

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- Death toll in attack on Christmas market in Germany rises to 5
- Rocket fired from Yemen strikes area of Tel Aviv overnight
- MLAs revolt against CM, DMK demands trust vote
- Rebel JD(U) leaders to call a national meet, stake claim

Posts in BCCI, ICC honourary in nature: Devajit Saikia

Assam LoP writes to CJI over constitutional 'violation' by AG

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: Leader of opposition in Assam Assembly, Debabrata Saikia, has written to the Chief Justice of India, accusing the state's Advocate General, Devajit Lon Saikia, of violating the Constitution by taking up roles as acting BCCI secretary and an ICC director.

In the letter sent to the CJI on Thursday, Saikia claimed that the advocate general breached the privileges and duties of his position by taking "office of profit/positions of pecuniary gains against norms and rules".

The advocate general, however, said there was no question of "office of profit" as both the posts in BCCI and ICC were honourary in nature. A copy of Debabrata Saikia's letter was also marked to the governor, chief minister,

chief secretary of Assam, and the chairman of the Bar Council of India.

The Congress leader pointed out that Saikia was appointed as the advocate general of the state on May 21, 2021, and he had sworn his allegiance and abidance to the rules and restrictions under Article 165 of the Indian Constitution.

Among such regulations are the advocate general holding himself up to the guidelines stipulated to be adhered to by any High Court judge, giving advice to the government on legal matters and also the right to speak in, and otherwise take part in the proceedings of the legislative assembly.

Saikia said that the Advocate General was appointed as the acting secretary of the Board of Cricket Control of India (BCCI) on December 12 this year, and will continue in this role until September 2025, when the vacancy is to be permanently filled. Due to his position as secretary of BCCI, Saikia was also appointed as the director of the International Cricket (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Shah tells banks to roll out new financial policy for NE

Northeast is now most lucrative place for investment and manufacturing, says HM at bankers' conclave

AGARTALA, Dec 21: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday asked all banks to prepare separate financial guidelines for the Northeast keeping in mind its people and ground realities so that the region could witness all-round development.

Addressing a bankers' conclave here, he also told the bankers to consider the development of the Northeast as their responsibility.

"Should the guidelines prepared by the RBI, NABARD and other banks with regards to the MSME, business, loans, personal loans for the country be the same for the Northeast. How is that possible? Banking guidelines for the Northeast can't be the same. It is necessary to prepare separate financial guidelines for the Northeast with new parameters. Secretary banking, Chairman NABARD and SBI should make special

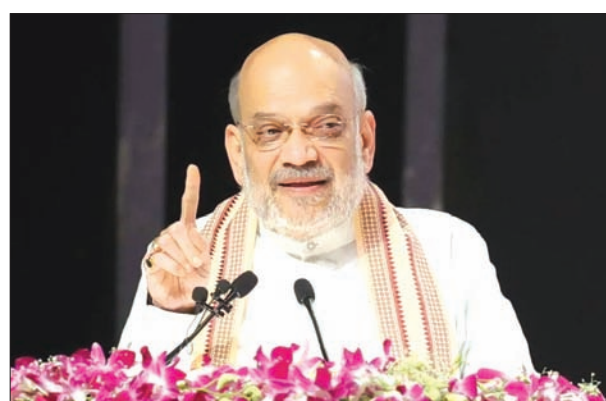
financial guidelines for the Northeast taking into account the people and its ground realities," Shah said.

He said the Northeast is now the most lucrative place for investment and manufacturing.

He said for future business, the banks will have to invest somewhere and no other place, except the Northeast, is the best place for future business.

Shah said the Northeast will develop at an average growth rate of 20 per cent in next 10 years. "You have to keep this in mind and have to take some risks. Make your financial policy a bit relaxed keeping in mind the people of the Northeast and its ground realities," he said.

The home minister said all "unbanking" villages in the Northeast should be connected with branches of banks and post offices and all DBTs (Direct Benefit Transfer) should



reach to the beneficiaries without corruption.

"Development in the Northeast should reach through banking," he said.

Shah said there is maximum potential in the Northeast and the need is not to look the Northeast through statistics but with sensitivity.

"All banks and venture capitalists should lend their help-

ing hands for the development of the Northeast. Consider the development of the Northeast your responsibility," he said.

The home minister said a robust ecosystem for commerce and industries is being built in the Northeast by strengthening the banking sector.

"Northeast India will become the gateway of economic development and will set new

records. This region will not only become the gateway of India's development, but will also become a bridge of trust for the entire country," he said.

He said work is also being done to make the Northeast a major gateway for export.

Shah said after the exchange of enclaves with the Bangladesh a few years ago, India's waterways are connected with Chittagong port in Bangladesh and through the Chittagong port, all produces of the Northeast can be exported to global markets.

"There are lots of potentials in the Northeast. Today whatever you produce in the Northeast, the doors to the global market are open for it through the Chittagong port," he said.

