held, exactly a year back, to the recent National Championships in Bengaluru, Indian wrestling has seemed like a rudderless ship.

Not too long ago, wrestling had developed into a sport that promised unprecedented Olympic success but cut to Paris 2024, Aman Sehrawat's bronze medal was what saved the delegation the blushes after Phogat's seemingly destined gold slipped through her grasp due to a cruel twist of fate.

She was, for better or for worse, the most intriguing story of Indian wrestling this year.

She punished herself to fight in a lower weight category after her preferred class was already booked for the Olympics, dived

the then unbeaten Japanese legend Yui Susaki in her opening round in Paris and then ended up disqualified for being 100gm overweight on the morning of the final.

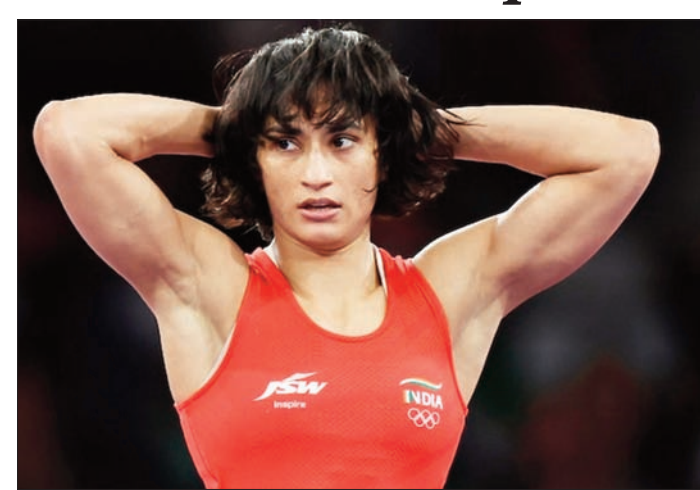
A day later, she gave up on her sporting career, declaring that the fight had left her.

She wasn't done though. Following an emotionally overwhelming homecoming which included a custom-made gold medal from Haryana's khap panchayats, Phogat joined the Congress party, fought the state assembly elections and managed to become an MLA in her maiden electoral outing from Julana constituency.

She wasn't the only one in her fraternity who decided on politics as a future.

Bajrang Punia too joined the Congress but he did not get the same returns as Phogat.

His position was that of a Kisan morcha head and his wrestling career was left stalled after copying a four-year ban for failure to submit dope samples during training



camp. This was after he failed to qualify for Paris, a new low in the career of the celebrated grappler, who fetched a bronze in the Tokyo Games. The two maintained all along that their fight against alleged sexual harassment of women wrestlers by former WFI head Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh was an apolitical one.

But their fellow protestor and Rio Olympics bronze-winner Sak-

shi Malik sought to dispute that soon after they joined congress. She went on to allege in her book that the duo's "greed" punctured their protest against Sharan Singh.

The likes of Anshu Malik and Antim Panghal, who were touted as the next big thing in Indian wrestling, cut a sorry figure in Paris but Aman carried forward the rich legacy of the Chhattrasal

stadium by winning the men's freestyle 57kg bronze.

It was a category which 2020 Tokyo Games silver-medallist Ravi Dahiya made his own. But Dahiya vanished from the scene due to spate of injuries that affected his form.

The Tokyo campaign, which yielded two medals in wrestling, should have been the catalyst for better infrastructure and coaching for Indian wrestling.

However, the developments in the last 24 months have prevented growth.

The potential is still there and the biggest example was Indian U17 women team's world championship victory in Amman, Jordan in September.

The country had been aiming for a podium finish for long and the dream finally materialised this year. Out of 10 possible medals, India won eight medals, including five gold medal and one silver.

Finishing ahead of powerhouse Japan and impressive Kazakhstan is no mean feat. (PTI)

Rahul, Jadeja, and brave tailenders help India avoid follow-on

BRISBANE, Dec 17: KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja were determination personified as their fighting fifties helped India avoid the follow-on on the fourth day of the weather-hit third Test against a menacing Australia that seems meandering towards a draw.

Jadeja (77, 123b, 7x4, 1x6) and Rahul (84, 139, 8x4) were the heavy-lifters in India's 252 for nine when bad light forced an early close to the day.

Jasprit Bumrah (10) and Akash Deep (27), who showed appreciable gumption, are holding the fort for India.

The visitors trail Aussies by 193 runs. But they wouldn't mind that one bit as Australia will now have to bat again and forcing a result in three sessions looks an improbable target, considering the Brisbane weather pattern.

The city is bracing up for rain and a thunderstorm or two on Wednesday.

