- Rebels try to bring normalcy while Syrians vow to speak up
- 'Ousted PM Sheikh Hasina involved in enforced disappearance'
- - AAP releases final candidates' list for Delhi polls
  - Maywati urges parties to support ONOE bills



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CM accuses Congress of shamelessness for not protesting Modi's Lok Sabha remarks

# Himanta alleges Soros links with Assam MP

GUWAHATI, Dec 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma alleged on Sunday that an MP from the state has links with US-based billionaire George Soros, amid the BJP's charge against the Congress central leadership of conniving with the investor to destabilise the

Sarma, however, did not mention the name or party of the MP. "An Assam MP also has links

with George Soros. I don't want to get into this controversy," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a programme, when asked about the Congress-Soros issue.

To a question whether the MP in question had won his election with financial help from the US investor, the CM said, "I cannot comment on it as I have no evidence. Anyway, I am not much interested in this matter."

He added that the journalists themselves can find out about the links between Soros and the state MP. On the Prime Minister's speech in Lok Sabha on Saturday,



has totally exposed the Congress... The fact that the Congress members could sit and hear him out was a big thing, it shows how shame-

less they are.' Replying to a two-day discussion in the Lok Sabha on "The glorious journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India", the prime minister had on Saturday accused the Congress of repeatedly mutilating the Constitution, having "tasted blood" in its "greed" for power, as he asserted that his government's policies and decisions since 2014 have been aimed at boosting

India's strength and unity. "Modi ji has shown them the mirror...Congress is not saying that he was lying. Whatever Modi ii said, is all in the recorded state-

Bill, Sarma said once it is introduced in Parliament, all sides will be able to place their views.

"When the discussion takes place in the Parliament, our people will understand its benefits," he

Sarma maintained that when elections are not conducted simultaneously, development becomes slow due to imposition of the model code of conduct at different periods and expenses are also high for holding separate polls.

"It is beneficial for all if elections are held together. It saves money, campaign will be together (for state and Lok Sabha polls). Expenses of political parties will also be saved," he said.

Mentioning of simultaneous elections after Independence, the BJP leader said, "When Congress started to impose President's Rule (in states), dismiss the Assemblies, this situation (of elections at different times) arose. No one could have thought at the time of Independence (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Omar Abdullah tells Congress to stop whinging about EVMs, accept poll results

NEW DELHI, Dec 15: Opening another point of friction with an important ally, Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah has dismissed the Congress party's vehement objection to Electronic Voting Machines, and echoed the BJP's defence -- you can't accept election results when you win, and blame EVMs when you lose.

'When you get a hundred plus members of Parliament using the same EVMs, and you celebrate that as sort of a victory for your party, you can't then a few months later turn around and say... we don't like these EVMs because now the election results aren't going the way we would like them to," Abdullah told PTI in an exclusive interview on Friday.

Told that he sounded suspiciously like a BJP spokesman, Abdullah reacted with "God forbid!" He then added: "No, it's just that... what's right is right.'

He said he speaks based on principles rather than with partisan loyalty and cited his support for infrastructure projects like the Cen-



tral Vista as an example of his independent thinking.

"Contrary to what everybody else believes, I think that what's happening with this Central Vista project in Delhi is a damn good thing. I believe constructing a new Parliament building was an excellent idea. We needed a new Parliament building. The old one had outlived its utility, he said. He said parties should not contest elections if they do not trust

"If you have problems with the EVMs, then you should be consistent in those problems," he said while replying to a question about whether he thinks that the opposition in general and the Congress, in particular, is barking up the wrong tree by focusing on EVMs.

After its loss in the Haryana and Maharashtra Assembly polls, the Congress has expressed doubts about the EVM's infallibility and the election (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Beneficiaries had to bribe officials for free rice under Congress govt: Tuliram



**HT Bureau DIPHU, Dec 15:** The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram

a program in which he participated in the Chief Minister's online official distribution of ration cards which was held at the Sarsing Teron (Langkung Habe) Memorial Town Hall.

Ronghang made this statement during

The CEM informed that each individual in a family would receive 5 kg of rice. "During the previous Congress government, beneficiaries had to bribe someone to get the rice. However, under the BJP government, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made it free. All families under Below Poverty Line (BPL), Above Poverty Line (APL), and Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) categories will receive free rice every month," he added.

He further highlighted that the BJP government has introduced a health scheme where every individual is entitled to medical expenses of up to Rs 5 lakh per year, provided they have an Ayushman Bharat card. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Give up arms or face strong action: Shah to Naxals

the voting mechanism.

JAGDALPUR (CHHATTISGARH), Dec 15: Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday appealed to Naxals to give up arms and join the mainstream, or else they will have to face the strong action of security forces.

He said the rehabilitation of the surrendered Naxals is the responsibility of the

Addressing a sporting event -- 'Bastar Olympics' -- in Chhattisgarh's Jagdalpur, Shah also said the country would be free of Maoists by March 2026.

"I appeal to Naxals, please come forward. Give up arms, surrender and join the mainstream. Your rehabilitation is our responsibility," he said. He said if the Maoists do not listen to the appeal of surrender, they will be crushed by the security forces. "Chhattisgarh Police is committed to ful-

filling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve to make India Naxal-free by March 31, 2026," he said.

The Union home minister said the Chhattisgarh government's rehabilitation



"If you surrender and join the mainstream, you will contribute for the development of Chhattisgarh and India," he said.

Shah said when the Congress was in power in Chhattisgarh before the BJP assumed charge a year ago, the action against the Maoists became slow. "But after our government came to power in Chhattisgarh. action against the extremists speeded up resulting in killings of 287 Naxals in last one year, arrest of 992 Naxals and surrender of

836 others," he said.

Shah said since the Modi government assumed charge, there has been a 73 per cent reduction in the casualties in security forces and 70 per cent decline in civilians' deaths.

"If Naxalism ends in Bastar (Chhattisgarh), it will attract more tourists than Kashmir due to its natural beauty," he said.

He further said those who know the process of change taking place within the society also know that it is not limited to only 1.5 lakh people participating in the Bastar Olympics.

"Everyone is saying that Bastar is changing. I assure you that when I will come to the 2026 Bastar Olympics, I will say that Bastar has changed," he said, adding that this change has been initiated by the Bastar

The Union home minister said this event will write a new saga of development of Bastar in the coming days and will become a strong basis for the complete eradication of Naxalism. He also said many development works are being done, through which

# hitting constable, injured while fleeing: Police

GUWAHATI, Dec 15: A suspected peddler, who was nabbed with drugs after he mowed down a constable with his vehicle while escaping police checking, was injured when law enforcers fired at him as he attempted to flee from custody in Assam's Sribhumi district, an officer said on Sunday.

The constable, Ujjal Bora, was killed early on Saturday when a truck hit him as it broke a police barricade and fled away. Policemen on duty at the check-post chased the truck, which later met with an accident. The driver and the handyman of the truck were arrested, and drugs worth over ₹ 4 crore seized (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Peddler arrested after Want Rajya Sabha to debate Constitution 'if BJP does not disrupt': Derek O'Brien

> NEW DELHI, Dec 15: Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha Parliamentary Party Leader Derek O'Brien said on Sunday his party wants the House to run and the debate on the Constitution to be taken up "if the BJP does not disrupt Parliament"

Ronghang, alleged on Sunday that bene-

ficiaries had to bribe officials to receive

free rice under the previous Congress

Blaming the ruling BJP for disruptions after the Upper House last week witnessed multiple adjournments and heated exchanges involving the opposition, treasury benches and the Chair, the TMC leader said they wanted people's issues to be discussed.

After the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha is set to take up on Monday a debate on 75 years of the Constitution in the backdrop of a proposed no-trust motion against vice president and Rajya Sabha chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar by Opposition parties which have submitted a notice for it.

The debate on the Constitution has been the key demand of the opposition for the Winter Session of Par-



Multiple adjournments over the Adani row, Soros issue and the no-trust notice had marred the proceedings of the House last week.

Asked about the debate scheduled to be taken in the House for Monday, O'Brien said, "We want Parliament to run, we want to raise (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

#### Assam govt launches first phase of new ration card distribution beneficiary will receive 5 kg of free

GUWAHATI, Dec 15: The first phase of new ration card distribution in Assam was launched on Sunday, covering 49 newly delimitated assembly constituencies.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who inaugurated the distribution from Guwahati, affirmed the government's commitment to working for an inclusive society.

'Today, HCM Dr. mantabiswa inaugurated the first phase of new ration card distribution in 49 newly designated assembly constituencies, reaffirming the government's commitment to uplifting vulnerable sections of society," the chief minister's office

(ČMO) said in a post on X. It said that by December, each

The government is working to unlock the potential of our inland waterways: Sonowal

Govt unveils 'Jalvahak' to boost inland waterways

rice, ensuring food security for those in need.

"HCM emphasised that the collective support and cooperation will continue to inspire the government's efforts to build a prosperous and inclusive society for all," the CMO added.

Sarma, also in a post on the micro-blogging site, said, "Our Govt is driven by the principles of Antyodaya, where special emphasis is given to the needs of the poor and

marginalised.' "Karishma Kashyap is among the 40 divyang brothers & sisters who have been given ration cards today assuring them of free healthcare and

foodgrains," he said, sharing a pho-

beneficiary receiving the ration

The chief minister said the distribution of ration cards is part of the government's '12 days of development' initiative, which will benefit 12 lakh people. He said that in Assam, beneficiaries can avail of multiple benefits through ration card, which includes free foodgrains, free healthcare, subsidised LPG, assistance under Orunodoi scheme and free insurance.

"In this phase of extending ration cards to the people, another ~20 lakh people will be covered, encompassing 2/3rd of the state's population in this social security net," Sarma added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Atishi claims Centre settling Rohingyas in Delhi; 'false narrative', says Hardeep Puri

NEW DELHI, Dec 15: Delhi chief minister Atishi wrote to Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday, accusing the BJP-led Centre of settling "a large number of illegal Rohingyas" in different parts of the city. With the AAP targeting Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri over his tweets and claiming that settling these refugees here was a "conscious decision" of the BJP-led NDA government, the minister accused AAP of indulging in "politics of diversion, false narratives and half-truths".

In the run-up to the Delhi Assembly polls due in February 2025, the ruling AAP and BJP have been hitting out at one another over the issue of illegal Rohingya and Bangladeshi people staying in the

national capital The BJP has already complained to the Election Commission about illegal Rohingyas and Bangladeshis registered as voters in Delhi "at the

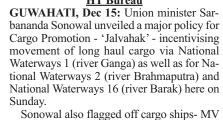
Citing two tweets by Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri in 2022,

behest of AAP".



Atishi alleged the Union government has settled a large number of illegal Rohingya refugees in different parts of the national capital by keeping the people and the government of Delhi in the dark.

"This seems to be going on for the past several years. On August 17, 2022, Union Urban Development Minister Hardeep Puri published two tweets that clearly show that it is a 'conscious decision and policy' of the BJP government to settle these refugees in Delhi," she alleged in the letter to Shah. "From the post of Puri, it seems they were settled into EWS (Economically Backward Class) flats of Bakkarwala. These flats were meant for the poor people (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



ishul with two Dumb Barges Ajay & Dikhu from the GR Jetty This marks the beginning of fixed Scheduled Service of Cargo Vessels from Haldia for

AAI, MV Homi Bhaba along with MV Tr-

NW 1 and NW 2. "The Fixed Day Scheduled Sailing Service will ply vessels between Kolkata - Patna -Varanasi - Patna - Kolkata stretch of NW 1 and between Kolkata and Pandu in Guwahati

on NW 2 via Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route

(IBPR)," an official statement said. The Union minister of State for MoPSW, Shantanu Thakur and minister of State for Transportation (Independent Charge), Uttar Pradesh Government, Daya Shankar Singh also joined the significant occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Sonowal, said, 'Under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, the Government has made a concerted effort to realise the tremendous potential of our rich network of



The Union minister said that with its advantage of being an economical, ecologically sound and efficient mode of transportation, adding, "We want to boost cargo movement via waterways, to decongest the railways and roadways. Jalvahak scheme incentivises long haul cargo on NW1, NW2 & and NW16, and provides an opportunity for the trade interests to explore movement of cargo via waterways

"Further, the regular scheduled freight service, which began from Kolkata, will ensure that the cargo is transported and delivered within a stipulated time frame. This will also generate confidence among our users about the readiness of national waterways for regular movement of cargo in an efficient, eco-

safe and timely delivery of cargo in a cost effective manner, this adds meaningfully to the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modiji's vision of transformation via transportation as India sails towards becoming a Viksit Bharat". As per the statement, the first vessel - MV

vessel operators with this incentive scheme

and encouraging our business enterprises with

Trishul with two Dumb Barges Ajay and Dikhu - is carrying 1500 tonnes of cement from GR Jetty in Kolkata to Pandu in Guwahati via Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR). The second vessel - MV Aai - is carrying 1000 tonnes of Gypsum to Patna while the third vessel - MV Homi Bhaba - is carrying 200 tonnes of coal to Varanasi. The cargo promotion scheme provides di-

rect incentive to the cargo owners to transport their goods via inland waterways for a distance of more than 300 kms. This is a joint effort by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the nodal agency of waterways development in the country, as well as by the Inland & Coastal Shipping Limited (ICSL), a fully owned subsidiary of the Shipping Corporation of India Limited (SCIL).

"The 'Jalvahak' scheme encourages to reduce logistics costs, decongest road and railways, and adapting to a sustainable mode of transportation," the statement added. It further nomical and environmentally responsible mode of transportation. By empowering our said that the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

THE HILLS TIMES

Page 2 Dec 16\_Normal Pages 15-12-2024 21:00 Page 1

# Indian tourism sector to double in 10 years, says WTTC chief

tourism sector is expected to double in size to USD 523 billion in the next 10 years, according to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) President and CEO Julia

WTTC works with governments on issues of the travel and tourism industry, and is the global authority on the economic and social contribution of the sector.

"The travel and tourism sector employs 45 million people in India, and is going to double in its value. In 10 years, the sector is going to be worth USD 523 billion in India, more than double the present size of USD 256 billion," Simpson told PTI in an interview.

"In 10 years, the tourism sector in India will be providing jobs to 63 million people," she said.

India is one of the most beautiful and amazing countries in the world, Simpson said. Tourists and visitors across the centuries have been attracted to its shores and wonderful cities. India continues to welcome the world with open arms and the Indian hospitality is incredible, she added.

"Tourism represents about seven per cent of the Indian economy and in 2019 it was about USD 211 billion. Now it is about USD 256 billion and gives jobs to 45 million people in India," she said.

"If you look at the impact of tourism in terms of the greenhouse gas emissions on India, it represents about five per cent of all India's greenhouse gas emissions

CIL's CSR expenditure

crosses ₹ 5,570 Cr in

**10 years** 

KOLKATA, Dec 15: Coal India

Ltd (CIL) has spent ₹ 5,570 crore

in Corporate Social Responsibility

(CSR) initiatives over the past

decade, a top official said on Sun-

said the PSU has been focusing on

education, healthcare, skill devel-

opment, sports, and women em-

Inaugurating the 3rd CIL CSR

Conclave 2024 on Sunday, West

Bengal Governor C V Ananda

Bose underscored the transforma-

tive power of CSR initiatives in

improving the lives of communi-

ties, particularly in tribal belts of

He lauded CIL's contributions,

including its efforts to support can-

cer patients, stating that such ini-

tiatives contribute to the holistic

tool to transform lives, especially

in Corporate Social Responsibility

Coal Secretary Vikram Dev Dutt

commended coal companies for

their impactful CSR projects over

the past decade, which, he said,

have positively impacted coal-

areas are equal stakeholders in coal

companies' activities. A theme-based

CSR calendar can help prioritize key

areas, starting with education in

January," Dutt added. (PTI)

"Communities in coal-bearing

initiatives over the past 10 years,"

in vulnerable regions," Bose said.