The home minister said a country with 140 crore people should have development in every nook and corner of the country (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Funds sanctioned

GUWAHATI: In a significant stride towards improving the quality of education and fostering inclusivity in Assam, the Ministry of Education, Higher Education Department, has sanctioned ₹ 55 crores under the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA), Education Minister Ranaj Pogu announced on Saturday. The funds aim to bolster infrastructure facilities in the state's educational institutions and reward districts for their exemplary efforts in gender inclusion and equity.

GMC initiative

GUWAHATI: In a bid to enhance cleanliness and hygiene in Guwahati, the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) has launched a special three-month-long "Guwahati Swachhata Abhiyan 2024", the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) announced on Saturday. The initiative, which aligns with the Swachh Survekshan 2024 mission, aims to foster civic responsibility and promote a cleaner environment under the motto: "Swachh Ghar, Swachh Surroundings, Swachh Guwahati."

Two arrested

GUWAHATI: The Guwahati Police successfully cracked down on vehicle theft, arresting two individuals in separate operations conducted by the city's police teams, the officials informed on Saturday. In the first operation, a team from the Gorchuk Police Station under the West Guwahati Police District (WGPD) apprehended a veteran criminal, Pranab Ronghang, during a raid in a luxury apartment on VIP Road, Ronghang, a resident of Baithalangshu, is a notorious offender with a history of involvement in multiple bike-lifting cases. In another case, a team from the Chandmari Police Station (CGPD), in collaboration with the Crime Branch, solved the theft of a Pulsar motorcycle bearing registration number AS01FW2843.

Cong chief urges CM for govt job for widow of dead party leader

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah on Saturday requested Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to provide a government job on compassionate grounds to the widow of a party leader who had died during a protest programme.

Congress leader Mridul Islam had died during a 'Raj Bhawan Chalo' on Wednesday, with the opposition party alleging that he was a victim of "police high-handedness". Police had used tear gas shells on protesters, in which several Congress workers and journalists were injured.

In a letter to Sarma, Borah claimed that Islam's death was a "direct result of the overuse of

force" by the police. "Whatever our political differences, the death of a political worker in the service of democracy, at the hands of the state machinery, is a matter of great tragedy," he said.

Stating that Islam leaves behind his wife and two young children, the Congress chief requested Sarma to grant a "suitable government job" on compassionate grounds to Islam's widow, Hamida Parbin, in her home district Kamrup (rural) district as per her qualification. "I look forward to receiving a positive response from you. I would personally be grateful if you show your compassion towards a grieving widow," Borah added. (PTI)

PM lauds Arabic translator, publisher of Ramayana and Mahabharata

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday met two Kuwaiti nationals here and praised their efforts in translating and publishing India's iconic epics Ramayana and Mahabharata in Arabic.

The Prime Minister also signed copies of the Arabic versions of the two epics. Expressing his appreciation, Modi in a post on X said, "I compliment Abdullah Al Baroun and Abdul Lateef Al Neseef for their efforts in translating and publishing these epics. Their initiative highlights the global popularity of Indian culture."

He also shared some photographs of his meeting with Al Baroun and Al Neseef. While Al Baroun translated both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Al Neseef managed their publication in Arabic, enabling a wider audience in the Arab world to engage with India's rich cultural heritage. Modi had acknowledged their efforts during a 'Mann Ki Baat' address in October, emphasising their contributions to fostering cultural exchange and promoting Indian heritage on a global platform.

Highlighting their work, he had said that it was "not just a translation, but a bridge between two great cultures. It is developing a new understanding of Indian literature in the Arab world".

Modi arrived in Kuwait earlier in the day for a two-day visit, where he was greeted with a ceremonial wel-



come at the Amir Terminal by senior Kuwaiti officials, including First Deputy Prime Minister and minister of defence Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, and foreign minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya.

The Prime Minister is visiting Kuwait at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His visit is the first of any Indian Prime Minister to the Gulf nation in 43 years. The last Indian Prime Minister to visit Kuwait was Indira Gandhi in 1981.

Upon their arrival at the hotel, Modi met with 101-year-old former Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer Mangal Sain Handa, who appeared deeply emotional during the meeting. Indian expatriates in Kuwait raised slogans of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Police in NE must ensure speedy justice'

72nd plenary of the North Eastern Council

AGARTALA, Dec 21: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said the time has come for a change in the approach of the police force with the end of insurgency in the northeast, in order to ensure that people get speedy justice.

Shah, addressing the 72nd plenary of the North Eastern Council (NEC) here, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought peace in the region by inking 20 peace accords in 10 years, leading to the surrender of 9,000 armed militants.

"The police fought the insurgency in the northeast for the past four decades. As insurgency has now ended, we need to change the approach of the force to ensure people get justice within three years of lodging FIRs," he said.

The home minister also said connectivity is no longer a problem in



the region, as the Centre has spent ₹ 81,000 crore for rail connectivity and ₹ 41,000 crore for road network in the northeastern states.

Asserting that PM Modi expedited development activities in the northeast, Shah said Union ministers "spent 700 nights" in states of the region since the BJP-led NDA assumed power at the Centre.

"After the exchange of enclaves (land boundary agreements) with

Bangladesh, the whole world will open for the northeast. This will change the investment ecosystem in the region," he said.