A quick word of appreciation is also required for No. 10 Bumrah and No. 11 Akash Deep for knocking down the 33 runs required to go past the follow-on mark of 246.

The much-awaited moment came when Akash crunched Pat Cummins over gully for a boundary.

When these two joined forces, India were reeling at 213 for 9 after Jadeja was dismissed off a Cummins' snorter.

But while resuming from a wafer-thin overnight score of 51 for four, India needed someone to offer fight, and Rahul, India's standout batter in this series so far, did precisely that.

Rahul displayed admirable technical nous to withstand the stern test posed by the Australian bowlers to take the game deep into the day.

A nine toes down Rahul and an equally



feisty Jadeja added 67 runs for the sixth wicket, and it was the first sign of India's fight.

There was a moment of massive fortune too for Rahul when Smith spilled a regulation catch at second slip off the first ball of the day from Cummins.

Rahul was on 33 then. A quick look upwards and a silent prayer showed how much he valued that reprieve, which he exploited to the hilt, notching his 17th Test fifty.

Once he woke up from a bit of morning

haziness, Rahul looked a class apart from the rest of his colleagues.

The Aussies employed three slips and a gully, leaving the vast expanse of the ground to play his favourite shot -- drive through the cover or in front of the point.

It was a dangerous proposition as there was enough movement and bounce for the Aussie pacers.

But Rahul was prudent enough to see through that ruse. He did not bring out that shot until the bowlers pitched the ball well

up in his driving arc.

The Bengaluru man's sagacity shone in how he defended too -- all soft hands and playing close to the body.

Cummins tested him with that fifth stump line outside off, but Rahul either left the ball wisely or merely tucked his bat behind his pads.

However, a remarkable redemption catch by Smith at slip off Nathan Lyon ended his stay.

But Jadeja carried on and he added 53 runs for the seventh wicket with Nitish Reddy to keep India afloat.

The 36-year-old scored a good chunk of runs either down the ground or square of the wicket, enabling him to collect runs without the risk of getting caught behind or in the cordon.

Jadeja brought up his 22nd fifty in Test cricket off 89 balls and the innings was also dotted with sweep shots that he effectively employed against off-spinner Lyon.

Nitish should also be patted for giving some solid company to Jadeja as batting for time was more important than the volume of runs considering the weather situation in this Test.

However, a slice of misfortune ended Nitish's stay as he dragged Cummins' climbing delivery back onto his stumps. Jadeja also soon departed while trying to farm the strike with Bumrah.

He looked to smash Cummins' rising delivery out of the ground but Mitchell Marsh settled nicely under the ball to give a heap of frayed nerves to Indian fans.

But Bumrah and Akash added 39 runs to put the smiles back on their faces, as Aussies dearly missed the metronomical Josh Hazlewood, who was ruled out of the series with a calf injury. (PTI)

Sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya launches 'Fit India Cycling Drive'

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya flagged off the 'Fit India Cycling Drive' at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium here on Tuesday.

Close to 500 cycling enthusiasts joined the three kilometres ride from the stadium to Raisina Hills and back, the initiative aimed at promoting cycling as a sustainable and healthy mode of transportation.

The event was flagged off by Mandaviya in the presence of Raksha Khadse, the minister of state (Sports), MP Tejasvi Surya, as well as elite athletes, including Paris Paralympics bronze medalist Simran Sharma, Commonwealth Games gold medalist Nitu Ghanghas and Asian Games bronze winner Preeti Pawar.

Mandaviya said in a press release, "We have launched this event as 'Fit India Cycling Tuesdays' but for the convenience of cycling enthusiasts, this will now be conducted on Sundays and be called 'Sundays on Cycle'." (PTI)

Rohan Jaitley easily beats Kirti Azad to be re-elected as DDCA president

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Incumbent Rohan Jaitley comfortably defeated former India cricketer and Lok Sabha MP Kirti Azad to be elected as the President of the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) for a third successive term.

The 35-year-old Rohan, son of former Union Minister late Arun Jaitley, secured 1,577 votes compared to Azad's 777 in the race to the top position, which comes with a three-year term. His father had served as DDCA president for 14 years.

As many as 2,413 votes were cast from among the 3748 members, and 1,207 votes were required to win.

In 2020, Rohan was elected unopposed after Rajat Sharma resigned midway during his term. A year later, he defeated advocate Vikas Singh to claim a full three-year run.

Rohan had the backing of former BCCI acting president CK Khanna, who is considered an influential figure in Delhi cricket as



he controls more than 1,000 votes.