"CSR initiatives are a powerful

"Coal India spent ₹ 5,570 crore

development of the nation.

powerment.

coal-bearing areas.

Prasad said.

bearing regions.

Coal India Chairman P M Prasad

# and that's probably about 250 bilsustainable aviation fuel. So we re-

lion kilos of carbon (dioxide) every year. That is actually the biggest greenhouse gas emission in the tourism sector after the US and China," she said.

The good news is that while the tourism sector has been growing, the greenhouse gas emissions haven't been growing as fast, she said. That means India is becoming more and more efficient for travel and tourism, she added.

"We are also keen to talk to the Indian government to ensure that it is reaching out to the aviation sector to help produce more sustainable aviation fuel because we can't really do tourism without aviation," Simpson said.

"We need the aviation sector. We will have more people travelling by air and we need to do that more sustainably. And the only real opportunity right now is through ally encourage the Indian government to incentivize its production,'

Asked if WTTC has approached the Indian government to take measures to ensure sustainable and eco-friendly tourism, Simpson said, "Well, we do meet Indian ministers on a regular basis, mostly at the big events like the World Travel Market, and I always raise these issues.'

"The great thing about the travel and tourism sector is that it employs high-end people like engineers, AI experts, technology, experts, financial and marketing experts. We also employ people for whom it may be their first job or it may be an opportunity to lift them out of an informal economy and work in a formal sector," she said.

Almost 50 per cent of global tourism happens near coastal resaid. People want to see the pristine beaches and go for amazing water sports. However, coastal areas are very vulnerable to global warming, in terms of dangerous weather changes and rising sea levels, she added.

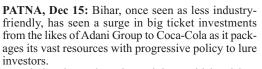
The WTTC recently released a report about measures to help protect coastal areas, she said. "If you look at places like Miami, they have been investing a lot in reinforcing their coastal area. They have good alarm systems and also build infrastructure that resists some of these very challenging weather events.

There are examples around the world on how countries can strengthen their travel and tourism sector, she said. "Tourists don't want to see a lot of concrete; what they want to see is the natural India around its coastline, with beautiful natural beaches, flora and fauna.

"We would like to work with the Indian government to help restore some of the natural flora. One big message for India is about decarbonizing road transport as quickly as possible," she said.

"I know Prime Minister Modi has made it one of his top priorities to try and clean up air pollution. And a part of that includes moving away from coal fired plants and investing more in solar and renewable energy. Under PM Modi's leadership, India is going to be one of the most advanced developing economies in the world," Simpson

## Bihar doubles down on investments as industrial growth surges



Its industries and tourism minister Nitish Mishra, with his CEO-style approach to governance, is pivoting Bihar into a state that could be a gateway for investors to eastern India.

Mishra says the perception bias regarding Bihar's industrial capabilities is slowly being overcome.

In recent months, Adani Group has announced investment of ₹ 8,700 crore in the state, Ambuja Cements is setting up a ₹ 1,200-crore unit, and Coca-Cola is expanding its bottling capacity. Bihar Business Connect-2023 -- the state's investor meet -last year saw memoranda of understanding (MoUs) worth over ₹ 50,000 crore being signed with 300 companies. And the second edition this week is expected to rake in more

Bihar's industrial potential is limitless, he says. "Bihar has been a victim of perception. But that is changing now.'

The state offers investors fiscal incentives ranging from interest subvention to reimbursement of state GST, stamp duty waiver, export subsidy and concessions for transportation, power, and land fee. Plus, it offers a single window clearance not just at the time of approval but also in disbursal of incentives.

Combine that with its resource endowment, inexpensive labour and vast market, Bihar has a potent mixture for industrial supernova

Mishra says the Freight Equalisation Policy of 1948, which mandates uniform pricing for finished products like steel across India, discouraged industrialisation in mineral-rich Bihar.

Bihar is making up for the lost opportunity. With the new policies and massive spending on infrastructure -- be it roads and highways or power plants -- and "the abundance of human resource, I think now this is the time for us to move on," he says.

Bihar, he says, enjoys a strategic locational advantage because of its proximity to the vast markets of eastern and northern India and Nepal as well as accessibility to Bangladesh and Bhutan

A fundamentally agrarian economy, the state has a large agricultural and animal production base offering abundant supply of raw material for a range of industries -- from agro-based (food processing, silk and tea) to leather and non-metallic minerals.

Plus, there is no water problem and there is abundant inexpensive labour.

The state has also built warehouses and mega food parks, leather processing hubs, integrated manufactur-

ing clusters and multi-modal logistics parks. It is now

building two special economic zones (SEZs). "Our policy is good and fortunately our leadership here in Bihar has been so good that in these 19 years

we have built a very good infrastructure," he says. "Bihar is ready (for investors)."

"I see Bihar as very strategically located. We have a huge population (more than 14 crore) of our own and it's a big market," he says, adding that an industry in the state also services market in eastern Uttar Pradesh as well as the entire eastern part of the country -- from West Bengal to the northeastern states.

Bihar has created a land bank of 3,000 acres for setting up industries. It is also offering about 2.4 million sqft of ready-to-move Plug and Play Industrial Sheds, equipped with all basic infrastructure requirements, situated in industrial areas across the state. These are available for any industry at fixed rate, he says.

It has addressed the law and order problem and now offers near round-the-clock electricity and infrastructure to reach seaports in Kolkata and Haldia, as well as to raw material sources and mineral reserves in neighbouring states like Jharkhand.

It will showcase its policy and achievements at the second edition of Bihar Business Connect 2024 investor summit on December 19-20.

Mishra says the Bihar government has labelled the food processing, IT and IT-enabled services (ITES), and textiles and leather sectors as high-priority and has separate policies to promote investments in each one of them. Also, it is going big on renewable energy, sources such as ethanol and biogas.

"I see huge potential in the IT sector because if you will see pan India or maybe across the globe, you will find professionals from Bihar who are working in big multinational companies," he said.

Also, the textile sector, which has a huge employment potential, is a focus area as the state has the raw material and skilled workforce, he said, adding that food processing is another sector with vast potential given the vast agro base that Bihar has. It also offers opportunities for the leather industry.

Biofuels are emerging as a big sector, particularly

the birthplace of two of the world's greatest religions -- Jainism and Buddhism.

vate investment and we are blessed because if you will see in terms of religious tourism or ecotourism, waterfalls, tiger reserves, bird sanctuaries, Bihar has got

"So I think it (investment opportunities) are huge,

but if you will see what our core strength lies, I'll say information technology, textile, food processing, biofuels," he says. "There are a couple of cement factories which are coming." (PTI)

#### ethanol and compressed biogas or CBG," he says. "Apart from that, there are big power projects also Mishra, who is also the tourism minister, says the state has a massive tourism potential, given that it is

"We have an exclusive tourism policy to attract pri-

Alongside, big metro projects are also coming in

## Sarovar Hotels bets big on highway properties; 80 projects in pipeline

KOLKATA, Dec 15: Hospitality firm Sarovar Hotels is broadening focus towards highway hotels and resorts close to major cities, capitalising on the country's rapidly expanding roads network, a top official said. The hotel chain has 80 projects in the pipeline over the next few years as part of its expansion plan, he said.

"Highway hotels and resort-concept properties close to cities, within three-four hour journey, are a new high-growth segment for hospitality, at a time when competition is getting intense in urban centres," Sarovar Hotels Chairman Ajay K Bakaya told PTI in an interview. He said this strategic shift aligns with the ongoing road infrastructure development in the country. Enhanced connectivity is opening up opportunities for leisure and business travel, creating demand for accessible and convenient accommodation options, he said.

"We haven't seen such development of highways in the past. Around 10,000 km of national highways are being constructed annually, which is remarkable. It is connecting places, and creating opportunities for highway hotels and resorts closer to cities," Bakaya said.



Sarovar Hotels, a part of the French Louvre Hotels Group, operates a chain of 135 hotels across 85 locations with 9,000 keys, mostly under management contracts and corporate services, but only a handful (four-five) of those are specifically designed as highway and resort properties. The Louvre Hotels Group is a subsidiary of Jin Jiang International Holdings Co Ltd, one of China's largest tourism and travel conglomerates. "There are new 80 hotel projects lined up. We will be adding 15-20 hotels comfortably every year over the next few years. We expect to cross 150 hotels by 2025, with a total of 12,000 keys. However, a limited number of these upcoming properties will be under the

highway hotels and resorts segment," Bakaya said. Noting that the hospitality business is capital-intensive, the top company official advocated for infrastructure status for the sector.

Bakaya hoped the sector would get that tag in the upcoming budget, stating that it would facilitate access to longer-term credit lines 15 years or more compared to the current 10-year terms, unlocking massive investment in hospitality, including the emerging segments.

"The corporate business currently accounts for 70 per cent of our total revenue in India, although this may marginally decline to around 65 per cent as resorts and highway motels con-

tribute more in the coming years," Bakaya said. The company is actively working to increase the contribution from the resort and highway hotel segments. "Sarovar Hotels is experiencing robust growth, with an overall CAGR of 15 per cent, which includes 9 per cent from existing properties and 6 per cent from new projects being added annually," Bakaya said, expressing confidence that the strong growth trajectory will continue, with demand outpacing supply in the near future. (PTI)

# PM to inaugurate ₹ 40,000-cr project to link 11 rivers in Rajasthan: C R Patil

**SURAT, Dec 15:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will dedicate a project worth about ₹ 40,000 crore to link 11 rivers in Rajasthan that is projected to make it a water-surplus state, Union Jalshakti minister C R Patil said on Sunday.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of semiconductor plant of Suchi Semicon, Patil appealed to corporates to work on water harvesting to address the issue of water crisis in the future.

"Rajasthan faces severe water crisis. The project that Modi Saheb is going to dedicate there on December 17 will link 11 rivers. This project, worth about ₹ 40,000 crore, will be announced by Modi Saheb. After this, Rajasthan will have maximum water," Patil said.

He said people have saved enough money to even

Canal Project (ERCP).

a memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Jal Shakti in January 2024 to prepare detailed project reports (DPRs) and onbroad planning of the Modified Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal (MPKC) link project, integrated with the Eastern Rajasthan

take care of their seven generations but there is a need

Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh governments signed

to conserve water for that generation.

The project is expected to improve water crisis in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The MPKC link project, inter alia, involves major rivers, viz; Chambal and its tributaries Parbati, Kalisindh, Kuno, Banas, Banganga, Ruparail, Gambhiri, and Mej. (PTI)

#### Contd. from Page 1...

### Himanta alleges Soros links

that today's situation could have emerged." On the Uniform Civil Code, Sarma said, "Modi ji has said a secular civil code will be worked out and I fully support it." (PTI)

### Omar Abdullah tells Congress

outcome. It has demanded a return to the paper ballot. Abdullah's comments add to his National Conference party's unhappiness with the Congress, which was allied with it during the September Assembly elections in Jammu

lifting to them. Still, the NC won 42 seats in the 90-member Assembly, and the Congress got six. The chief minister emphasised that electoral machines remain the same regardless of the election outcome, and parties should not use them as a convenient excuse for defeat. "One day voters choose you, the next day they don't," he said and gave his own example of facing defeat in Lok Sabha polls while winning a majority in the September assembly polls. "I never blamed the machines," he said. (PTI)

NC officials have privately said that the Congress did not do its bit during the campaigning and left all the heavy

### Want Rajya Sabha to debate

issues affecting people." "If the BJP does not disrupt Parliament again, we will take up the debate on the Constitution and expose them," O'Brien told reporters on Sunday.

According to sources, 10-11 MPs will participate in the debate, and speak for 3-4 minutes each. They said it would also showcase the "diversity" of their party. The MPs will highlight the essence of ten keywords from the Preamble of the Constitution, speaking on themes like equality, justice, sovereignty, independence, democracy

The TMC has 12 MPs in the Rajya Sabha. However, MP Sukhendu Shekhar Roy has been sidelined for his criticism of the party during the RG Kar protests. The opposition's move to seek impeachment of Dhankhar led to pandemonium in Rajya Sabha on Friday, with opposition and treasury benches clashing over the issue and the chairperson saying it is not a campaign against him but against the farmer community to which he belongs.

The proceedings of the House were adjourned for the day in the first hour itself, but not before Dhankhar said he was a farmer's son and would not "show weakness". The Rajya Sabha will hold the debate on December 16 and 17, and Prime Minister Modi is expected to reply on Tuesday.

The Lok Sabha held the debate on December 13 and 14, with the opposition parties attacking the BJP-led central government accusing it of undermining the Constitution. In his reply on Saturday, Prime Minister Modi accused the Congress of repeatedly mutilating the Constitution, having "tasted blood" in its "greed" for power. Modi asserted that his government's policies and decisions since 2014 have been aimed at boosting India's strength and unity in line with the vision of the Constitution. (PTI)

### Assam govt launches first phase

He distributed ration cards among the people of Guwahati Central and Jalukbari constituencies during the pro-

Atishi claims Centre settling

of Delhi. It appears that the rights and facilities meant for the people of Delhi are being given away to migrants," Atishi said. Puri hit back with an X post on Sunday saying, "Aam Aadmi Party continues with its politics of diversion, false narratives and half-truths. Facts and actual position on illegal Rohingya migrants were immediately clarified through a tweet on the same day which they selectively chose to ignore, and continue to do so."

"No Rohingya migrant has been given a govt house in Delhi. In fact, contrary to the drummed-up AAP rhetoric they are actually the ones who play host to the illegal Rohingyas in Delhi, have settled them in large numbers, give them electricity and water, and even pay them Rs 10,000," he alleged.

Atishi claimed these migrants would not just cause law-and-order problems for Delhiites but also "take away their jobs" and strain the city's limited resources. Citing media reports, she claimed that thousands of Rohingya migrants were crossing the India-Bangladesh border every day without any hindrance.

"This shows how the BJP government has completely failed to protect our borders. If this situation continues, s our country in a position to handle such a large number of refugees? The answer is NO. Then why is the BJP government not doing anything to stop this illegal migration?" she asked Shah.

The Delhi chief minister also asked how the immigrants, after crossing the international border, managed to reach Delhi thousands of kilometres away. "Were these illegal immigrants transported to different parts of India by the BJP government in a systematic manner by keeping the people of India in the dark? How many Rohingyas did you transport and relocate to Delhi?" she posed.

Atishi said it was "most shocking" that the BJP-led Union government "settled" these Rohingyas in different parts of Delhi while the "party-appointed" lieutenant governor directed the Delhi Police to conduct a door-to-door survey to identify Rohingyas. She demanded Shah provide a complete list of Rohingyas settled in Delhi and emphasised that no illegal refugees should be settled in the city in future without consulting the people and the Delhi government. Last week, the Delhi LG secretariat directed the chief secretary and police commissioner of Delhi to launch a two-month special drive to identify and take strict action against illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in the national capital. (PTI)

### Govt unveils 'Jalvahak' to boost

'Jalvahak' scheme offers reimbursement upto 35% of total operating expenditure incurred while transporting cargo via waterways on NW 1 (Ganga river), NW 2 (Brahmaputra river) & NW 16 (Barak river) via Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route.

"To encourage the business proposition of vessel operators, the scheme encourages cargo owners to hire vessels owned or operated by organisations other than IWAI or ICSL. The incentive scheme is ideal for major shipping companies, freight forwarders, trade bodies and associations that handle bulk and containerised cargo. By opting for the scheme, it provides them an opportunity to optimise their supply chain network. The scheme is initially valid for 3 years," the statement read.