The senior BJP leader also laid emphasis on the upliftment of people in rural areas by promoting vegetable cultivation, production of milk, eggs, and meat.

"Only a hike in the GDP (Gross State Domestic Product) is not enough for overall development. There is a need to attain self-sufficiency in vegetables, milk, eggs, and meat," he said.

Besides, the central government has been focusing on organic cultivation in the region, said Shah.

"The Centre has already constituted the National Organic Corporation Ltd to boost the sector. I urge all the CMs (in the northeast) to sign agreements (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Russia reaffirms support to India's bid to become permanent member of UNSC

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: India and Russia have decided to step up joint efforts in dealing with the challenges of radicalisation and terror financing.

Ways to deepen cooperation in tackling threats of terrorism were discussed at a meeting of the India-Russia joint working group (JWG) on counter-terrorism cooperation.

At a separate meeting on issues relating to the United Nations, Russia reiterated its support for India as a permanent member of a reformed UN Security Council.

The meeting took place in Moscow on December 19 and 20.

"In the 13th JWG on counter-terrorism, both sides shared their experiences in countering terrorism including cross-border terrorism, and agreed to enhance cooperation to address problems of radicalisation as well as terror financing," the ministry of external affairs (MEA) said on Saturday.

"They discussed current terrorist threats at the global and regional level and combating the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes," it said in a statement. The MEA said both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening counter-terrorism cooperation in bilateral as well as multilateral platforms.

India and Russia also held the sixth round of consultations on UN-related issues in Moscow.

"In the consultations on UN-related issues, both sides exchanged views on regional and global developments and issues pertaining to the UNSC (UN Security Council), including its reform," the MEA said.

"Russia reiterated its support for India as a permanent member of a reformed UN Security Council," it said. Tanmaya Lal, secretary (West) in the MEA, led the Indian delegation at the JWG on Counter Terrorism (CT) (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bodies of two missing brothers recovered in Tangla

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 21: The bodies of two brothers, who went missing since Friday, were recovered in Udalguri's Tangla town on Saturday, said family sources.

The victims have been identified as Kaushik Sharma (14) and Gaurav Sharma (12) from Jorpukhuri Tangla in Udalguri district. Upon learning that both the boys didn't return from school, the family members filed a missing persons complaint with the police. However, on Saturday morning, their bodies were discovered under mysterious circumstances in the Sastrapara Batabari area near Tangla.

Police have launched a probe into the matter to uncover ascertain the truth.

Meanwhile, police have apprehended the boys' elder brother, Niraj Sharma, who is suspected to be involved in the incident. "Reference to the murder of two young boys in Tangla, Udalguri — the accused, who is related to the victims, has been detained by police, and the weapon of offence has been seized. Evidence is being collected per procedure," Director General of Police (DGP) GP Singh said in a post on X.

He added that the details about the incident and progress of investigation will be shared by the inspector general of police, Bodoland Territorial Region, and superintendent of police, Udalguri.

Another police official said the two victims, Gaurav and Kaushik Sharma, were reported missing since Friday. "Students of classes 5 and 6 of a local school in Tangla, they went missing while going to school on Friday. Their bodies were recovered this morning," he said.

The tragic incident has sent shockwaves through the Tangla area in Udalguri district.

ISFR 2023 records 25.17% increase in forest and tree cover in the country

Assam witnesses decline in forest and tree cover

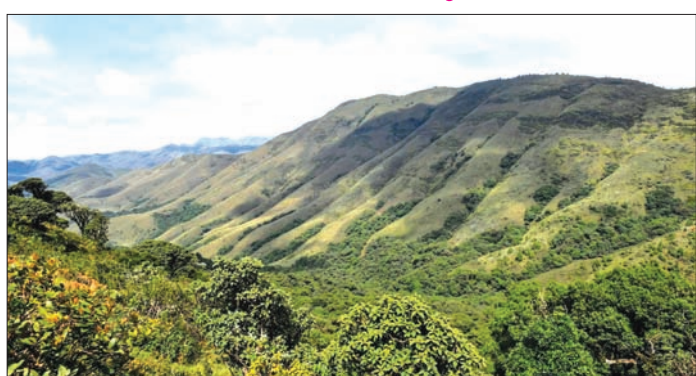
By: Hiranva Barman

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: The Indian State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023 released on Saturday showed a decline in the forest and tree cover in Assam by 83.93 sq km since 2021.

Assam and other Northeastern states other than Sikkim and Mizoram witnessed a decline in forest and tree cover, although the total forest and tree cover of the country has increased compared to 2021.

Assam also witnessed a decline of forest cover inside the Recorded Forest Area/Green wash (RFA/GW) by 86.66 sq km. Other states which saw the maximum decrease of forest cover inside the RFA/GW are Tripura (116.90 sq km) followed by Telangana (105.87 sq km), Andhra Pradesh (83.47 sq km), and Gujarat (61.22 sq km).

The States showing the maximum increase of forest cover in-



side the RFA/GW are Mizoram (192.92 sq km), followed by Odisha (118.17 sq km), Karnataka (93.14 sq km), West Bengal (64.79 sq km), and Jharkhand (52.72 sq km), the report stated.