Khanna's daughter Shikha Kumar (1,246 votes), defeated Rakesh Kumar Bansal (536) and Sudhir Kumar Agarwal (498) to

claim the vice-president's post.

Ashok Sharma (893) became the secretary, while Harish Singla (1328) was elected for the treasurer's post and Amit Grover

(1189) won the joint secretary position.

All office-bearers are elected for a three-year term.

Anand Verma (985), Manjit Singh (1050), Navdeep M (1034), Shyam Sharma (1165), Tushar Saigal (926), Vikas Katyal (1054), Vikram Kohli (939) claimed the directors' post, which goes to polls every year.

A member of the 1983 World Cup-winning team Azad, who represents Bardhaman-Durgapur constituency for the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress party, had alleged corruption in the DDCA in the run up to the polls.

He had alleged that the DDCA spent as much ₹ 17.5 crore on installing floodlights when the much bigger Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad did the same for ₹ 7.5 crore.

He had also accused the incumbent DDCA administration of spending only a fraction of the approximately ₹ 140 crore it received from the BCCI in the last financial year. (PTI)

Vettori admits Bumrah-Deep partnership foils Australia's plans to enforce follow-on

BRISBANE, Dec 17: Australia assistant coach Daniel Vettori admitted that a resilient partnership between Indian tailenders Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep foiled their plans to enforce a follow-on, while also defending the decision not to declare the home team's first innings in the third Test which seems heading towards a draw.

With the Indian batters, barring KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja, failing once again, it was the obstinate 39-run unbeaten partnership between Bumrah and Akash Deep that saved India the blushes as the tourists avoided a follow on a rain marred day four on Tuesday.

"I think the only way to force the game was

to force the follow-on," Vettori said at the post-day press conference.

"There was a desperation to get that final wicket. We thought we had a really good chance when Jadeja was dismissed, but it was a real fighting partnership from Bumrah and Deep.

"Unfortunately, just the amount of time that's been lost from the game has made it difficult," he added.

Akash Deep, making his debut in Australia, walked in to bat at 213 for 9, with India still needing 33 runs to avoid the follow-on that could have cost them the game. Alongside pace spearhead Bumrah, he guided India to 252 for 9, frustrating the home team.

Australia had ended day three on 405 for 7 but chose to bat, consuming a considerable amount of game time on a rain affected day four rather than declare their innings.

Asked if declaring was on the table, Vettori said, "No, I think we always acknowledge that first innings runs are going to be vitally important in this game.

"You don't really want to plan for weather, because we've seen on these days where it can blow past, and you can get on with things, and then it can settle in.

"So I think the conversation was mainly around, let's make the most of this first innings, trust a very good bowling unit to be able to deliver on this wicket like they did

today."

Australia were handed a major blow as pacer Josh Hazlewood sustained a calf injury, ruling him out of the rest of the match.

Vettori said losing one of the best bowlers in the world did affect Australia's game plan, but the rain breaks helped the pace duo of Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins without any additional burden.

"Weather allowed us to operate in terms of breaks with Mitch and Patty able to come back on multiple occasions. If it had been full 90 overs, it would have been a lot tougher to manage. We always have the luxury to bowl Nathan (Lyon). So that alleviated a little bit of the concern," he added. (PTI)

FIFA set to announce its top players in men's and women's soccer in 'The Best' awards



DOHA (QATAR), Dec 17: Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior is about to find out if he'll be finally getting his hands on a big global player award.

FIFA's "The Best" awards take place on Tuesday, when the top men's and women's soccer players of 2024 will be announced based on voting by fans, the current captains and coaches of all national teams, and media representatives. It is FIFA's version of the older and more prestigious Ballon d'Or prize.

Vinicius is on an 11-player shortlist for the best men's player, having been so disappointed to lose out to Manchester City midfielder Rodri for the Ballon d'Or in October that he and his Madrid team snubbed the ceremony in Paris in protest.

The FIFA ceremony starts at 1700 GMT in Doha, where Madrid and Vinicius traveled on Monday for the Intercontinental Cup final against Pachuca.

Rodri is also on the shortlist, along with Kylian Mbappé and Lionel Messi — last year's winner of the FIFA prize on a tiebreaker over Erling Haaland.

Barcelona playmaker Aitana Bonmati won the best women's player for 2023 and is seeking back-to-back FIFA prizes as one of four Spain players on the 16-woman shortlist.

Bonmati has won the Ballon d'Or for two straight years, and won the Spanish league, Spanish cup and Champions League with Barcelona in 2024.

The contenders have been selected based on their performances from Aug. 21, 2023, to Aug. 10, 2024.