India boasts an extensive network of inland waterways comprising rivers, canals, backwaters, and creeks. Of the total navigable length of 20,236 km, 17,980 km consists of rivers, and 2,256 km is made up of canals, both suitable for mechanised craft. However, freight transportation via waterways remains significantly under-utilised compared to countries like the United States, China, and those in the European Union. With focused development, India's national waterways are poised to become the nation's lifeline, facilitating efficient transportation.

#### Beneficiaries had to bribe officials

"This is irrespective of their financial position," he added. Commenting on the development of Karbi Anglong, the CEM stated that not only have ration cards been distributed, but schemes such as Arunodhoi, PMAY, road infrastructure improvements, and health schemes have also been implemented.

Later, he criticised the opposition, stating that certain leaders were using the issue of the Sixth Schedule to create confusion among the people. "They want unrest and division among tribes and communities. Unity and peace are what are truly needed. The people of different communities and tribes should respect each other's cultures, languages, and traditions, and co-exist peacefully," he said.

"12,000 youths have been appointed to government jobs, but some political leaders are misleading the people with propaganda. The powers under the Sixth Schedule are not sufficient to run the KAAC, and to gain more autonomy, we are demanding an Autonomous State. We do not want to divide Assam," he added.

He further stated that Karbi Anglong is no longer known for "bandhs" (strikes), but for a strong work culture. With the APSC and UPSC free coaching center, 61 individuals were appointed to various posts in the Government of Assam last year. The CEM Relief Fund has also sponsored writers to write books and provided pensions for local accredited journalists.

The CEM ceremonially distributed new ration cards to beneficiaries. A total of 7,430 new ration cards were issued in Karbi Anglong, while 4,702 were issued in West Karbi Anglong. MLA Bidyasing Engleng, executive member of KAAC Madhuram Lekthe, and members of the Autonomous Council (MACs) Dr Mongve Rongpi, Johny Timung, Tilotima Hasnu, and district commissioner (DC) Nirola Phangchopi participated in the CM's online

### Peddler arrested after hitting constable

from the vehicle. Police said the driver, suspected to be a drug peddler, was taken for crime scene recreation later and he tried to escape from custody. The peddler suffered a bullet injury when police fired at him and he is currently undergoing treatment at the Silchar Medical College and Hospital. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who also holds the home portfolio, said Bora's death is not being treated as a mere accident case.

"The death of the constable is not a case of accident. We are taking it as an attempt to murder. Police have arrested the accused and we will know more after interrogation," the CM said. Meanwhile, Bora's body was brought to his native residence in Jorhat district on Sunday where the last rites were performed with police honours. A pall of gloom descended on the area at the death of the constable, who was in his late twenties. He had joined police service in 2022 and was serving in his first posting in Sribhumi district. (PTI)

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2024

Page 3 Dec 16\_Normal Pages 12/15/2024 8:57 PM Page 1

### Ration cards distributed to beneficiaries in state

**HT Correspondent** 

MARGHERITA, Dec 15: As part of a statewide initiative across 50 constituencies, six assembly constituencies in Tinsukia district distributed new ration cards to 83.952. beneficiaries in simultaneous events held across the district.

In the 83rd Margherita Constituency, beneficiaries received ration cards under the National Food Security Act on Sunday. The distribution event took place at the North Margherita Rangamanch, where, out of 13,161 new beneficiaries, 7,210 from 13 Gaon Panchayats and one Municipal Board received their ration cards.

The event was graced by the presence of Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma, Margherita codistrict commissioner Parikshit Thoudam, Margherita Municipal Board chairman Anand Kumar Sharma, Margherita Municipal Board executive officer Dheeraj Bhattacharjee, assistant director of the Food and Civil Supply Department Pronamika Konwar, and Margherita Anchalik Panchayat president Sukhdev Sharma. Several other officials from the Margherita co-district administration also attended the program.

The new beneficiaries expressed their joy and gratitude upon receiving their ration cards.

Parikshit Thoudam, Margherita co-district commissioner, highlighted that the new ration card distribution under the 'One Nation. One Ration' scheme will significantly benefit families covered under the National Food Security Act, particularly those belonging to the Below Poverty Line (BPL)

Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma, in his speech, noted that the process of obtaining a ration card has become significantly easier and more transparent, thanks to the ambitious initiatives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief

minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. He further highlighted that the 'One Nation, One Ration' system enables beneficiaries to access rations from any part of the country. ensuring greater flexibility and convenience. Sharma also assured that the distribution of all 13,161 ration cards in the constituency will be completed by December

Our Sivasagar correspondent adds: The Food and Civil Supplies Department, government of Assam, in collaboration with the Sivasagar district administration, ceremoniously distributed ration cards to 524 beneficiaries on Sunday. The event, held at Boarding Field, was attended by notable dignitaries, including Kushal Duwori, chairman of the Urban Drainage and Sewerage Board; Sivasagar DC Ayush Garg; and Sivasagar DDC Samiran Bora.

Speaking at the event, DDC Samiran Bora emphasised the state government's consistent efforts to support marginalised sections of society. Addressing the beneficiaries, Kushal Duwori commended the government's dedication to uplifting the economic status of weaker sections through various schemes. However, he urged cultivators to recommitted to their traditional farming activities, ensuring sustainable growth alongside government support.

### 5.7 acres poppy plantation destroyed in Churachandpur

IMPHAL, Dec 15: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday said that 5.7 acres of illegal poppy plantation was destroyed in Churachandpur district.

Singh lauded the state police, Assam Rifles and the forest department for the joint drive in Thinghangjang area.

In a post on X, Singh said, "Well done, combined team of Churachandpur Police, 36 AR, CCPur Forest Division, and NAB for their successful operation in the Thinghangjang area under Tuibuong Sub-division. The destruction of approximately 5.7 acres of illicit cultivation is a commendable achievement.'

"Let us continue to approach future operations with the same zeal and determination," the CM added. (PTI)

# BTR govt marks fourth anniversary with grand celebration

CEM Pramod Boro highlights peace, harmony, and development under UPPL-led governance in Bodoland region

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Dec 15: Marking four years of governance under the dynamic leadership of Pramod Boro, chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), the BTR government celebrated its fourth anniversary with a grand program at the Bhergaon Mini Stadium in Udalguri district.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from diverse communities across the Bodoland region. The celebration was themed 'Regaining Sustainable Peace, Harmony, and Integration', reflecting the government's commitment to fostering unity and progress in the region.

Notably, the BTR alliance government, led by the UPPL party, was formed on December 15, 2020, and has since been dedicated to the welfare and development of society across

The fourth-anniversary celebrations were graced by Assam Legislative Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary, state cabinet minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma, chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Region Pramod Boro, and BTCLA Speaker Katiram Boro, among other dignitaries.

Several distinguished dignitaries, including BTR executive members, MLAs, MCLAs of BTR, and the principal secretary of BTR, were prominent attendees at the event.

Additionally, notable personalities from the fields of sports, culture, and agriculture were



warmly felicitated during the program, adding to the significance of the occasion amidst the presence of invited guests.

Speaker Biswajit Daimary extended his heartfelt greetings to the people of the Bodoland region and its government on the joyous occasion of the fourth anniversary of the BTR government.

The day-long, colourful program highlighted the achievements of the administration under chief executive member Pramod

Daimary praised the BTR government for initiating numerous welfare and developmental programs aimed at fostering sustainable growth in the region since its inception. He emphasised that the state and BTR governments are working collaboratively to ensure the all-round development of society in the

Chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, stated that the four-year journey of the BTR government, guided by the theme 'Regaining Sustainable Peace, Harmony, and Integration', has successfully fostered these values among

He highlighted that over the past four years, the BTR government has tirelessly worked to promote peace, inclusive progress, sustainable development, and equitable justice for every section of BTR's diverse soci-

He remarked that the four-year journey of the BTR government stands as a milestone, reaffirming its unwavering commitment to building a brighter and more harmonious future for all.

"Over the past four years, our government has tirelessly worked to foster peace, inclusive progress, sustainable development, and equitable justice for every section of BTR's diverse society. This milestone reaffirms our unwavering commitment to building a brighter and more harmonious future for all," said Pramod Boro.

He added, "I take this opportunity to extend my heartiest greetings to all my fellow citizens of BTR and express my heartfelt gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his leadership, Home minister Amit Shah, and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for their guidance. I also thank our developmental partners, my colleague EMs, MCLAs, and everyone contributing to BTR's growth story. Together, we will continue working towards a better future for every citizen of BTR."

# **KVS Foundation Day**

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, Dec 15:** The PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) Kendriya Vidyalaya, Diphu, celebrated the 62nd Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) Foundation Day with great enthusiasm and a series of vibrant cultural programs. The event was graced by Ankita Borah, the ADC of Karbi Anglong, as the chief guest.

The celebrations commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, followed by the KVS prayer and a warm welcome address by the principal. In her speech, Borah lauded the pivotal role played by Kendriva Vidyalayas in promoting education and fostering holistic development among students.

The highlight of the event was the students' mesmerising cultural performances, which included traditional dances, soulful musical renditions, and a skit celebrating six decades of KVS achievements. Adding to the excitement, Borah invited all students for a collective dance, fostering a sense of inclusivity and joy.

The chief guest commended the efforts of both students and staff, urging them to continue upholding values that Kendriya Vidyalayas represent. The program concluded on a patriotic note with a vote of thanks and the national anthem, reflecting the unity and dedication that define the Kendriya

# KV Diphu celebrates 62nd 1.14 lakh 'Lakhpati Didis' by end of current fiscal: Tripura CM

AGARTALA, Dec 15: Lauding the Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission (TRLM) for spearheading women empowerment, Chief Minister Manik Saha on Saturday asserted that the northeastern state will have 1.14 lakh 'Lakhpati Didis' by the end of the current fiscal. At present, the state has 83,000 'Lakhpati Didis' who earn ₹ 1 lakh or more annually by engaging themselves in activities of self-help groups (SHGs).

While addressing the inaugural programme of SARAS Mela at Badharghat International Fair Ground in West Tripura district, the chief minister said the success of SHGs has changed the rural economy over the last few years.

"The number of SHGs, which



now increased to 52,000. Altogether, 4.73 lakh rural women got engaged in various self-employment trades. The government has allocated ₹ 69 crore as revolving fund so far (after the BJP came to power in Tripura) and ₹ 626.97 crore community investment fund has been channelised to the SHGs," Saha said.

Showering praise on the role of

TRLM, which works under the state government's Rural Development Department, Saha said "The number of 'Lakhpati Didis' in the state will increase from 83,000 at present to 1.14 lakh by the end of the current financial year. The initiative has strengthened the socioeconomic condition of the women living in rural areas.'

Saha also highlighted the success of organising SARAS mela, an annual event to showcase and sell the products made by different

Mela, which was ₹ 1.5 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal, has grown to ₹ 4.5 crore in the 2023-24 fiscal. The increase mirrors the success of SHGs," he said. (PTI)

### NFR records growth in freight loading

GUWAHATI, Dec 15: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is working relentlessly around the clock to serve its customers and ensure the timely delivery of essential commodities to end users. NFR continues to make steady progress in freight loading, and during the month of November 2024, the railway registered 0.702 million tonnes of freight loading across various commodities.

During November 2024, the loading of certain commodities registered significant growth compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. Cement loading increased by 280 percent, and container loading increased by 9.1 percent compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. A growth of 306.7 percent in the loading of miscellaneous items was also registered compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year.

The speedy execution of doubling and electrification works in important sections of NF Railway has led to increased inward and outward movement of freight traffic. This unprecedented loading accomplishment was made possible through simultaneous efforts to enhance capacity. This continuous growth in freight loading reflects the increasing economic activity in the region. The upward trend in freight operations has not only boosted the region's economic dynamics but also generated significant revenue for NFR.

# Wild elephants maul farm worker in KA

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Dec 15: A herd of wild elephants feeding on a sugarcane field attacked and killed a farm worker in Jorashimlu, in the West Karbi Anglong district in broad day-

The deceased, identified as Milan Ali Laskar, a resident of Kharikhana village, was working in the sugarcane crop field when the elephants attacked

People on the elephant attack site familiar with the person said that he was a landless farm worker and very poor, who was harvesting the sugarcane. He was attacked while he went to wash up before lunch. He is survived by a minor son and his wife.

The elephants also attacked and damaged a Maruti Swift car that was parked near the crop field. It is estimated that there are around 150 wild elephants roaming around West Karbi Anglong in search of food. The elephants are often encountered where sugarcane and paddy are in plenty.

The authorities have been notified by the villagers, and they are searching for a solution to the man-animal con-

It may be mentioned that farmers, farm workers, and villagers alike often fell victim to wild elephant attacks, which sometimes prove to be fatal. It is an annual occurrence in the West Karbi Anglong district under the administrative control of the Karbi Anglong Au-

> Meanwhile, a herd of more than 40 elephants has been staying in a paddy field since last Saturday on the bank of the Dighalpani River in Pub Dikharu in Howraghat sub-division of Karbi Anglong district. Villagers are of the view that the elephants have come down from the hills in search of food and may have lost their way as they are not usually seen in the area.

tonomous Council (KAAC)

Villagers have tried to chase the wild elephant herd by creating noise, but they stayed

Meanwhile, community leaders requested the forest department to chase them towards the hills as they feared that if the situation persists, it will not be long before some villagers, farmers, and wayfarers may be attacked.

# **KAAC CEM attends Tribal Cultural**

**DIPHU**, **Dec 15:** Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Tuliram Rnghang attended the Open Session on the concluding

Asom Janajati Sanskriti Mahasabha (AJSM) here at Taralangso. The cultural meet was organised in collaboration with

day of the three day first Tribal Cultural Confluence of

Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) and supported by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

Addressing the gathering the CEM said. "I am glad the first cultural confluence is being organised here, with so many ethnic communities. As the AJSM has become a platform for unity among ethnic tribes of Assam, and as you all know the people of Karbi Anglong are demanding Autonomous State for more autonomy and I appealed to all the ethnic tribes of Assam to extend support to our demand."

CEM also said erstwhile United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills is the oldest and largest sixth scheduled district in India, where Karbis have their distinct culture, language and tradition.

Upholding one's culture is important and through AJSM the culture and language of the ethnic tribes of Assam should be reach the global sphere.

He thanked the AJSM president, Debendranath Basumatari; working president, Pabitra Kr Pegu; chief secretary, Suruj Kr Patir and KCS president, Chandrasing Kro and general secretary Bidyasing Rongpi for organising the tribal cultural confluence and expressed confidence under their leadership will work in bringing together the various ethnic tribes of Assam.

In the evening cultural demonstrations of various ethnic tribes were held. There were folk dances of the Karbis, Bodos, Mising, Dimasa, Garo, Tiwa, Garo, Mech Kachari, Rabha, Deuri and others.

# **HPCF** observes foundation day

HT Bureau DIPHU, Dec 15: Hill People's Cul-

tural Forum (HPCF) celebrated its 9th foundation day as 'Day of brotherhood' with a daylong programme here at Diphu Club on Sunday. The HPCF was constituted with an aim to build communal harmony among tribes irrespective of faith and belief, caste, language and culture with joint effort bringing together the 27 tribes and communities residing in Karbi Anglong.

Attending the programme, the Chief Executive Member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Tuliram Ronghang said, "For Brotherhood Day celebration I suggest next year that it be organised in Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra, Guwahati, so that it become a testimony to the unity of all tribes and communities residing in Karbi Anglong. All the expense of travel, lodging, food and organising the event will be borne by me. This is my assurance." He said every tribe and community is in coexistence without disturbing the integrity of others. The KAAC is always facilitating in

solving the grievances of every tribe and communities. Those who have lived since 1951 will continue to live in the district. The KAAC is not against them, but against the influx of Bangladeshis and people from

Manipur entering Karbi Anglong. HPC chairman, Laichan Engleng said his organisation is working for the tribes and communities to contribute to the development of the district and building peace and harmony by respecting each other. It is not only Karbis, but all tribes and communities.