The total forest and tree cover in Assam is 30,415.01 sq km of the total geographical area of 78,438.00 sq km, as per the report. The Northeastern states wit-

nessed an overall decline in forest and tree cover by 327.30 sq km since 2021.

Nagaland saw the highest decline in forest and tree cover of 125.22 sq km among the NE states. Arunachal Pradesh witnessed a decline of 52.49 sq km, Manipur declined by 62.20 sq km, Meghalaya by 84.07 sq km, and Tripura by 100.70 sq km.

However, Mizoram saw an increase in tree and forest cover by 178.42 sq km. Similarly, Sikkim saw an increase in greenery by 2.88 sq km.

The total forest and tree cover of the country has increased by 1445.81 sq km as compared to the last assessment of 2021. The current assessment shows an increase of 156.41 sq km in the forest cover at the national level as compared to the previous assessment, the ISFR stated.

The total forest and tree cover of the country is 8,27,356.95 sq km which is 25.17% of the geographical area of the country. The total Forest Cover has an area of 7,15,342.61 sq km (21.76%) whereas the Tree Cover has an area of 1,12,014.34 sq km (3.41%).

The India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023, released on Saturday, also said that India has achieved an additional (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SpaDeX Mission: ISRO says launch vehicle moved to First Launch Pad

BENGALURU, Dec 21: The launch vehicle of India's SpaDeX mission has been integrated and moved to the first launch pad of Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, ISRO said on Saturday.

This mission is intended to develop and demonstrate a technology needed to dock and undock spacecraft in space, apart from other things. "The launch vehicle has been integrated and now moved to the First Launch Pad, for further integration of satellites and launch preparations," ISRO said in a post on the social media X.

SpaDeX mission is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for the demonstration of 'in-space docking' using two small spacecraft launched by PSLV, ISRO said in an explainer on the subject.

This technology is essential for India's space ambitions such as Indian on Moon, sample return from the Moon, and the building and op-



eration of Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), ISRO stated in an explainer.

In-space docking technology is essential when multiple rocket launches are required to achieve common mission objectives. Through this mission, India is marching towards becoming the fourth country in the world to have space docking technology, it added.

After the successful launch of the PSLV-C59/Probas-3 mission on December 9, ISRO chairman and secretary of the department of space, S

Somanath said a similar mission was coming up with the launch of PSLV-C60 in December itself.

"It (The PSLV-C60 mission) is going to demonstrate the space docking experiment called SpaDeX. The rocket is ready now and we are getting ready for the final stage of activities leading to the launch, possibly in December itself," Somanath had said.

According to the ISRO, SpaDeX mission consists of two small spacecraft (about 220 kg each) to be launched by PSLV-C60, independently and simultaneously, into a 470 km circular orbit at 55° inclination, with a local time cycle of about 66 days. SpaDeX mission was floated to develop and demonstrate the technology needed for rendezvous, docking, and undocking of two small spacecraft (SDX01, which is the Chaser, and SDX02, the Target, nominally) in a low-Earth circular orbit, the explainer added. (PTI)

GST Council postpones decision to cut tax on insurance, rate panel defers report submission

JAISALMER, Dec 21: A GST Council meeting on Saturday postponed a decision on reducing taxes on health and life insurance, while the much talked-about GoM recommendation of rate rejig in 148 items was not tabled before the Council.

Some members of the Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising her state counterparts, felt that more deliberations were required before a final decision could be arrived at with regard to insurance taxation.

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, who heads the panel on GoM on insurance, said one more meeting is required to take a call on taxation of group, individual, senior citizen's policies. "Some (Council) members said more discussions required. We (GoM) will meet in January again," Chaudhary told reporters here.

Besides, the report of the GoM on rate rationalisation, which had recommended tweaks in 148 items, was not tabled before the Council. "We will submit the GoM report on rate rationalisation in next meeting of Council," said Chaudhary who is the convenor of the panel.

The ongoing Council meeting will also deliberate on bringing Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) in Goods and Services Tax fold.

Several proposals of Fitment Committee, comprising officials from the Centre and states' GST



वित्त मंत्री (बायाँ) के साथ वित्त मंत्री (दायाँ) के बीच बैठक के दौरान।

departments would come up for review before the Council.

One of the proposals include cutting taxes on food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato, to 5 per cent (without input tax credit), from the current 18 per cent (with ITC).

It is likely to have proposed a rate hike on sale of used EVs as well as small petrol and diesel vehicles to 18 per cent from the current 12 per cent. This hike would bring used and old smaller cars and EVs at par with old larger vehicles, according to sources.

Also, the Group of Ministers (GoM) on GST compensation cess is likely to get a six-month extension till June 2025, to submit their report. The compensation cess regime comes to an end in March 2026, and the GST Council has set up a panel of ministers, under

Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary, to decide the future course of the cess.

The GoM on insurance had recommended exempting insurance premiums paid for term life insurance policies from GST. Also premium paid by senior citizens towards health insurance cover has been proposed to be exempted from the tax.