FIFA said the award winners have been decided by an "equally weighted voting system" between fans, the captains and coaches, and the media.

The best men's and women's coaches and the best men's and women's goalkeepers will also be announced, along with the best men's and women's 11s and the Marta and Puskás Awards for the best goals in women's and men's soccer, respectively.

Among those attending the gala dinner at the Aspire Academy in Doha will be FIFA President Gianni Infantino. (AP)

Tighten up defence in first 30 overs: Rahul's method Down Under

BRISBANE, Dec 17: Tightening up defence and giving bowlers respect in the first 30 overs of an innings has been the mantra to KL Rahul's success during the ongoing series against Australia in which his other India teammates have struggled.

Rahul has by far looked the most assured Indian batter on the tour and it was on display once again on Tuesday when he produced a gritty 84 off 139 balls in challenging conditions, contributing immensely to the visitors' 252 for nine on day four of the third Test here.

After India managed to avoid follow-on in the rain-hit game, Rahul turned up for the media interaction and was expectedly asked about his style of play compared to the struggling Indian lot.

"See I'm quite certain that everybody has their own set plans... You also need to have a bit of luck as a top-order batter.

"Just a little bit that goes your way if you can get through those first 10-15 overs and get a bit of confidence then you start feeling good and you start enjoying playing with the Kookaburra ball with the pace and bounce here in Australia," said Rahul who has reaped the benefits of playing close to his body.

Rahul has been a picture of patience and perseverance in the Border-

Gavaskar Trophy while the other Indian batters have been found wanting against the new ball.

What has made Rahul's success more remarkable is that he was not the first-choice opener before the start of the series. He did well in the first Test and then skipper Rohit Sharma decided to drop himself down the order.

The classy right-hander said it is all about sticking to the basics in overseas conditions and that includes giving due respect to the bowlers when the ball is hard and new.

"It's just about getting through those first 20-30 balls for everybody and everyone's trying their best to do that and it's a long series. So we played three games five innings now, so I'm sure everyone will go back and come up with their own plans the next time we bat.

"The only thing you can do in the first 30 overs is to tighten up your defence, try and respect that the first 30 overs is the bowler's time and give them their time, leave balls, try and play as tight as possible and then really try to cash in once the ball gets older. So that's my plan, and that's pretty simple, and I'm sure that's the plan for everybody."

Besides not playing away from his body, Rahul has also made a conscious effort to leave balls while the other bat-



ters have been guilty of playing deliveries on the off-stump channel with hard hands.

"Yeah, very important. I mean, not just

for me, for any openers on both sides," said Rahul when asked about the importance of leaving balls.

"We've seen even in Adelaide when in

the night when McSweeney and Labuschagne played really well in those 10-15 overs they just kept leaving balls of a good length..."

"... That's a good thing about playing here in Australia, if you get used to the pace and bounce, you can trust the bounce and you can leave balls on bounce and that's something that they showed us in the last game."

When on tours, Rahul reckons one has to earn the right to score runs.

"When you travel overseas and when you're playing quality fast bowlers, you have to respect the first 20-30 overs. You have to respect if the ball's moving, you have to give it to the fast bowlers and just soak in that pressure and wait for your time to score runs.

"You have to earn the right to score runs in overseas conditions. And that's something that we've spoken about a lot and we'll try and do it again," said Rahul, adding that he had a hard time picking the pink ball in the previous game.

Has his plans changed from venue to venue?

"I mean not so far at least because I feel like Perth and Brisbane were quite similar in terms of how much pace and bounce the wickets had.

"So I've had a pretty simple plan for these two grounds. But now, once I've

come here again, gone back to basics and try and play close to the body, leave balls, the basics, I can't make up anything new and tell you," said the opener.

An unbeaten 39-run stand between Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep for the 10th wicket helped India avoid follow-on. With more rain around, the game is heading for a draw despite Australia's dominance in the weather-hit Test.

Rahul enjoyed the shots played by Akash Deep and Bumrah.

"Yes, very good to see when the lower order chips in and scores runs. That's something that we discuss a lot in our meetings and the bowlers work really hard on their batting as well.

"Knowing that there's a bit of rain around and so much of the game has been lost to rain. We need to find a way to stay in the game and I think Akash and Bumrah did that at the end," said Rahul, who was preparing himself to bat again when India were reduced to 213 for nine.

"It was a great contest at the end, the last half an hour they batted, not just the runs that they got, just the heart that they showed to keep away the bouncers, there's a lot of pace and bounce in the wicket.

"To get behind the ball, defend really well, leave the ball, hit some nice shots, it's really good," added Rahul. (PTI)