"The sale proceeds of SARAS

### Tripura CM stops convoy to help injured persons

**HT Correspondent** 

AGARTALA, Dec 15: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, once again displayed his commitment to public welfare by going beyond the call of duty.

While returning from a government function in Udaipur under Gomati District today, the chief minister came across a distressing sight on Gokulnagar Road in Sepahijala District where an injured person lying helpless after a road

Demonstrating exemplary compassion and leadership, Saha immediately stopped his convoy and sought assistance from the local residents.

Together, they ensured that the injured individual was swiftly transported to the nearest hospital

using a convoy vehicle. Recognizing the critical importance of timely medical intervention, the chief minister personally contacted the attending doctors over the phone, urging them to pro-

vide the best possible treatment. In a heartfelt gesture, Saha conveyed his wishes for the injured person's speedy recovery.

He also expressed his gratitude to the local residents for their prompt action and willingness to help during the crisis.

# UPPL expresses gratitude to citizens

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 15: The United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has extended heartfelt greetings and gratitude to all citizens of the Bodoland region as the fourth anniversary of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) government was celebrated on Sunday at Bhergaon Mini Stadium in Udalguri district.

Addressing reporters at a press conference held at the UPPL Central Office in Kokrajhar on Saturday, the party's general secretary, Raju Kumar Narzary, expressed gratitude to the citizens of the Bodoland region for their continued cooperation and support in leading the alliance government in the BTR. He noted that the BTR government was formed on December 15, 2020, and has since been committed to delivering welfare services across the region. Narzary added that the fourth anniversary of the government is being celebrated in a grand manner, commencing on Sunday.

"The fourth anniversary of the UPPL-led BTR government marks a significant milestone for the re-

gion, where people from all communities are experiencing healthier lives with dignity and integrity,' Narzary stated.

He highlighted that the Bodoland region has progressed towards becoming a peaceful, smart, and green Bodoland under the leadership of the UPPL-led alliance government, which has introduced numerous welfare initiatives fostering integration among citizens. He added that the BTR has witnessed significant strides in sustainable development across various sectors of society since the formation of the govern-

He stated that several missions and visions have been launched in the BTR under the leadership of Pramod Boro, the chief executive member (CEM) of the Bodoland Territorial Region, receiving widespread appreciation from citizens. Among these initiatives is Mission Bwiswmuthi, a flagship program aimed at addressing land-related services for the public.

Additionally, schemes like Mainao Swrang Bithangkhi, Giyan Swrang Bithangkhi, Onsungthai

Bithangkhi, and Alari Swrang Bithangkhi have been implemented to support needy individuals and SHGs across the region. These flagship programs have ushered in significant social development, driving the mission of better governance and transformative change in the region. He emphasised that the UPPL party remains steadfast in its commitment to serving humanity and working towards the holistic develunder the banner of the NDA alliance, the UPPL has been actively contributing to the welfare of society through its efforts in the BTR government, as well as at the state and central levels.

He stated that the Opposition BPF party has become irrelevant among the common people, alleging that it failed to address the problems and grievances of citizens during its 17-year rule in the Bodoland Territorial Region. He claimed that the UPPL party's popularity is rising significantly, with people from across communities increasingly coming forward to join the ruling party.

#### Those responsible for death of students will be held accountable: Arunachal CM

ITANAGAR, Dec 15: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu expressed shock over the death of three students in an overhead tank collapse in a private school in Naharlagun, and asserted that those responsible for the incident would be held accountable. Three students were killed after an overhead tank, near which they were revising for examinations, collapsed on Saturday.

"Deeply saddened by the tragic incident at St. Alphonsa School, Naharlagun, which claimed the lives of three young students and opment of the people. He stated that left two others critically injured. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families during this unimaginable loss," the chief minister said in a post on X.

"The administration has initiated a thorough investigation, and those responsible will be held accountable. Ex gratia support for the families of the deceased and assistance for the injured will be provided as per norms. We are committed to ensuring justice and extending all possible support. Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured and strength to the grieving families in this difficult time," he added.

Five people, including the owner and the principal of the school, have been arrested in connection with the incident. An FIR has been registered with Naharlagun police station, and further investigation is underway to ascertain the cause of the collapse. (PTI)

### Padma Shri Anuradha Koirala to receive **Upendra Nath Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award**

**HT Correspondent** 

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 15: The Upendra Nath Brahma Trust (UNBT) has announced that Padma Shri Anuradha Koirala, a globally renowned social activist and founder of Maiti Nepal, has been chosen as the recipient of the 21st Upendra Nath Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award. This prestigious accolade honours her exceptional efforts in combating human trafficking, rescuing survivors, and transforming lives through her steadfast commitment to justice and equality.

Padma Shri Koirala will be presented with the award on December 22, 2024, at 10:00 am at the Bodofa Cultural Complex in Kokrajhar.

Anuradha Koirala, also known as the Mother Teresa of Nepal,' has dedicated her life to the service of humanity, focusing particularly on combating the exploitation of women and children. Since establishing Maiti Nepal in 1993, her relentless efforts have resulted in the rescue and rehabilitation of over 50,000 survivors of sex trafficking. Through her organisation, she has provided safe havens, rehabilitation homes, and preventive programs, empowering survivors to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

Her unparalleled dedication has earned her numerous prestigious international accolades,



including the CNN Hero of the Year Award (2010), the Mother Teresa Memorial International Award for Social Justice (2014), and the Padma Shri (2017) from the Government of India. Anuradha Koirala's humanitarian efforts have solidified her reputation as a global symbol of hope and compassion.

The Upendra Nath Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award is an annual honour presented by the Upendra Nath Brahma Trust to individuals who embody the ideals of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, a visionary Bodo leader devoted to justice, equality, and the upliftment of marginalised communities and humanity This award aims to recognise and celebrate individuals whose actions inspire others to champion the cause of the downtrodden and uphold the principles of humanity.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

By a lie, a man... annihilates his dignity as a man. - Immanuel Kant

#### Trade tensions and India's path forward

ment, warning that if BRICS countries, including India, moved away from the U.S. dollar, they would face a punitive 100% tariff. While this rhetoric is not new, it underscores the growing tensions in global trade relations, with the U.S. using tariffs as a tool to assert its dominance on the international stage. Such measures have already had a profound impact on global trade, and India finds itself in a delicate position, navigating a complex web of economic challenges. Trump's harsh rhetoric against India is not new either. He has previously labeled the country the "tariff king" and withdrew its preferential trade status under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). The GSP, which provides duty-free access to over 3,500 products from low-income countries, was a key trade benefit for India, helping it expand exports to the U.S. However, given India's growing economy and per capita income of around \$2,700, it no longer qualifies for this status under U.S. criteria. India's removal from the GSP represents a shift in the U.S.'s approach to global trade, targeting nations that have moved beyond the low-income threshold.

Despite the political rhetoric and growing tariffs, the actual economic impact on India has been relatively limited. A closer look at India's exports to the U.S. reveals that most of its key products, such as diamonds, pharmaceuticals, refined petroleum, and automotive components, were not heavily impacted by the withdrawal of GSP benefits. For instance, while items like textiles and footwear were affected, these account for a relatively small portion of India's total exports to the U.S. Furthermore, the imposition of tariffs on consumer goods such as toys and furniture—categories that are not significant in India's export basket—has had a minimal effect on its overall trade with the U.S. However, India cannot afford to be complacent. The country's current account deficit continues to widen, driven by strong domestic demand for energy, particularly imported oil, and the global slowdown in demand for many of India's key exports. To address these issues, the government has implemented measures such as importing discounted oil from Russia, curbing gold imports, and boosting exports through schemes like the Atmanirbhar Bharat and the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) programs. Yet, these measures have not been enough to significantly improve India's manufacturing competitiveness, which remains stagnant at around 17% of GDP.

One major obstacle to India's economic growth is the lack of foreign direct investment (FDI). While India continues to attract investment in sectors like defense, where it has contracted nearly \$20 billion worth of U.S. defense items since 2008, FDI in manufacturing has been declining. In the first half of the 2023-24 financial year, India saw a dramatic drop in FDI flows, reflecting concerns over business environment rigidities, such as high taxes on certain sectors and the inverted duty structure (IDS). For example, the automobile and carbonated soft drink (CSD) industries in India face some of the highest taxes in the world. The GST rates for these sectors can go as high as 40%, which is much higher than global norms. Such high taxes undermine competitiveness, particularly in the CSD sector, where there is no clear distinction between sugary and low-sugar beverages.

# Trump 2.0: India's real concern lies in domestic distortions, not tarrif

n November 30, Mr. Donald Trump osted a threat on his social media, warning that if BRICS countries abandon the US dollar, they would face a 100% tariff. This is not a new threat; similar warnings have also been directed at other regions, including nearshore friendly countries such as Mexico and China, with tariff threats spreading across various geographical areas.

A recent study by the National Retail Federation estimated that Trump's proposed tariffs on apparel, toys, furniture, appliances, footwear, and travel goods could cost consumers an additional \$46 billion to \$78 billion annually. All of this means higher prices for the consumers, and the US sellers of Chinese goods fear a loss in business due to the price hikes induced by the tariffs.

While China is expected to bear the brunt of the tariffs, other neighbouring countries, including India, are not likely to be exempted. Not only did Trump label India as the "tariff king", but he also removed the country from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), during his last tenure as President. Under the GSP, established by the Trade Act of 1974, US policymakers allowed imports of around 3,500 products from designated beneficiary countries—primarily low-income nations—at a preferential duty-free (zero-tariff) rate. The aim was to help these countries increase and diversify

According to the World Bank, a "low-income" country is one with a per capita income of less than \$1,045 per year in 2023. With India's per capita income at around \$2,700 annually, Trump's position is technically correct: Indian firms may no longer qualify for preferential treatment under the GSP, given that India no longer meets the low-income threshold

As the US remains India's largest export destination, it is only natural to feel the pressure with increasingly restrictive trade measures in place. Around 18% of India's total exports are directed to the US, with a value of \$77 billion in 2023, and \$78 billion in

However, if previous restrictive trade measures, including the withdrawal of GSP, are any indication, then the impact has been relatively modest. A quick review of the items qualified under the GSP reveals that they primarily fall under categories such as textiles and apparel, watches, footwear,



leather apparel. India's exports to the US are mainly comprised of diamonds (19%), packaged medicaments (14%), refined petroleum products (8.9%), automotive components (2.1%), and textiles and apparel (3.7%). The percentages in parentheses represent the share of each category in India's total exports to the US.

Among these key export categories, some items within textiles and apparel and automotive components were included in the GSP list.

Additionally, exports of organic chemicals, steel, and By: Dr. Nilanjan Banik certain engineering goods—such as nuclear boilers, machinery, and mechanical appliances-were also im-

pacted by the withdrawal of GSP benefits. However, the value of these items as a proportion of total Indian exports to the US is relatively small. During the previous period of the Trump administration, he imposed tariffs primarily

on items such as toys, household appliances, footwear, travel goods, apparel, and furniture. Again, these items do not feature among India's top exportable items. In 2023, India became the second-largest exporter of refined petroleum, with exports valued at \$85 billion and a global market share of 12.6%. Other major exports from India include insecticides and fungicides (10.5%), steel (12.7%), beet sugar (12.21%), rubber tyres (3.31%), and gemstones (36%), with the global market share figures indicated in

Therefore, from the perspective of Trump's tariffs and a hawkish trade policy measures has little to explain India's burgeoning trade deficit. Most of India's key exports are income-sensitive, and weak global demand is having an impact. On the other hand, a strong Indian economy drives higher demand for energy and fossil fuels, the majority of which are imported.

The government took several steps to address the widening current account deficit. **DEGREE OF THOUGHT** 

India continues to im-

port discounted oil from

Russia, with its share in the trade basket rising from 1% to 22%. Last year, India banned the export of 100% broken rice, used in ethanol production. To curb gold imports, customs tariffs were increased from 7.5% to 12.5%. Initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat and the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes aimed at boosting export competitiveness are also undertaken.

However, the contribution of manufacturing value added to GDP remains stagnant at 17%, indicating no significant improvement in manufacturing competitiveness. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), a key driver of technology transfer and manufacturing competitiveness, is declining, with gross FDI flows dropping to just 1% and net FDI falling to 0.6% in the first half of the 2023-24 financial year—levels not seen since 2005-06. Rigidities in the business environment, the inverted duty structure (IDS), and India's decision to terminate bilateral treaties are to be blamed for discouraging flow of FDI.

Consider two of the most important sectors dominated by foreign manufacturing giants, namely, automobiles and carbonated soft drinks (CSDs). Both these industry attract highest possible rate of goods and services tax (GST) which is 28% with additional cess taking up the total duty to up to 40%.

India stands out for imposing high taxes on CSDs, unlike the global practice of taxing sugary beverages. The high taxes on lowand zero-sugar CSDs contradict WHO recommendations and those of health experts, who favour a tax based on sugar content. Over 120 countries have adopted layered tax policies, where lower sugar content attracts lower taxes, to encourage healthier product reformulation. Similarly, when state governments impose high road taxes on automobiles, the assumption that demand is inelastic and consumers will pay regardless is ultimately undermining foreign investments. A recent study of 1.464 tariff lines across textiles, electronics, chemicals, and metals reveals how the IDS is hurting competitiveness, with 136 items from textiles, 179 from electronics, 64 from chemicals, and 191 from metals most affected. For example, apparel items priced below \$14 (Rs 1,000) are subject to a GST of 5%, while those exceeding \$14 are taxed at 12%. In fact, the government has recently proposed that garments priced between Rs 1,500 and Rs 10,000 will be taxed at 18%, while apparel priced above Rs 10,000 will fall under the highest GST slab of 28%.

This level of hike in indirect tax can undermine export competitiveness and increase price up to 8% in the world market. For textile manufacturers, there are also significant investments required in value-added services such as marketing, warehouse rentals, logistics, courier services, and other fulfilment costs. However, these additional services are taxed at a higher GST rate of 18%. This creates an inverted duty structure, where the tax on inputs is higher than the tax on the final product.

During his last tenure, Trump positioned himself more as a major arms dealer, focused on selling more weapons. India has contracted for nearly \$20 billion worth of US origin defense items since 2008. This trend is likely to continue in a potential Trump 2.0. India, for its part, should focus less on tariffs and more on addressing do-

# India-China border: Post-Galwan tensions and diplomatic challenges

By: Dipak Kurmi

he India-China relationship, particularly in the context of the unresolved territorial dispute and the Line of Actual Control (LAC), continues to evolve amid moments of thaw and deep-seated tensions. Recent developments, including a meeting between Indian Prime Minister NarendraModi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, signal a potential shift in this complex equation. However, the shadow of the Galwan clash of June 2020 and decades of unresolved border disputes make it evident that progress will require more than superficial diplomacy **Revisiting the Post-Galwan Landscape** 

The events of June 2020 in Galwan Valley marked a watershed moment in India-China relations. The violent clash not only resulted in loss of lives but also shattered the fragile trust between the two nations. In its aftermath, India articulated two key objectives: the restoration of the status quo as of April 2020 and adherence to existing border agreements. However, the tactical situation on the ground revealed troubling realities. India had seemingly forfeited some patrolling rights along the LAC in Ladakh, and the creation of buffer zones along the disputed frontier raised concerns about a potential "new normal" imposed by China. These issues remain contentious and unresolved. The external affairs minister's (EAM) recent statement in Parliament attempted to address the evolving situation, emphasizing peace and tranquility along the border as prerequisites for normalizing bilateral ties. Yet, the absence of a thorough parliamentary discussion on this vital issue triggered a walkout by Opposition members, underscoring the domestic discord surrounding India's China policy.