Besides, GST on premiums paid by individuals, other than senior citizens, for health insurance with coverage of up to ₹ 5 lakh is proposed to be exempted.

However, 18 per cent GST will continue on premiums paid for policies with health insurance cover of over ₹ 5 lakh. The GST rate rationalisation GoM report, which has suggested rate tweaks in 148 items, was not tabled before the Council and would be taken up

in next Council meeting.

The GoM earlier this month had arrived at a consensus to hike tax on sin goods, like aerated beverages, cigarettes, tobacco and related products, to 35 per cent from the present 28 per cent.

Currently, GST is a four-tier tax structure with slabs at 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent. Luxury and demerit goods are taxed at highest bracket of 28 per cent, while packed food and essential items are at the lowest 5 per cent slab.

The GoM had also decided to propose rationalising tax rates on apparel. As per the decision, ready-made garments costing up to ₹ 1,500 would attract 5 per cent GST, those between ₹ 1,500-10,000 would attract 18 per cent. Garments costing above ₹ 10,000 would attract 28 per cent tax.

Currently, garments costing up to ₹ 1,000 attract 5 per cent GST, while those above that attract 12 per cent. The GoM also proposed hiking GST on shoes above ₹ 15,000/pair from 18 per cent to 28 per cent. It also proposed hiking the GST rate on wrist watches above ₹ 25,000 from 18 per cent to 28 per cent.

The GoM had proposed reducing GST on packaged drinking water of 20 litre and above to 5 per cent from 18 per cent, and reducing tax rate on bicycles costing less than ₹ 10,000 to 5 per cent, from 12 per cent. Also, GST on exercise notebooks would be reduced to 5 per cent from 12 per cent. (PTI)

GST Council approves 'Track and Trace Mechanism' to curb evasion

JAISALMER, Dec 21: In a significant move to plug leakage, the GST Council on Saturday approved a proposal to implement the 'Track and Trace Mechanism' for specified evasion-prone commodities, under which a unique mark will be affixed on such goods or packages to trace them throughout the supply chain.

This is to insert an enabling provision in CGST Act, 2017, through Section 148A so as to empower the government to enforce the Track and Trace Mechanism for specified evasion-prone commodities.

"The system shall be based on a Unique Identification Marking which shall be affixed on the said goods or the packages thereof. This will provide a legal framework for developing such a system and will help in the implementation of a mechanism for tracing specified commodities throughout the supply chain," the finance ministry said while listing out decisions taken in the 55th Council meeting here.

"To clarify that in respect of supply of 'Online Services' such as supply of online money gaming, OIAR services, etc. to unregistered recipients, the supplier is required to mandatorily record the name of the state of the unregistered recipient on the tax invoice and such name of state of recipient shall be deemed to be the address on record of the recipient for the purpose of section 12(2)(b) of IGST Act, 2017 read with proviso to rule 46(f) of CGST Rules, 2017," it said.



With regard to the decision taken about the GST rate on goods, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the Council has decided to cut the rate on fortified rice kernel (FRK) to 5 per cent from 18 per cent and also exempted GST on gene therapy.

Besides, she said, it was decided to reduce the rate of compensation cess to 0.1 per cent on supplies to merchant exporters at par with the GST rate on such supplies and to exempt from IGST imports of all equipment and consumable samples by the Inspection Team of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) subject to specified conditions.

As regards services, she said, the Council decided to exempt GST on the contributions made by general insurance companies from the third-party motor vehicle premiums collected by them to the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund, constituted under section 164B of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.

This fund is constituted for providing compensation/cashless treatment to the victims of road accidents including the hit and run cases.

In addition, she said, the GST Council recommended no GST on the transaction of vouchers as they are neither a supply of goods nor a supply of services.

The provisions related to vouchers are also being simplified, she said, adding, that the Council recommended to amend the definition of 'pre-packaged and labelled' to cover all commodities that are intended for retail sale and containing not more than 25 kg or 25 litre, which are 'pre-packed' as defined under the Legal Metrology Act, or a label affixed thereto is required to bear the declarations under the provisions of the Act and rules. It was also clarified that no GST is payable on the 'penal charges' levied and collected by banks and NBFCs from borrowers for non-compliance with loan terms. (PTI)

Andhra, PhysicsWallah ink ₹ 1,000 cr deal to set up varsity of innovation

AMARAVATI, Dec 21: The Andhra Pradesh government and EdTech company PhysicsWallah have signed an agreement to set up a University of Innovation (UoI) at an investment of up to ₹ 1,000 crore.

The UoI is set to emerge as the first institute of eminence in the state and aligns with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's aim to provide the state's youth with education in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies.

"We are committed to investing up to ₹ 1,000 crores by GSV Ventures - US and other investors, the purpose is to create an institution that combines academic learning with industry relevance. The UoI will help learners with the skills they might need in a constantly evolving job market, in an attempt to foster entrepreneurship and innovation," said PhysicsWallah founder and chief executive Alakh Pandey in a press release on Friday.