**Diplomatic Moves and Lingering Questions** The 32nd meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs, held in Delhi in December, reflected cautious optimism. The Ministry of External Affairs' (MEA) statement following the talks noted the implementation of a recent disengagement agreement that purportedly resolved issues from 2020. However, critical questions remain unanswered: Does this signify a full resolution of the Galwan-triggered tensions? Is the so-called agreement documented, or is it based on verbal understandings? The ambiguity surrounding these points has fueled skepticism, with experts like former Ambassador to China Ashok Kantha voicing concerns about the lack of clarity and consistency in official statements. This opacity is compounded by historical precedents. India's experience with Chinese incursions, notably the 1962 war, offers valuable lessons about the consequences of inadequate transparency. Nehru's decision to allow an open parliamentary debate on the Chinese invasion, despite the ongoing war, stands in stark contrast to the current reluctance to engage in broader discussions on the

Galwan episode and its aftermath. The Legacy of 1962 and Its Resonance Today

The 1962 war left an indelible mark on India's strategic and political psyche. Nehru's willingness to engage Parliament on the issue, despite its sensitivity, underscored the importance of democratic accountability. However, the decision to withhold the Henderson Brooks report, which analyzed the military failures of the conflict, set a precedent of limited transparency that continues to influence India's approach to its China policy. The parallels between 1962 and 2020 are striking. In both instances, India was caught off guard by Chinese aggression. The strategic missteps of 1962 resonate with concerns raised by experts about the management of the post-Galwan situation. The MEA's assertion that lessons have been "reflected upon" should prompt introspection

about whether these lessons have translated into actionable strategies to prevent future crises.

The Need for Transparency and Policy Coherence The India-China border dispute is not merely a bilateral issue; it has significant implications for regional stability and India's national security. The lack of transparency surrounding the disengagement process and the broader contours of India-China relations undermines public confidence and complicates strategic planning. Democratic accountability demands that critical issues of national security be openly debated, both in Parliament and the public sphere. A comprehensive White Paper on India-China relations, building on the EAM's parliamentary statement, could serve as a starting point for greater transparency. Such a document should detail the status of border negotiations, the implications of buffer zones along the LAC, and the broader strategic objectives of India's China policy. It should also address the domestic political compulsions and geopolitical factors that shape India's approach to its eastern neighbor.

**Moving Forward: A Complex Balancing Act** The path to a stable and mutually beneficial India-China relationship is fraught with challenges. The need to maintain peace along the border must be balanced with the imperative of safeguarding India's territorial integrity and strategic interests. Diplomatic engagements, such as the Modi-Xi meeting and the WMCC talks, provide opportunities for dialogue but must be complemented by a coherent and transparent policy framework. The restoration of the April 2020 status quo remains a critical goal, as emphasized by Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi. Achieving this requires a combination of military preparedness, diplomatic dexterity, and domestic political consensus. The lessons of history, from 1962 to Galwan, underscore the importance of proactive and transparent policymaking in navigating the complexities of the India-China relationship. The unresolved border issue between India and China is a reflection of deeper geopolitical tensions and historical legacies. While recent diplomatic engagements offer a glimmer of hope, the road ahead requires sustained effort, clear communication, and an unwavering commitment to national security. Transparency, both in terms of public discourse and policymaking, will be critical in shaping a stable and resilient India-China relationship for the future. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)

# Israel should not be allowed to use Syria as a theatre for its power game

By: P. Sudhir

he rapid advance of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and other armed factions led to the fall of Bashar al- Assad's government in Syria. With this, the US has succeeded in toppling the last of the secular regimes in West Asia, US military interventions resulted not only in the fall of secular regimes in nistan, Iraq, Libya and now Sy West Asia-North African region, but also created deep sectarian fissures in the region. The destruction unleashed by the US and the Frankenstein religious fundamentalist/extremist groups it helped create, is threatening peace and stability everywhere.

Syria was divided into three zones after the civil war, which started in 2011. Assad's government was in control of only 65 per cent of the land. It was supported by Russia and Iran. which helped the government control the land

and also repel attacks from militant groups. The second zone of 25 per cent land is controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with the backing of the US. The rest of the region, particularly the North-Western regions are controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which is an off-shoot of the al-Qaeda and al-Nusra front. HTS declared itself as a separate entity in 2016 and has emerged as a dominant militant group. It is based in Idlib. Though declared a terrorist organisation by US. Russia and Turkey, it enjoyed covert backing from countries that were against Assad.

Basing itself in Idlib, the HTS actively worked to regroup its forces in the past one year and launched the attack. Its attack received a fillip from a parallel attack that was led by another militant group, the Syrian National Army (SNA) backed by Turkey, which is based in the areas north of Aleppo.

Iran and Russia, two main supporters of the Syrian government are bogged down by the conflicts in their neighbourhoods. Hezbollah, which played an important role in defence of the Syrian government is involved in the war

against Israeli aggression. All these factors led rael is claiming that the intensity with which it to weakening of support to the Syrian government, which was already in a crisis.

Assad was not a popular president. He had initiated neoliberal economic policies that created discontent among the people. The government tried to suppress protests against such policies by using force. It curtailed all forms of democratic rights and imposed an authoritarian rule. Imperialist forces led by the US utilised this discontent to destabilise the regime. They used fundamentalist/extremist organisations like al-Qaeda and its regional associate al-Nusra to conduct militant attacks that led to the civil war. Israel, a major imperialist ally in the region, too played a role in creating distur-

Thousands of people lost their lives, many more were injured in the civil war. More than 6 million Syrians became refugees and were forced to flee the country. The economic loss suffered due to destruction ran into several billions. Even after the decade long civil war lost its intensity, Syrian government could not address peoples' sufferings.

In the last one year, Israel has continuously bombed territories within Syria, in the name of cutting down arms supply to Hezbollah and eliminating its threat. Syria could neither resist nor counter such attacks. Soldiers in the Syrian armed forces were affected by the all round crises and were not ready to resist.

The Syrian government lost the confidence of its people as a result of its authoritarian character. This was its major weakness. It was because of these reasons that when the militant groups launched their offensive, whatever remained of the Syrian armed forces just melted away without offering any resistance. President Assad too fled the country and sought asylum

Immediately after the fall of Assad, Israel intensified its attacks on Syria. Israel has carried out more that 480 aerial strikes in 48-hours (between December 10-11), which is more than what it had carried out in the past one year. Isis attacking is an attempt to ensure that Syrian arms and ammunition does not fall into militants' hands.

Israel has occupied the buffer zone between Syria and Israel near the Israeli occupied Golan Heights. It has officially declared that its defence forces have even 'crossed the buffer zone' into Syrian territories. This is Israel's yet another brazen violation of UN res The far-right Zionists are begging for the occupation of as much territory as possible for the establishment of 'Greater Israel'.

On the other hand, Turkey too is keen to establish its control and realise its regional ambitions. It is supporting the SNA to carry out attacks on Kurds and occupy their lands. It wants to eliminate the threat emanating from the Kurds' demand for an autonomous Kurdistan. Media reports that the fighting between Turkish-backed and Kurdish-led forces in northern Syria has killed more than two hundred people in just three days.

People of various sects like Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, Alwaites, Druze and Christians live in Syria. In the coming days, sectarian strife is bound to increase because of the conflicting interests of the powers backing competing militant groups. There is every chance that the situation will deteriorate into another internal civil war, which would be detrimental to the people of Syria, who are harbouring high hopes after the fall of Assad's government.

The militant groups announced the formation of an interim government with Mohammed al-Bashir, as the prime minister till March 1, 2025. He urged the people to remain united and promised to govern accordingly. Given the experiences of countries or regions governed by militant groups like the HTS, we can hardly expect them to live by such promises. The future of Syria should be decided by the people of Syria, without any external influence, intervention or threat. Imperialism and Zionism should not be allowed to use Syria as a theatre to pursue its great power ambitions. (IPA Service)

#### Post bag

Sir/Ma'am

rom village-level initiatives by Mahila Samitis or Yuva Sanghas to large-scale events like the Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha and Asom Sahitya Sabha, tree plantation programmes have become a ubiquitous feature. Even events that don't typically focus on environmental issues often include tree planting ceremonies. On World Environment Day, hundreds of thousands of saplings are planted, both officially and unofficially, in schools, colleges, public spaces, and even as part of record-breaking attempts.

Despite these efforts, which have been ongoing for years, the number of trees in our environment has not increased significantly. This suggests that traditional tree plantation programs have had limited impact on environmental conservation and promotion.

Several factors contribute to this outcome. Firstly, there often lacks sincerity in these plan-

Stray cattle and environmental conservation In contrast, individual initiatives by few environtation initiatives. Tree plantation programs are occasionally implemented, but the focus is not on nurturing and monitoring the saplings'

growth. Typically, the seedlings are fenced with bamboo or other materials for protection, but these fences have a limited lifespan, rarely lasting more than six months to a year. Once the fence is damaged, no one takes responsibility for repairing or replacing it, and even the officials responsible for implementing the tree plantation program show little interest in monitoring their progress.

Roadsides, which have been beautifully planted with saplings and fenced with bamboo, often become feeding grounds for stray cattle and goats. Within six months, the fence collapses, and the saplings are destroyed. As a result, thousands of rupees allocated for government tree plantation programs go to waste. A sapling typically requires two or three fences to ensure its safety, but without plans for subsequent fencing, the entire plantation program is often ineffective. mental activists have shown remarkable success. We urgently need legislation to prohibit the free movement of cattle to protect the environment. The growing population and scarcity of grazing land have led to an increase in open cattle grazing, harming farmers, herders and the environment. This practice also contributes to a higher incidence of accidents.

During the winter season, our fields lie barren after the paddy harvest. The primary reason for this is the infestation of stray animals. Even before the paddy season ends, people in our villages and towns start letting their cattle loose, and after the sowing season begins, they think of tethering their cows and buffaloes. These stray cattle not only prevent cultivation but also damage trees growing naturally in the area. If trees growing naturally in areas like jungles, riverbanks, and wetlands were allowed to flourish, there would be no need for artificial sapling plantation in these regions, particularly in Assam. However,

the entry of cattle into these areas must be banned to prevent damage to the trees. Enforcing a ban on open cattle grazing is crucial, especially in India, particularly in Assam. This practice has reduced cattle productivity and led to the failure of artificial insemination schemes. Moreover, open grazing has resulted in a high incidence of breeding accidents, often causing valuable cows to suffer injuries or death.

Above all, open cattle grazing destroys saplings, hinders the growth of seedlings and prevents the roots of seedlings from sprouting. When saplings on roadsides grow slightly taller, cows and buffaloes destroy them.

The practice of open cattle grazing has been discontinued in southern Indian states like Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. However, in northeastern states like Assam, as well as in West Bengal and Odisha, open cattle grazing remains a common sight. We urgently need legislation to prohibit open cattle grazing to protect

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Page 5 Dec 16\_Normal Pages 15-12-2024 17:51 Page 1

# Heart attack vs. heart failure: What to know

**By: Mathieu Rees** 

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heart attack occurs when there is a sudden loss of blood supply to the heart. Heart failure is when the heart is unable to pump blood efficiently.

Heart disease is a leading cause of death in the United States. The term refers to several different types of heart conditions, including heart attacks and heart failure.

This article will explore the differences between heart attacks and heart failure. It will look at the symptoms, causes, diagnosis, and treatments of both conditions.

#### **Definitions**

The heart is a muscular pump that circulates blood to all the tissues throughout the body. This is a vital function, as without a continuous supply of fresh blood, cells are unable to work correctly and will eventually die.

It is essential to maintain heart health and help prevent any heart disease that may stop the heart from functioning correctly.

A heart attack, or myocardial infarction, is when there is a sudden reduction in the flow of blood to a section of the heart. Typically, this is the result of a blockage preventing the normal flow of blood, but it can also occur from supply-demand mismatch. If the flow of blood does not restore to normal, it can cause that section of heart muscle to begin dying.

Heart failure, or congestive heart failure, is a condition when the heart is unable to pump sufficient blood around the body. This may be due to the heart not filling with enough blood or the heart being too weak to pump correctly. Despite the name, it does not refer to the heart stopping.

Both conditions are fairly prominent, with research suggesting that roughly 805,000 Americans have a heart attack every year, while roughly 6.2 million U.S. adults have heart failure.

#### Heart attack causes

A wide variety of factors can result in heart attacks. A common cause of heart attack is coronary artery disease.

This is when the coronary arteries, which supply oxygen-rich blood to the heart, become narrower or blocked due to a buildup of plaque. This makes it harder for blood to pass

heart attack. This is when there is a severe tightening or spasm of a coronary artery, which has muscles in its walls, and this can cut off blood flow through the artery.

#### Heart failure causes

There are also many factors that can contribute to heart failure. Typically, it is the result of other medical conditions that overwork the heart, or an injury or infection that causes damage to the heart.

Heart failure can affect both the left and right sides of the heart. The left side pumps oxygen-rich blood throughout the body, while the right side collects oxygen-low blood and pumps it to the lungs to acquire oxygen.

It is more common for heart failure to affect the left side and how well the heart can pump blood to the body. There are two types of left sided heart failure: reduced ejection fraction and preserved ejection fraction.

Reduced ejection fraction, also known as systolic heart failure, is when the heart cannot contract effectively. This may be due to:

- · Coronary artery disease
- · Genetic cardiomyopathy • Faulty heart valves
- Irregular heartbeat
- Acquired heart disease
- Alcohol · Cocaine, methamphetamine, or other tox-

Preserved ejection fraction, also known as diastolic heart failure, is when the heart is too stiff to fully contract. This means it cannot fill up with enough blood, so it pumps less out to

- the body. This may be due to: High blood pressure
- Obesity
- Diabetes

With heart failure of the right side, the heart is unable to pump enough blood to the lungs to pick up sufficient oxygen. It usually occurs due to heart failure of the left side. This is due to a buildup of blood, raising pressure in the blood vessels that carry blood from the heart to the lungs.

#### Heart attack symptoms

Heart attacks do not always present with noticeable symptoms. Doctors may refer to these as silent heart attacks. The symptoms of a heart attack can vary from person to person. People who have had a past heart attack may A coronary artery spasm can also result in a notice different symptoms. Typically, the most

common symptoms are:

- · Chest pain or discomfort
- Upper-body discomfort, such as in the arms, back, shoulders, neck, jaw, or stomach
- Shortness of breath Other possible symptoms may include:
- Sweating
- Fatigue • Nausea and vomiting
- Lightheadedness or sudden dizziness

**Heart failure symptoms** The symptoms of heart failure depend on the type and severity of the condition. Shortness of breath is a common symptom of both left and right sided heart failure. Symptoms will usually get worse as the heart grows weaker.

#### Symptoms of left sided heart failure can include:

- General weakness • Trouble breathing
- Sleepiness
- Trouble concentrating
- Coughing
- Fatigue
- Bluish color of finger and lips

#### Symptoms of right sided heart failure may include:

- Swelling
- Weight gain • Nausea
- · Loss of appetite Abdominal pain
- Urinating frequently

· Difficulty sleeping flat

Diagnosis

Due to the urgency of a potential heart attack, a doctor will likely diagnose a heart attack based on the person's signs, symptoms, and medical history. They can also perform diagnostic testing.

This may involve an electrocardiogram (EKG), blood tests, stress test, or coronary an-

Similarly, a doctor can diagnose heart failure using a person's medical history, a physical exam, and diagnostic testing.
Usually, this testing will involve blood tests

and an echocardiogram. If these tests are inconclusive, a doctor may then order further tests such as a CT scan, MRI scan, EKG, or

#### Heart attack treatment

Early treatment for a heart attack can help prevent or reduce severe damage to the heart muscle. Before a diagnosis confirms a heart attack, a doctor may treat a person with:

- Nitroglycerin
- Oxygen therapy Beta-blockers

After diagnosis, a doctor will then try to restore blood flow by removing or lessening the blockage. This may involve medications, coronary angioplasty, and intervention.

Coronary angioplasty is a medical proce-

dure that uses a balloon to open up the artery and restore blood flow. A doctor may also insert a small mesh tube called a stent to keep the artery open.

A doctor may also prescribe medicine to reduce clotting, lower blood pressure, and reduce strain on the heart.

#### Heart failure treatment

Heart failure has no cure, but treatments aim to help a person live longer with fewer symptoms. Treatment will depend on the type of heart failure a person has, but typically involves lifestyle changes, medicines, and in some cases, surgery.

#### When to see a doctor

Both heart attack and heart failure are serious conditions. If left untreated, they can be fatal. Anyone who experiences symptoms of a heart attack or heart failure should immediately seek the advice of a healthcare professional. Receiving prompt treatment can make a big difference to a person's chance of recov-

Heart attacks and heart failure are both types of heart disease, but are different condi-

Heart attacks are when there is a loss of blood supply to the heart, while heart failure is when the heart is unable to pump blood around the body efficiently.

Although heart attacks and heart failure both affect the heart's ability to pump blood around the body, the conditions are different.

While both conditions have different causes, people can try to reduce their chances of heart disease by trying to follow a healthy lifestyle with a varied diet, regular exercise, and minimum stress. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

# Foods to avoid after cesarean section

By: Dr. Priyanka Saurabh

LV \_\_pregnancy complications or unforeseen circumstances. The C-section procedure can be challenging and unpleasant for most women and can be mentally and physically exhausting. The mother needs plenty of high in carbs. This helps in enrest and a strict diet to recover ergy maintenance and breast milk from the procedure. During the production. Iron, fiber, and folic first few weeks after the C-sec- acid are all important nutrients for tion, the mother must be moni- babies in their early growth tored thoroughly and supported to stages. recover mentally and physically from the stress of delivery. Hence, she must be given proper

food to eat after the C-section. Since breast milk is the main source of nutrition for the baby during the first few months, the mother should follow a good diet after a cesarean section. Along with adequate rest, a good diet can also speed up the healing process of the abdominal wall and uterus, which were torn during the C-section. A proper diet can also help the mother lose the weight gained during pregnancy.

Eating right after a cesarean section is very important for a few reasons:

**Promotes healing:** A balanced diet rich in vitamins, minerals, and proteins helps your body heal faster and recover from surgery.

**Boosts immunity:** Eating a

healthy diet boosts your immunity and helps prevent infections. Provides energy: After a Csection, your body needs extra energy to recover and care for to take too much iron, as it may your newborn. A healthy diet ensures that you have the energy

you need for both. Support breastfeeding: A healthy diet is essential for providing high-quality breast milk, which is necessary for your baby's growth and development.

Reduces complications: A

good diet can help control weight, reduce the risk of constipation, and promote better digestion, which are important after surgery. **Improved mood:** Eating a bal-

recovery after delivery like protein, vitamin C, and zinc are essential for tissue repair and regeneration, helping your surgi-

What to eat after cesarean?

be eaten after cesarean: Protein- and calcium-rich **foods:** Proteins help in the formaaccelerating the healing process. strength after surgery. Calcium,

bones and teeth, relaxes muscles, promotes blood clotting, and preany cesarean deliveries vents osteoporosis. Include beans, eggs, etc., in your diet after C-section and watch yourself heal and get stronger.

Whole grains: Whole grain foods, including brown bread, pasta, and brown rice, should be included in the diet as they are

**Vitamins and minerals:** Vitamins are high in antioxidants and aid in tissue repair. Hence, they can be a great inclusion in the diet after a cesarean section. They help the body make collagen, which aids in the formation of ligaments, new scar tissues and skin. Vegetables like spinach, broccoli and fenugreek leaves are high in vitamins A and C, in addition to dietary calcium and iron. Also, fruits like oranges, papayas, watermelon, strawberries, and grapes are high in vitamin C and are the best foods to eat after a cesarean section. These fruits and vegetables help in infection prevention and immunity building.

Iron: Iron maintains hemoglobin levels. Iron content in the body increases the amount of iron and helps replace blood lost during delivery. Iron helps the immune system function properly. Iron-rich foods include egg yolks, oysters, red meat, cow liver, and dried fruits. But it is advisable not cause constipation. Hence, it is always advisable to consult your doctor regarding iron intake.

Vegetables: Vegetables are a great option to eat after cesarean. Green vegetables are beneficial for new mothers as they are rich in iron, vitamins, and calcium. Green vegetables like spinach, beans, lotus stems, broccoli, and fenugreek should be included in the diet plan. On the other hand, you can get enough protein from mushrooms and carrots.

The period after a C-section delivery can be complicated and challenging. It is important to maintain control over food inanced diet after a C-section can help you recover from the surgery and keep you and your baby healthy. Doctors usually prepare a diet chart after C-section delivery. Apart from strictly following the diet chart, you should also keep track of your eating habits. Doing this will help you recover after cesarean section and become healthier than before. (The author is a Research Scholar in Political Science, poet, freelance jour-

# Cold temperature elevates risk for cardiac ailments

By: Dr Bimal Chhajer

eart attack is a cause of blockage of blood flow through the blood vessels due to plaque build up that breaks down into clots. While the heart has to work harder to pump the blood throughout, excessive work on the heart muscle gives a heart attack or in severe cases can lead to heart failure as well.

Cardiac Ailments is one of the leading causes of death in India and worldwide killing about 1 in 5 men and 1 in 8 women, According to WHO reports. Heart attacks that were once reckoned to be an elderly problem has now been reflected in the middle aged population as well. The increasing stress of modern life has exposed even younger people to the risk of heart dis-

While a person's genetic disposition and family history remain the most common and uncontrollable risk factors, majority of heart diseases in the younger generation is due to excessive stress and long working hours coupled with erratic sleep patterns, which cause risk of heart disease ition and increase the Smoking and a sedentary lifestyle further accelerate the risk symptoms in people in the age group of 20 to 30 years and ultimately heart failure.

Cold weather causes blood vessels to tighten in order to preserve core body temperature, which forces blood pressure to rise and puts additional strain on the

heart. To stay warm, people often consume more food, including high-calorie options, which can lead to weight gain, increased blood sugar levels, and higher cholesterol, further burdening the heart. Additionally, increased drinking and smoking during winter months can exacerbate these health issues, compounding the strain on the cardiovascular system.

Risk factors such as smoking and diabetes, in particular, provoke inflammatory changes and promote the formation of blood clots, thus obstructing the blood flow. The one factor that strongly predicts both heart and brain health is high blood pressure. Infact, many people are not even aware that they have high blood pressure because it has no visible symptoms, which is why it is called as 'the silent killer'. Symptoms of a heart attack

Though the symptoms of heart attack may vary from person to person, angina, commonly known as chest pain may be the most common symptom, accompanied by unusual breathlessness, palpitation, heaviness or tightness in the chest excruciating to shoulder, jaws

While the condition may happen to anybody irrespective of age and gender, certain signs and symptoms should never be ignored:

to moderate to severe, depending upon individual and

upto the arms. Sudden or unusual shortness of breath

the chest that seems to spread to the jaw, neck and back

• Cold sweats even at normal room temperatures

· Sudden dizziness or light headedness. • Sudden feeling of nausea and coughing

When it comes to heart attack, timing is everything and the chances of survival doubles with timely intervention. It is advised to everyone specially those at risk of a heart attack such as diabetics, high blood pressure, smokers, overweight, elderly and those with a family history of heart attack to always keep Sorbitrate and Aspirin tablets ready in car, home and office as heart's First Aid. Self help may not always be good enough but is the simplest way to prevent damage to the heart in an impending heart attack hence you must seek medical help - call for help and try and reach a hospital.

From the heart point of view they should keep the risk factors like Blood Pressure, Sugar at the best. They should avoid all kinds of non vegetarian food and cut down oil to cut down the lipids. Walking stricted at home and they should do Yoga and meditation for half an hour on daily basis. To boost up the immunity they should take extra dose of Anti Oxidants, Vitamin C., Haldi, Amla, Tulsi, eat plenty of vegetables, salads and fruits. (The author is the Director, SAAOL Heart Centre)

# • Sudden pressure, tightness, or painful sensation in Protecting children's Pollution and Its Deadly ears, nose, and throat Impact on Heart Health from pollution

By: Dr. Ashesh Bhushan

ising pollution levels have become a critical concern globally, with children being among the most vulnerable to its adverse effects. Air pollution, in particular, can significantly impact ear, nose, and throat (ENT) health in young children. Developing bodies, immature immune systems, and prolonged exposure to pollutants make children more susceptible to ENT-related disorders,

Health

Airborne pollutants such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, and sulphur dioxide can irritate the sensitive mucosal linings of children's respiratory and ENT systems, leading to a range of health issues. Polluted air contaminated with allergens like dust, pollen, and industrial pollutants often triggers allergic rhinitis, causing frequent sneezing, nasal congestion, and itching. These pollutants can also inflame the nasal passages, resulting in acute or chronic sinusitis, characterized by persistent nasal blockages, headaches, and breathing difficulties

Poor air quality exacerbates Eustachian tube dysfunction, increasing the risk of ear infections, which may impair hearing and speech development in younger children if left untreated. Additionally, exposure to polluted air irritates the throat, causing dryness, chronic coughing, and recurrent sore throats, making children more prone to infections like pharyn-

**Recent Pollution Upsurge** 

ular emissions, and industrial discharge combine with weather conditions to trap

pollutants, cause dangerous spikes in Air Quality Index (AQI). Schools in heavily polluted regions like Delhi report increased absenteeism due to respiratory and ENT complaints among children during these months. Paediatric ENT specialists in the region observe a significant rise in consultations for pollution-related issues, especially among younger patients. Children with pre-existing conditions such as asthma or allergies are at an even higher risk of complications.

tion requires systemic changes, parents and caregivers can take proactive steps to protect their children's ENT health. Monitoring air quality through AQI apps and limiting outdoor activities on high-pollution days can help reduce exposure. Maintaining clean indoor spaces and using air purifiers can further minimize the impact of pollutants at home.

Ensuring children stay hydrated helps keep their mucous membranes moist, while encouraging good nasal and ear hygiene can prevent irritations and infections. Providing well-fitted masks for outdoor use, especially in highly polluted areas, adds an extra layer of protection. Lastly, seeking timely medical advice from an ENT specialist for persistent symptoms can help address issues early and prevent complications.

dren's ENT health, with conditions like allergies, sinus infections, and ear issues becoming more prevalent. By taking proactive steps to minimize exposure and seeking timely medical care, parents can help safeguard their children from the harmful effects of polluted air. Addressing this crisis requires collective action to create cleaner, healthier environments for future generations. (The author is a Senior Consultant - ENT Department, Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida)

By: Dr. Pankaj Ranjan

ir pollution is a pressing global issue which poses a significant threat to cardiovascular health. Beyond its well-documented effects on the lungs, pollution is now recognized as a major contributor to heart disease. The link between air quality and heart health is especially concerning in North India, where pollution levels have dramatically exceeded safe

**How Pollution Affects the Heart** 

Airborne pollutants, such as particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and carbon monoxide, enter the bloodstream through the lungs. Once in the bloodstream, these particles can cause inflammation in blood vessels, increase oxidative stress, and lead to the formation of plaques in arteries. Over time, these changes heighten the risk of heart attacks, arrhythmias, and heart failure. Pollution also affects the heart indirectly by increasing blood pressure,

a key risk factor for heart disease. **Growing Threat of Pollution to Heart Health** 

Across North India, pollution levels often spike during winter, due to stubble burning, vehicular emissions, industrial activities, and weather patterns. Cities such as Delhi frequently record Air Quality Index (AQI) levels in the

'severe" category, where extended exposure poses serious health risks. Hospitals nationwide have observed a significant rise in cardiovascular emergencies during high-pollution periods. Vulnerable populations, including the elderly and those with heart disease, face heightened risks as pollu-

tion continues to exacerbate cardiovascular strain. **Global Research and Implications** 

Studies worldwide have underscored the connection between long-term exposure to pollution and cardiovascular mortality. The World Health Organization (WHO) attributes approximately 20% of heart disease deaths to poor air quality. In India, this impact is magnified due to the high population density and widespread exposure to pollution.

The risks extend beyond long-term exposure; even short-term spikes in pollution levels have been shown to trigger acute cardiovascular events. For instance, studies indicate a rise in heart attack cases following days of elevated pollution, highlighting the urgent need for protective measures.

**Safeguarding Your Heart Against Pollution** To protect heart health amidst rising pollution, individuals can monitor air quality, use air purifiers, maintain a heart-healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet and regular exercise, and consult healthcare providers for tailored advice, especially if managing pre-existing heart conditions.

The connection between pollution and heart disease underscores the urgent need for policy changes and public awareness. Addressing air quality issues is not just an environmental necessity but a critical step in safeguarding public health. By reducing pollution levels and adopting protective measures, we can mitigate its impact on heart health and improve the quality of life for millions. (The author is the Head of Department & Senior Consultant, Cardiology, Yatharth Hospital. Greater Noida)

anced diet helps keep your mood stable and provides mental clarity, thereby aiding in emotional Aids tissue repair: Nutrients take to speed up healing. A bal-

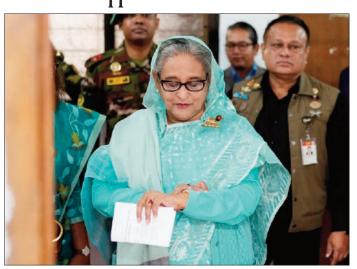
cal wound heal more effectively. Here is a list of foods that can

tion of new tissue cells, thereby Protein-rich foods help in healing tissues and maintaining muscle on the other hand, strengthens nalist, and columnist) which can affect their overall well-being. How Pollution Affects Children's ENT

The recent pollution upsurge, especially in North India provides a stark example of the severe effects of pollution on children's ENT health. During winter, stubble burning, vehic**Protecting Children's ENT Health** While tackling the broader issue of pollu-

Pollution poses a growing threat to chil-

# Ousted PM Sheikh Hasina involved in enforced disappearance: B'desh commission



DHAKA, Dec 15: An inquiry commission set up by the interim government in Bangladesh has said that it found evidence implicating deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and top-ranking military and police officials from her regime in alleged incidents of enforced disappearance.

The five-member Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances submitted an interim report titled "Unfolding The Truth" to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus on Saturday.

The commission estimated that there would be more than 3,500 enforced disappearances.

"The commission has found evidence of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's involvement as the instructor in the incidents of enforced disappearance," the press wing of the office of Chief Adviser said in a statement on Saturday

It said the deposed premier's defence adviser Major General (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre and sacked Major General Ziaul Ahsanand senior police officers Monirul Islam and Mohammad Harun-Or-Rashid and several other senior officials were found to

be involved in those incidents. The ex-military and police officers are on the run, mostly believed to be abroad since the ouster of Hasina's Awami League regime on August 5 following a studentled uprising.

According to the statement, retired Supreme Court judge Mainul Islam Chowdhury, the chairman of the commission, told Yunus that during investigations they found a "systematic design" that allowed incidents of enforced disappearances to go undetected.

"Individuals carrying out enforced disappearance or extrajudicial killing (even) lacked knowledge about victims,"

Chowdhury said. The report said the police's elite inti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which draws men from the Army, Navy, Air Force, regular police and other law enforcement

each other to pick up, torture and keep victims in detention and deliberately segmented the opera-

The commission simultaneously proposed the abolition of the RAB alongside scrapping or thoroughly amending the Anti-Terrorism Act,

Rights activist and commission member Sajjad Hossain said they recorded 1,676 complaints of enforced disappearances and, so far, have examined 758 of them. Of these, 200 people or 27 per cent of the victims never returned while those who returned were mostly shown on records as arrested.