The UoI will work towards blending academic excellence, innovation, and research, focusing on addressing key challenges in education and employability. Following a hub and spoke model, the varsity will serve as a central hub with satellite centres across the southern state serving as spokes.

Further, in a bid to keep the curriculum aligned with the market, PhysicsWallah is collaborating with industry partners like Amazon Web Services India Pvt Ltd to provide industry-relevant education.

IT Minister Nara Lokesh added that the partnership with the EdTech company aims at advancing innovation and equipping Andhra Pradesh's youth with skills which align with industry demands and standards. (PTI)

INTUC seeks govt intervention to address unemployment in Tuticorin

TUTICORIN (Tamil Nadu), Dec 21: Employment crisis looms large in the district as several downstream industries have been hit following the closure of the Vedanta Group company Sterlite Copper power plant, said INTUC General Secretary P Kathirvel.

According to Kathirvel, the shutdown of the Sterlite Copper plant has led to the closure of thermal power plants, salt pans, textile mills and numerous small and large industries in the district leading to significant job losses.

"The closure of the Sterlite Copper plant alone directly displaced over 1,500 workers and disrupted the livelihoods of approximately 40,000 individuals who depended on it directly. Additionally, the halt in other industries has rendered nearly one million daily wage workers unemployed," he said in a statement on Saturday.

He pointed out that Tuticorin DMK MP

Kanimozhi has appealed to the central government to establish semiconductor manufacturing units as such facilities would create employment for 30,000 people and be a catalyst in economic recovery in the region.

Traditional spinning mills with a history spanning 125 years have struggled to modernise and adapt to contemporary technologies. Kathirvel, who is also the senior vice president at the Indian National Port and Dock Workers Federation, New Delhi, said,

"The reopening of Sterlite Copper Plant would generate employment opportunities for approximately 3,000 truck drivers engaged in raw material transportation and over 4,000 daily wage workers per shift in material handling, he said. Many truck owners were forced to sell their trucks for being unable to repay the loans following the closure of the plant, he added. (PTI)

GST Council postpones decision on slashing tax on life, health insurance

JAISALMER, Dec 21: The GST Council on Saturday postponed a decision on cutting tax rate on life and health insurance premiums, officials said. The 55th meeting of the GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts, decided that some more technicalities needed to be ironed out and tasked the GoM for further deliberations. Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary said one more meeting of the GoM on insurance is required to take a call on taxation of group, individual, senior citizens' policies. "Some members said more discussions required. We (GoM) will meet in January again," Chaudhary told reporters. A Group of Ministers (GoM) set up by the Council under Chaudhary, in its meeting in November had agreed on exempting insurance premiums paid for term life insurance policies from GST. (PTI)

Number of domestic migrants estimated to have lowered by 12 pc since 2011: EAC-PM

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: The number of domestic migrants is estimated to have lowered by around 12 per cent to 40.20 crore between 2011 and 2023, indicating increased economic opportunities across the country, said a report by prime minister's economic advisory panel EAC-PM.

According to a working paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM), the number of domestic migrants stood at 40,20,90,396 in 2023, which was 11.78 per cent lower compared to the figure registered as per Census 2011.

The paper titled '400 Million Dreams! Examining volume and directions of domestic migration in India using novel high frequency data', said as per Census 2011, the total number of migrants stood at 45,57,87,621.

"Overall domestic migration in India is slowing. We estimate the overall number of migrants in the country, as of 2023, to be 40,20,90,396. This is about 11.78 per cent lower as compared to the number of migrants enumerated as per Census 2011 (45,57,87,621)," it said.

Consequently, the paper said, the migration rate which stood at 37.64 per cent of total population as per Census 2011, is estimated to have reduced to 28.88 per cent.

"We hypothesize that this is on account of availability of improved services such as education, health, infrastructure and connectivity as well as improved economic opportunities in or near in major sources of migration and is an indicator of overall economic growth," noted the paper authored by former EAC-PM chairman Bibek Debroy.



The paper used three high-frequency and granular data sets - Indian Railway Unreserved Ticketing System (UTS) data on passenger volumes; mobile telephone subscribers roaming data from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), and district level banking data to understand the likely impact of migration at the places of origin.

Looking at the spatial dimensions of travel, the paper said, the top origin districts are coalesced around major urban agglomerations viz. Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata etc.

Not only is this in line with gravity models of migration but perhaps also is a tentative confirmation of prior i.e short distance migration accounts for the largest share of migrants and that distance has a negative effect on labour flows, it added.

The report also noted that the composition of the top five states that attract maximum number of migrants (including intra-state mi-

grants) has changed. "West Bengal and Rajasthan are the new entrants and while Andhra Pradesh and Bihar are now ranked a notch lower," it said.

While pointing out that West Bengal, Rajasthan and Karnataka are the states showing the maximum growth in percentage share of the arriving passengers, the report said Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are the states where the percentage share of total migrants has reduced.

"Mumbai, Bengaluru Urban, Howrah, Central Delhi, Hyderabad are the districts attracting most migrant arrivals, while Valsad, Chittoor, Paschim Bardhaman, Agra, Guntur, Villupuram and Saharsa are the top origin districts," it said.