Besides the chairman, the commission comprises Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli, rights activist Nur Khan, private BRAC University teacher Nabila Idris and rights activist Sajjad Hossain.

At a press conference earlier, the commission announced that they had found eight secret detention centres in Dhaka and its outskirts.

The panel chairman on Saturday informed Yunus that they would deliver another interim report in March and would require at least another year to complete the scrutiny of all allegations they had received.

"You are doing a really very important job. We are ready to give you all kinds of support that you need," Yunus was quoted as say-

TV channels and social media carried interviews with several victims of the alleged enforced disapincluding former military officers and opposition activists who were active in opposing Hasina's regime.

While receiving the report yesterday, Yunus said he would visit some of the joint interrogation cells and secret detention centres as he wanted first-hand knowledge

about the sufferings of the victims. The report called for the creation of a new law criminalising en-

forced disappearances. Commission members also told the government to repeal laws under the Armed Police Battalions Ordinance that grants law enforcers indemnity for acts done in

# World Rebels try to bring normalcy while Syrians vow to speak up

head of security arrived at Damascus' international airport with his men, a bearded fighter who marched with other rebels across Syria to the capital. The few maintenance staff who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager for answers about what happens next.

They unloaded all their complaints, pent up for years during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told him they were denied promotions and perks funneled to pro-Assad favorites, that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned him of hardcore Assad supporters among the airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility re-

As al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, confessed: "This is the first time we talk.

This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms: grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the

LONDON, Dec 15: The scandal

surrounding an alleged Chinese spy

who managed to gain access to

Buckingham Palace as a "close

confidant" of Prince Andrew, the

younger brother of King Charles

III, intensified on Sunday as it

emerged that he also met former

prime ministers David Cameron

tanced themselves from any knowl-

edge of his espionage links, the row

involving the businessman, known

only as "H6" for legal reasons, con-

tinues to dominate the headlines

after a tribunal judge noted that he

had an "unusual" degree of trust

Earlier, Andrew, the Duke of

York, said in a statement that he had

'ceased all contact" with the al-

the Conservative Party for over a

decade and PM for six years. He

met thousands of people during that

time at hundreds of functions and

events. We don't have any further

information about this individual,"

a source close to Cameron, now

"David Cameron was leader of

While Cameron and May dis-

and Theresa May.

from the senior royal.



capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way

ahead. At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate.

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again."

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and

Alleged Chinese spy got close to senior British royal, met former PMs

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for

Theresa May said "as such, she

doesn't remember when or where

this particular photograph was

The revelations come after it

emerged earlier this week that H6

had been barred from entering the

UK due to national security risks. A

Special Immigration Appeals Com-

mission (SIAC) went on to hear in

July that the man was invited to

Prince Andrew's birthday party in

2020 and was told by a royal aide

that he could act on the Duke's be-

half when dealing with potential in-

According to SIAC case details,

H6 was first excluded from entering

the country in 2023 over national

security fears by Suella Braverman,

who was then home secretary. In

July last year, the Home Office said

H6 was considered to have engaged

in "covert and deceptive activity"

on behalf of the Chinese Commu-

nist Party. H6 denied the allegations

and appealed that decision in the

SIAC, which ruled against him on

Thursday. In a statement, Prince

vestors in China.

taken or the man in question".

ing by 'Sky News'.

files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

"It will take a year to solve problems" he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts esti-

met the man "through official chan-

nels" and there was "nothing of a

The Chinese Embassy in the UK

has denied the espionage allega-

tions, saving "some individuals in

the UK are always eager to fabri-

cate baseless 'spy' stories targeting

and disrupt normal exchanges be-

tween Chinese and British person-

However, former Tory Cabinet

minister Gillian Keegan said on

Sunday that the UK should "always

be vigilant", and it is "surprising

that people are surprised" by

China's activities because security

advice has been given to people vis-

threat we have. They're a much big-

ger strategic threat than Russia,'

"They are the biggest strategic

UK Home Secretary Yvette

Cooper laid out the Labour govern-

ment's stance as ensuring that the

country's security and intelligence

agencies are "continually vigilant

for any threat to UK national secu-

iting China going back 30 years.

nel," a spokesperson said.

"Their purpose is to smear China

sensitive nature ever discussed"

force at around 20,000.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial

areas. Many are hardline Islamists. The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tol-

Syrians remain suspicious. The people we see on the

streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident. He was concerned by the few reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings. "We should be fearful.

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discretely to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said.

Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone.

The rest is up to us.' On the night after Assad's fall,

brating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency

buildings were torched. The public stayed indoors. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order. It ordered a nighttime curfew for three days. It

moved fighters to protect proper-After a day, people began to

banned celebratory gunfire and

emerge. Tens of thousands went to Assad's prisons to search for loved ones, mingling with rebels, some of whom were also searching.

Amid celebrations, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles, and posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars.

The transitional government urged people to return to work. The insurgents deployed men to act as traffic police. Volunteers picked up trash, since municipal workers haven't returned to their

Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and mer-

One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

"We need a long time to clean this up," he said. (AP)

### Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CM says negotiations with Afghanistan's Taliban govt only solution for peace in region



PESHAWAR, Dec 15: Chief Minister of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Ali Amin Gandapur on Sunday said negotiations with the incumbent Taliban government in Afghanistan is the only solution for maintaining peace and security in the region.

The firebrand leader of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said if the world could recognise the Taliban government in Kabul, "then we should also talk with them for the sake of peace and security in the region"

"Our province has the longest border with Afghanistan and we face the most severe consequences. In provincial and federal apex committee meetings, I have discussed initiating talks with Afghanistan," he said.

The federal government claims it will negotiate with Afghanistan but they have not taken any concrete steps so far, the leader said.

"We are managing this long border with the sacrifices of our people. Our police and security forces are giving their lives for peace. We are victims of terrorism but are ensuring it does not spread further," Gandapur stated.

"Several terrorists have been neutralised in the southern districts over the past few months. We are fiercely combating terrorists," he added. Gandapur claimed that the law and order situation was completely stable during the tenure of Khan's government from 2018 to 2022, however, it deteriorated after the PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) government came to power in the wake of the no confidence motion in 2022.

"Institutions have been tasked with dismantling PTI instead of focusing on other responsibilities. When I took office, the situation was dire, but my focus is on improving it," he said.

The PTI leader claimed that the performance of his government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is best compared to other provinces. "We have met the IMF target, which no other province has achieved so far." he said. "No one has made as many sacrifices for democracy and true freedom as we have," the chief minister said.

Recently, Gandapur warned of launching more protests against the federal government to secure the release of the jailed former premier.

"We will continue launching attacks like the battle of Panipat. We will conquer if demands are not met." Gandapur told reporters referring to a historic battle in the sub-

"We have launched just five attacks and will continue to launch the rest," he said while referring to the PTI's march on November 24 in Islamabad to demand the release of

#### agencies had collaborated with Lord Cameron, was quoted as say- Andrew's office said the Duke had 5 heroin traffickers return to Australia after almost 20 years in Indonesian prisons

MELBOURNE, Dec 15: Five Australians who had spent almost 20 years in Indonesian prisons for heroin trafficking returned to Australia on Sunday under a deal struck between the two governments, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said.

The governments confirmed weeks ago that negotiations were underway for Matthew Norman, Scott Rush, Martin Stephens, Si Yi Chen, and Michael Czugaj to be returned to Australia. Their return on Sunday was shrouded in secrecy.

There was uncertainty about whether they could potentially serve out their life sentences in Australian prisons. However, Albanese confirmed in a statement Sunday the men re-



turned to Australia as free citizens. He also thanked Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto for the men's release. "Australia respects Indonesia's sovereignty

and legal processes and we appreciate Indonesia's compassionate consideration of this matter," Albanese said.

The five were among a gang of nine Australian smugglers arrested in the Indonesian tourist island of Bali in 2005 as they attempted to fly with heroin strapped to their bodies to Australia.

Two convicted ringleaders of the Bali Nine, Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, were executed by a firing squad in 2015, causing a diplomatic furore between neighbours Indonesia and Australia. One of the drug smugglers, Tan Duc Thanh Nguyen, died of cancer in prison in 2018, while Renae Lawrence, the only woman in the group, was released and returned to Australia the same vear. The agreement was signed Friday during a virtual meeting by Australian Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke and Indonesia's senior law minister, Yusril Ihza Mahendra, Australian Broadcasting Corp. said.

The men flew on the Australian airline Jetstar from Indonesia to the northern Australian city of Darwin where they remain, according to ABC. The Australian government had offered the men temporary accommodation, medical care and any other support required, local media reported.

Albanese said they will "have the opportunity to continue their personal rehabilitation and reintegration here in Australia." (AP)

## South Korean leaders seek calm after Yoon is impeached

SEOUL, Dec 15: South Korea's opposition leader offered Sunday to work with the government to ease the political tumult as officials sought to reassure allies and markets, a day after the opposition-controlled parliament voted to impeach conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol over a short-lived attempt to impose martial law

Liberal Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, whose party holds a majority in the National Assembly, urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on Yoon's impeachment and proposed a special council for policy cooperation between the government and parliament.

Yoon's powers have been suspended until the court decides whether to remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 Lee, who has led a fierce political offensive

against Yoon's embattled government, is seen as the frontrunner to replace him. He lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by a razor-thin margin. He told a televised news conference that a swift court ruling would be the only way to "minimise na-

tional confusion and the suffering of people.' The court will meet to discuss the case Monday, and has up to 180 days to rule. But observers say that a court ruling could come faster. In the case of par-

liamentary impeachments of past presidents — Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016 the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park.

Lee also proposed a national council where the government and the National Assembly would work together to stabilise state affairs, and said his party won't seek to impeach Prime Minister Han Ducksoo, a Yoon appointee who's now serving as acting president.

"The Democratic Party will actively cooperate with all parties to stabilise state affairs and restore international trust," Lee said. "The National Assembly and government will work together to quickly resolve the crisis that has swept across the Republic of Korea.

It's unclear if Lee's proposed council will be re-

In a meeting with the parliament speaker, who touched upon Lee's idea, Han said he will closely cooperate and communicate with the National Assembly but didn't specifically say whether the government intends to join the council. Kweon Seong-dong, floor leader of the ruling People Power Party, separately criticised Lee's proposal, saying that it's "not right" for the opposition party acting like the ruling party.

Kweon, a Yoon loyalist, said that his party will use existing PPP-government dialogue channels "to continue to assume responsibility as the governing party until the end of President Yoon's term."

The Democratic Party has already used its parliamentary majority to impeach the justice minister and the chief of the national police over the martial law decree, and had previously said it was also considering impeaching the prime minister. (AP)

# Pope Francis departs on first papal visit to Corsica

one-day visit to the French island of Corsica on Sunday, two days before his 88th birthday, puts a dual focus on the Mediterranean, highlighting local traditions of popular piety on the one hand and migrant deaths and wars on the

The visit to Corsica's capital Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon, will be one of the briefest of his papacy beyond Italy's borders, just about nine hours on the ground, including a 40-minute visit with French President Emmanuel Macron

It is the first papal visit to the island, which Genoa ceded to France in 1768 and is located closer to the Italian mainland than France.

Corsica stands out from the rest of secularised France as a particularly devout region, with 92 confraternities, or lay associations dedicated to works of charity or piety, with over 4,000 members.

'It means that there is a beautiful, mature, adult and responsible collaboration between civil authorities, mayors, deputies, senators, officials and religious authorities. Ajaccio Cardinal François Bustillo told The Associated Press. "There

is no hostility between the two. And that is a very positive aspect because in Corsica there is no ideological hostility.'

Papa Francescu, the pope's

name in Corsican, will address more than 400 participants at the Conference on Popular Religiosity in the Mediterranean, organized by the bishop of Ajaccio, Cardinal François-Xavier Bustillo.

The pope's remarks will include reflections on local religious traditions, especially strongly held in Corsica, including the cult of the Virgin Mary, known locally as the Madunnuccia, which protected the island from the plague in 1656 when it was still under Genoa.

"The Mediterranean is the backdrop of this trip, surrounded by situations of crisis and conflict, which is expected to be echoed in the pope's address, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said. The pope has often referred to the tragedy of migration, which he has said has turned the Mediterranean into "Europe's largest cemetery."

After the conference address, he will travel to the 17th-century cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta to meet with clergy, stopping along the way at the statue of the Madunnuccia. Francis will celebrate Mass at the Place d'Austerlitz park,

where it is said Napoleon played as a child. Around 7,000 faithful are expected. He will meet privately with Macron at the airport before departing for the 50-minute flight back to Rome. The pontiff pointedly did not

make the trip to Paris earlier this month for the pomp surrounding the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral following the devastating 2019 fire. The visit to Corsica seems far more suited to Francis' priorities than a grand cathedral reopening, emphasizing the "church of the peripheries."

It is Francis' third trip to France, each time avoiding Paris and the protocols that a state visit entails. He visited the port of Marseille in 2023, on an overnight visit to participate in an annual summit of Mediterranean bishops, and went to Strasbourg in 2014 to address the European Parliament and Council of Europe.

Corsica is home to more than 340,000 people and has been part of France since 1768. But the island has also seen pro-independence violence and has an influential nationalist movement. and last year Macron proposed granting it limited autonomy. (AP)

Page 7 Dec 16 (New) nation\_Normal Pages 12/15/2024 9:29 PM Page 1

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2024

## Mayawati urges parties to support ONOE bills

BSP chief slams SP, Cong on reservation issue



LUCKNOW, Dec 15: BSP chief Mayawati on Sunday attacked the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, saying they should not speak on reservations as they colluded in opposing legislation giving quota in promotions to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) when the Congress-led UPA was in

Addressing a press conference, she also backed the Centre's bills on 'one nation- one election', stressing it will reduce expenses and ensure public welfare works continue uninterrupted. She urged other parties to also support the

Mayawati demanded that reservations for SC, ST and OBC be included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to prevent any tampering. Central and state laws listed in the Ninth Schedule are exempt from judicial review.

During the discussion on the Constitution in Lok Sabha, the ruling side and the opposition, especially the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, to woo Dalit and OBC voters, have said a lot of "baseless" things about reservation issue in which there is "not even an iota of truth", she told reporters.

"And it would have been better if these two parties (Congress, SP) had remained silent on this issue in Parliament, because during the time of the Congress party's government at the Centre and with the connivance of this party, SP had strongly opposed the Constitutional Amendment Bill related to reservations in promotion of SC and ST communities.

"This bill was torn and thrown away by SP in the Parliament itself and ... is still pending in the Parlia-

ruling BJP and said, "The antireservation mentality of the BJP is also clearly visible, due to which they are in no mood to get the bill

Mayawati said that there was a heated discussion in the Parliament on the 'glorious journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India'.

"But its usefulness is possible only when it is accepted with an open mind whether the ruling class has been able to provide employment and justice, a life of self-respect and self-esteem to crores of people of the country as per the sacred intention of the humanitarian and welfare Constitution," she

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said that the Constitution has not failed but the people and parties ruling the country have failed the Constitution of the country with their "narrow thinking and casteist politics".

Mayawati also said that the "resolutions" being taken by the current BJP government are not going to benefit the people of the coun-

She said if the government makes amendments to the Constitution to benefit a party or any particular person or institution, "then our party will strongly oppose it".

Mayawati said being the party of the poor and the oppressed, the BSP welcomes the related bills brought by the BJP government regarding 'one nation, one election'.