As per the paper, at the state level, Uttar Pradesh-Delhi; Gujarat-Maharashtra; Telangana-Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar-Delhi emerge as the primary dyads of movement.

"At the district level, Murshidabad-Kolkata; Paschim Bard-

haman-Howrah; Valsad -Mumbai; Chittoor-Bengaluru Urban, and Surat-Mumbai are the most popular routes for migration between districts," the paper said, adding that this has implications for urban planning as well as for planning of transportation networks.

Using TRAI's mobile phone roaming data, the report finds that April-June is the high months for movement with November-December witnessing secondary highs. A secondary high in winter time is perhaps indicative of travel around the festival/marriage season. January, on the other hand, appears to be the month of lowest travel, it said.

As per Census 2011, just five states -- Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal -- together account for about 48 per cent of the total outbound migrants, which includes within-state migrants as well.

Similarly, just five states -- Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu -- together account for about 48 per cent of all incoming migrants. This includes within-state migrants as well.

In the period from 1991 to 2001, the compounded annual growth rate of the number of migrants was 2.7 per cent.

This increased to 3.7 per cent during 2001 to 2011. Interestingly, in the period from 1991 to 2001, India's workforce grew from 3.17 crore to 4.02 crore (an annual average growth of 2.6 per cent), whereas from 2001 to 2011, the workforce grew from 4.02 crore to 4.82 crore (an annual average growth of 1.99 per cent). (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Posts in BCCI, ICC honourary

Council (ICC), the Congress MLA added. While expressing delight at the appointment of a person from the state to top positions in the cricket bodies, the leader of the opposition added, "...we also plead that Saikia should hold himself in the utmost regard and commitment towards the Constitution of India and responsibilities betrothed upon him by the Government of Assam and people of Assam with the topmost priority before any other commitments."

The Congress leader claimed that Saikia has violated the privileges of the assembly by taking a secretarial position along with the position of director which has several pecuniary benefits by a foreign organisation (ICC) and a non-governmental organisation (BCCI) in violation of the principles of 'office of profit'. He also claimed that Saikia had violated the rules of the Bar Council of India under Advocates Act, 1961, which states that "an advocate shall not be a Managing Director or a Secretary of any company".

"Also, a holder of India's constitutional post cannot take upon an international organisation's fiduciary position, if that organisation has India's foreign adversaries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh etc. as its members," Saikia maintained.

Underlining that The Assam Game and Betting Act, 1970, is in vogue in the state, Saikia, by his appointment as BCCI secretary (acting) is under "direct conflict with the policies" of the state as the primary sponsor of BCCI Men's Team, Dream 11, is being "investigated by several agencies for betting and match-fixing".

The Congress leader pointed out that Saikia was in a "similar peculiar position in the past, where he had to resign from the post of senior additional advocate general of Assam in December 2018 to make himself eligible to contest for the post of secretary of Assam Cricket Association". "In this regard, I pray to your conscience to kindly treat this matter with utmost importance and see it as a serious breach of privileges by a constitutional post holder in the Government of Assam; and accordingly act upon the matter at the earliest," Saikia added.

Responding to the allegation, AG Saikia claimed there was no question of 'office of profit' as both positions in the BCCI and ICC were honorary in nature. "The basic thing is that the positions I am holding in BCCI and ICC are honorary posts. How does the question of 'office of profit' arise?" he said. "If the leader of the opposition is lacking in legal knowledge, I pity him. He is in such a high position in the assembly. The leader of the opposition should know what is an office of profit, and what the requirements are for becoming office-bearers in BCCI and the advocate general," Saikia told PTI.

"In an appropriate time, I will give my reply to him," he said. Indicating that Congress leaders are holding positions in the BCCI, the advocate general said, "My colleague in the BCCI represents the 'grand old party of India'. I request him (Debabrata Saikia) to find it out from his own party member, who is in Rajya Sabha." He, however, refrained from naming the Rajya Sabha MP he was referring to. (PTI)

Shah tells banks to roll out new

and all regions of the country must be developed equally which is the necessity. "Unless all 140 crore people are economically developed, the country can't fully develop," he said. The conclave was also attended by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu, his Tripura counterpart Manik Saha and top officials of the banking sector among others. (PTI)

'Police in NE must ensure

with NOCL for packaging, marketing, and exporting of organic products," he said. The home minister, however, said more efforts were needed to tackle narcotics smuggling in the region. Earlier in the day, Shah inaugurated the 72nd plenary session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) at Prajna Bhavan here.

Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, along with governors, chief ministers of all the eight northeastern states, and senior officials, were also present at the event. The council is the nodal agency for the economic and social development of the northeastern region, consisting of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. (PTI)

PM lauds Arabic translator,

"Vande Mataram" in solidarity. "Delighted to have met Shri @MangalSainHanda Ji in Kuwait this afternoon. I admire his contribution to India and his passion for India's development," Modi posted on X. On Friday, Handa's granddaughter Shreya Juneja requested Modi to meet her Nanaji to which Modi replied, "Absolutely! I look forward to meeting @MangalSainHanda Ji in Kuwait today." Last year, Modi had sent a letter to Handa on his 100th birthday, praising his diplomatic contributions.