It would be better for all the parties to rise above party politics and work in the interest of the country and the general public on this issue, she said.

The BSP has faced a steady electoral decline in recent years and has only one Rajya Sabha MP in Kejriwal slams BJP for 'no CM face'

# AAP releases final candidates' list for Delhi polls

released its final list of candidates for the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi, party supremo Arvind Kejriwal, who will contest from the New Delhi constituency, took a swipe at the BJP, alleging that the saffron party has no chief ministerial face.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday released its final list of 38 candidates for the Assembly polls due in February, fielding Kejriwal from New Delhi besides repeating Chief Minister Atishi from Kalkaji.

In a post on X in Hindi, Kejriwal

said, "The party is contesting the elections with full confidence and full preparation. BJP is missing. They have no CM face, no team, no planning, and no vision for Delhi. They have only one slogan, only one policy, and only one mission -- 'Remove Kejriwal'. Ask them what they did in five years, and they reply, 'Kejriwal ko bahut gaali di' (cursed Kejriwal a lot)." The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is yet to announce its



candidates, is reportedly planning to pitch Parvesh Verma, son of former Delhi Chief Minister late Sahib Singh Verma, against Kejri-

The Congress, meanwhile, has announced 21 candidates, including Sandeep Dikshit, son of ex-Chief Minister late Sheila Dikshit, who will challenge Kejriwal in

Kejriwal has on multiple occa-

sions ruled out any alliance with Congress, despite both parties being part of the INDIA bloc.

In its bid for a third consecutive term in power in the national capital, AAP has nominated its senior leaders from their own constituen-

Accordingly, Environment Minister Gopal Rai will contest from Babarpur, Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj from Greater Kailash,

pur Majra, respectively. Other candidates in AAP's list

include Sanjeev Jha from Burari, Ajesh Yadav from Badli, and Durgesh Pathak from Rajinder Nagar. The party has fielded Amanatullah Khan from Okhla.

Satyendar Jain from Shakur Basti.

vinder Shokeen and Mukesh

Kumar Ahlawat will contest the

polls from Nangloi Jat and Sultan-

Additionally, ministers Raghu-

As per a list issued earlier, former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia has been moved to Jangpura, while newcomer Avadh Ojha will contest from Sisodia's previous seat, Patparganj.

Congress has fielded Kumar from Patparganj.

In the 2020 elections, AAP secured 62 of the 70 seats in Delhi, solidifying its dominance in the capital's politics.

The upcoming polls are expected to be a litmus test for the party's governance model and its appeal to the electorate. (PTI)

### **Fadnavis hits** out at Oppn

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday slammed the opposition parties, accusing them of not be-

lieving in the Constitution. Fadnavis landed in Nagpur to a grand welcome from party workers and people.

Talking to reporters at Nagpur airport, Fadnavis said, "It is a joyous moment that after becoming the chief minister, I have come to my janmabhoomi and karmabhoomi (birthplace and workplace). Nagpur is my family, and it is welcome by my family.

Fadnavis took oath as the chief minister for the third time on December 5 after the Mahayuti combine swept the November 20 Maharashtra elections, winning 230 out of 288 seats. The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi, which managed just 46 seats, has been alleging irregularities in electronic voting machines (EVMs). Asked about the Opposition aggressively taking up the issue of EVMs, Fadnavis said, "These people (opponents) are disappointed. (PTI)

#### Karnataka BJP chief Vijayendra rejects charge that he attempted to bribe Manippady

BENGALURU, Dec 15: Kar- bly, Vijayendra said, "by creating nataka BJP President B Y Vijayendra on Sunday strongly dismissed Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and ruling Congress leaders' charges that he attempted to bribe former state Minority Commission Chairperson Anwar Manippady to hush up his report on the Waqf encroach-

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in a statement on Saturday said that Manippady had publicly stated that Viiavendra visited his house during Yediyurappa's tenure as CM and offered Rs 150 crore to be silent about the Waqf property encroachment re-

Meanwhile, Manippady has denied that no such offer was made to him by Vijayendra while Home Minister G Parameshwara stated that there was video footage showing Manippady making such charge. Questioning whether there was any logic in the allegation, Vijayendra said, the Congress and Siddaramaiah seem to be "perturbed" by the allegations of corruption and scam against them, especially by the MUDA site allotment case against the CM.

'This is a shameless government, its leaders, ministers, and legislators, I have seen their statements, they seem to have lost their mind. When B S Yediyurappa was CM and BJP government was in power Anwar Manippady had submitted a report on Waqf regarding irregularities committed during the previous Congress government and its leaders," Vijayendra said.

said, "As the then Chief Minister's son, why should I go to Anwar Manippady's house and offer Rs 150 crore? That too to save Congress leaders? Is there any logic in this (allegation)?

The state BJP chief said if the Congress wants to use this issue to waste the time of the legislature during the ongoing session, it is nothing but the "height of stupidity". The government which is in the midst of corruption allegations and scams is trying to waste time, he further alleged.

"I have not seen Anwar Manippady's statement. Is there any meaning in the allegations (made by CM and Congress leaders)? What Priyank Kharge has said is meaningless, if the CM is speaking using what he (Kharge) has said, I don't know what to say. It seems to be true that CM is perturbed," he said. Stating that he will respond to the allegations if raised in the Assem-

imaginary things, if they feel that they can make opposition and Vijayendra succumb to it, we are ready to take it as a challenge and respond to it."

Demanding a CBI probe, the CM in his statement on Saturday said that Manippady has further stated that he sent Vijayendra out of his house when he offered money, and reported the incident to PM Narendra Modi and the BJP President.

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

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters in Mangaluru Manippady said, Vijayendra did not come to his house and no such offer was made to him.

"Vijayendra was not in the scene when the report was submitted. I didn't even know him then and had only heard his name. I only spoke to him and expressed displeasure about the delay in tabling of report when Vijayendra was party Vice President, and Yediyurappa was CM once again. There was no Rs 150 crore offer," he said.

Reacting to this, Home Minister G Parameshwara said, there is a video footage of Manippady accusing Vijayendra and the media had covered it then. "If he is changing his words now,

don't know how to take it. He himself had made such claims. Let's see, the issue may be raised in the

Alleging that the Congress government was wasting time during the ongoing legislature session in Belagavi, Vijayendra said, the administration, including the Chief Minister, is not ready to discuss issues concerning the state, especially from the north Karnataka region, and also on recent maternal deaths at government hospitals.

At a time when the High Court is hearing whether the MUDA case against the Chief Minister should be handed over to CBI for probe, and ED is also investigating the case, the CM seems to be anxious, he said. Noting that there are media reports that the ruling Congress wants to discuss cases of alleged rape and charges of using casteist slurs made against BJP MLA N Munirathna, cases against former CM B S Yediyurappa and the COVID scam. during the session from tomorrow, Vijayendra said, the government is clearly misleading the House. (PTI)

### Simultaneous election plan will erase' political voice of J-K: Para

SRINAGAR, Dec 15: PDP leader Waheed Para on Sunday said the one nation one election' (ONOE) plan directly "threatens" the political, legal and cultural identity of Jammu and Kashmir.

The youth president of the PDP said the plan will erase "whatever remains" of the political voice of Jammu and Kashmir.

"One Election (ONOE) proposal" This is not just an administrative shift; it directly threatens the political, cultural, and legal identity of Jammu and Kashmir," Para, the MLA from Pulwama, said in a post on his X handle.

"Our region has long fought for its distinct voice and identity. The revocation of Article 370 was a blow, and ONOE risks erasing what little remains of our political voice. At the heart of the issue is the erosion of regional autonomy across India. Jammu and Kashmir has unique issues-- like restoration of Article 370 and 35A, the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits, land rights --that cannot be lumped into national debates," he said.

"These concerns will be lost in the national political noise, leaving us with no room to address our spe-



lence our voices, allowing national issues to dominate and undermining our region's distinctiveness," he

Para said the regional parties are crucial in representing the needs of the people but the ONOE will suppress their voice. "Our regional parties, are crucial in representing the needs of our people.

With ONOE, their voices will be drowned out by the resources of national parties that have little interest in our issues. The rehabilitation of displaced persons, tribal rights, and local governance concerns will be-

of diverse political and cultural identities. Both Jammu, and Kashmir have different needs and priorities.Holding state and national elections together would only deepen divisions," he said.

Para said the national politics often fail to reflect the regional re-

"National policies often fail to reflect our realities, and ONOE would exacerbate this gap, leading to governance challenges and policy deadlocks.Our region's complex geography, security issues, and administrative strains make it difficult enough to hold elections under nor-

# **BJP interested in politics, not discussing public** Landslide disaster relief: Union govt 'adding issues during legislature session: Shivakumar

Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Sunday hit out at the opposition BJP, accusing it of indulging in "politics" and not showing any interest in discussing issues concerning the state and its people, during the ongoing winter session of legislature in Belagavi.

He claimed that the saffron party in the state was a divided house, and hence they were not interested on discussing real is-

"BJP is not interested in any discussion, what to do?....they are not interested in anything else other than doing politics. There is no unity among them, so they are doing such things," Shivakumar told reporters here in response to a question about issues relating to north Karnataka not being discussed in the legislature session so far.

The session that began on De-

Belagavi, bordering Maharashtra, has been hosting legislature sessions once a year since

Suvarna Vidhana Soudha, modeled on the Vidhana Soudha, the state secretariat in Bengaluru, was built as an assertion that Belagavi is an integral part of Karnataka. Maharashtra claims Belagavi and some nearby places belong to it.

To a question whether irrigation issues relating to north Karnataka be discussed during the session, Shivakumar, who is also the Water Resources Minister, said the government was ready for discussion on any

Asked about Mahadayi project, the Deputy CM said, "I had recently met union forest minister (Bhupender Yadav) and union minister Pralhad Joshi regarding this... we have called (from Centre), we will start the work.'

Joshi and BJP MP Jagadish Shettar should take the responsibility to obtain permissions, he said. "We are somewhat confident about getting permissions."

The Mahadayi project is a drinking water initiative that aims to divert water from the Mahadavi river to drought-hit districts in north Karnataka.

Asked why no politicians have been named in the FIR registered in connection with COVID-19 scam that allegedly took place during previous BJP regime, Shivakumar said, "We have not said anything on BJP leaders, actions are being taken based on Justice Michael D' Cunha Commission report. Based on the recommendations made in the report FIR has been registered, let's see what hap-

## chilli' to wounds, says Kerala FM HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA), cember 9 will continue during tenders and things are ready, and KOCHI, Dec 15: Kerala Finance Min-sponse to queries regarding a letter

Balagonal on Sunday criticised the union government for demanding payment for disaster relief and rescue operations conducted by the Indian Air Force (IAF) during Wayanad landslides. He described the move as "adding

chilli to the wounds" of the state, already burdened by the aftermath of the Addressing reporters here, Balagopal

accused the BJP-ruled Centre of "failing" to provide even the funds it had promised to the state for disaster relief. The Finance Minister alleged that

this was akin to mocking the people of the state. "In addition to such an approach, a new bill has been introduced in the name of the Air Force," he said. "Really, this approach is like adding

chilli to a serious wound," Balagopal added. He also questioned the stance of BJP leaders, including Union Minister Suresh Gopi and former Union Minister V Muraleedharan, on the issue affecting Kerala. Balagopal made these remarks in re-

ment of Outstanding Airlift Charges," received by the office of then-Chief Secretary, V Venu on November 2. It had details of unpaid bills, with

over ₹ 100 crore pertaining to rescue operations during the 2018 floods and more than ₹ 13 crore for IAF operations after the July 30 landslides in Wayanad. Meanwhile, BJP leader Rajeev

Chandrasekhar criticised the Left government, accusing it of creating a "row" over the letter. According to his post on 'X', "Reim-

bursement of costs to @IAF MCC for relief operations is routinely done by ALL state govts.' "But for @pinarayivijayan's govt

that has a budget of 2 Lac crs/year it bcms a "row" why?" he wondered. The landslides that struck Wayanad

on July 30 devastated large parts of villages--Punchirimattam, Chooralmala, and Mundakkai--along with sections of Attamala, claiming 231 lives, according to the state govern-

# Lawyers, activists call for extending POSH Act to political parties, cite need for accountability

NEW DELHI, Dec 15: Legal ex- technical definition. perts and activists have voiced the urgent need to bring political parties under the ambit of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. known as the POSH Act, citing the need for gender equality and accountabil-

The reaction comes after the Supreme Court on Monday disposed of a plea seeking direction to political parties to follow the procedure for the protection of women in the workplace under the 2013 POSH Act. A bench of Justices Surya Kant

and Manmohan asked the peti-

tioner to approach the Election

Commission of India (ECI) with a

representation for the application of the POSH Act. Sonal Mattoo, a lawyer and director of NGO Helping Hands, called for a shift in perspective,

urging political parties to focus on the spirit of the law rather than its

Associate Editor- Nilomoni Borah

"The problem is they're looking at the letter of the law as opposed to the spirit of the law. If you look at the letter of the law, yes, you will struggle with who is the employer... but if you look at the spirit of the law, it's very easy to implement as every political party has a disciplinary committee," she Similarly, she said, this is a

group of people who are entrusted with ensuring that decorum is followed and no member does anything that brings disrepute to the

"Similarly, they can set up a committee that also looks at the behaviour related to inappropriate conduct of party workers and people within the party. So, if you look at the letter of the law and you look at who is the employer, vou will struggle.

"But if you look at other bodies within political parties that look at discipline and other conduct or



misconduct, it's very easy to create a similar pattern in terms of ensuring appropriate conduct with women colleagues that work with them I think the whole idea is to look at the spirit, rather than the letter of the law," Mattoo said. However, prominent lawver

Shilpi Jain expressed concerns

over the internal committees' in-

dependence, given the immense power wielded by politicians. "An internal committee funded

by a political group will lack teeth. For such bodies to function effectively, independence and courage are essential. Unfortunately, given the misuse of power by many politicians, achieving this remains a challenge," she told

Jain added that courts are better positioned to handle cases of sexual harassment involving politicians, given the inherent biases internal mechanisms might face.

Activists argue that addressing harassment within political parties will set a precedent for improving gender equality across society. Shabnam Hashmi, founder of

NGO Anhad, called it a "progressive" move. "Politicians are expected to lead by example. If they continue to ig-

nore gender equality, it sends the wrong message to society. Establishing such mechanisms in political parties will bring gradual but important changes, just as we saw with women asserting themselves after the implementation of 33 per cent reservation in panchayats,' she told PTI.

Yogita Bhavana, anti-rape activist and founder of People Against Rape in India (PARI) criticised the "irony" of Parliament

exempting itself from a law it enacted. "If an institution with more than

10 members is required to implement POSH, why are political parties excluded? Parliament itself brought in this law. Their inability to enforce it internally reflects their reluctance to confront harassment within their ranks," she

Bhayana also pointed out the larger issue of poor implementation of the POSH Act across various sectors, stating, "We need a framework that is not only expansive but also effective in its enforcement.

The legal definition of "workplace" under the POSH Act complicates its application to political

A 2022 Kerala High Court ruling stated that political parties do not have a conventional employeremployee relationship and cannot be mandated to set up Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs).

This ambiguity, combined with the decentralised and informal nature of political party structures, has often been cited as a reason for non-compliance.

should not prevent political parties from taking proactive steps. "The lack of a traditional workplace structure cannot be an ex-

Still, many experts believe this

cuse. Political parties must adapt and lead by example," Hashmi emphasised. She added that even minimal initial progress would pave the way for systemic change in the

long run. Lawyers and activists have also highlighted how extending the POSH Act to political parties could improve the participation of women in politics. Additionally, extending the

Act's provisions would address the vulnerability of women working in political settings, who often find themselves in informal roles without clear channels for grievance redressal. (PTI)

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