"Humble request to Hon'ble PM @narendramodi to meet my 101-year-old Nanaji, ex-IFS officer, in Kuwait during tmrw's interaction with the Indian Diaspora. Nana @MangalSainHanda is a great admirer of yours. Details have been emailed to your office," Shreya Juneja, granddaughter of Handa posted on X on Friday. On his arrival, Modi received a heartwarming welcome from the vibrant Indian diaspora in Kuwait. "Their energy, love, and unwavering connection to India are truly inspiring. Grateful for their enthusiasm and proud of their contributions to strengthening ties between our nations," Modi said.

The Indian community is the largest expatriate community in Kuwait. Indians constitute 21 per cent (1 million) of the total population of Kuwait and 30 per cent of its workforce (approx 9 lakhs). Indian workers top the Private Sector as well as domestic sector (DSW) workforce list, according to the Indian Embassy in Kuwait. More than 200 Indian associations in Kuwait actively organise socio-cultural and humanitarian initiatives, further reinforcing the ties between the two nations.

Kuwait is also among India's top trading partners, with bilateral trade valued at USD 10.47 billion in the financial year 2023-24. It is India's sixth largest crude supplier, meeting 3 per cent of the country's energy needs. India and Kuwait have enjoyed traditionally friendly relations, with links dating back to pre-oil Kuwait when maritime trade with India was the backbone of its economy.

During his visit, Prime Minister Modi will also attend the opening ceremony of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup here. (PTI)

Russia reaffirms support to

cooperation and the consultations on UN-related issues. The Russian side was headed by Sergey Vershinin, deputy minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation, representatives of respective departments and agencies from both sides also participated in the meetings. On December 19, Lal also held a meeting with Russian deputy foreign minister Mikhail Galuzin and discussed current international and regional issues, especially the Ukraine conflict. (PTI)

Assam witnesses decline

carbon sink of 2.29 billion tonnes compared to 2005 levels. As part of its climate plans or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to meet the Paris Agreement goals, the country has committed to creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

In terms of the total area, Madhya Pradesh leads with the largest forest and tree cover (85,724 sq km), followed by Arunachal Pradesh (67,083 sq km), and Maharashtra (65,383 sq km). For forest cover specifically, Madhya Pradesh remains on top (77,073 sq km), followed by Arunachal Pradesh (65,882 sq km), and Chhattisgarh (55,812 sq km).

Eco-initiative focuses on sustainability and beautification in BTR

Green Bodoland Mission adopts Mothambil village

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 21: Green Bodoland Mission (GBM) director Manaranjan Das on Saturday announced the decision to adopt Mothambil village along with the Raimona National Park under the Gossaigaon subdivision in Kokrajhar.

Mission director of GBM, Manaranjan Das said that the Mothambil village has been declared as one of adopted village of the ten villages under the Green Bodoland Mission which would be green and beautification in all aspects with planting multiple seedlings of the trees along the village.

"The GBM has initiated the mission with planting multiple seedlings of plants across the Bodoland region and the mission received a good response from the citizens of the region and we were able to plant more than 1.2 lakh seedlings in last four months so far," Das said.

Das mentioned that the villagers from the Mothambil coming forward



ward to extend their full cooperation in this venture to make green Bodoland.

He opined that the GBM is a flagship programme of BTR government under the leadership of Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of BTR while making a green, smart and peaceful

Bodoland.

"Since the launch of GBM, 258 youth clubs were engaged in the plantation drive across the region and ten villages were adopted by the GBM initiative. The GBM has also emphasised to make plastic free village amongst the citizens to attract the tourist in days to come

through the Green Bodoland Mission initiative," Das added.

Notably, the Mothambil village consists of over 260 families, comprising of different communities like Bodo, Santhali, Oraon.

Under the Green Bodoland Mission, the village witnessed a planting of saplings in the community land, forest land, village land areas that leading to make healthy natural environment amongst the citizens in days to come ahead.

"The GBM has been working dedicatedly towards the building up for bringing sustainable green, smart and peaceful Bodoland under the dynamic leadership of Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region," Das concluded.

Mission Director of Green Bodoland Mission, Manaranjan Das, UPPL media secretary, Hantigiri Narzary and many other members from NGOs like Midway Journey were prominent attendees in the event.

Transport Minister distributes microfinance waiver cash awards

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 21: New Transport Minister Jogen Mohan distributed No Dues Certificates to 2854 microfinance defaulters of the district waving their loans amounting of ₹ 7 Crore and 10 lakh. The Minister said that the beneficiaries will be relieved of considerable tension and pain by the government step.

Mohan also distributed cheques amounting to over ₹ 10, 27, 00,000 among 22,913 families in the district as Disaster Management grant. A total of 249 SHGs also received cash incentives for productive works. He further said that the government would take stern measures against reckless driving to prevent road accident in the eve of New Year.

Keshab Mahanta launches development initiatives in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 21: As part of the "12 Days of Development" programme, Assam minister Keshab Mahanta inaugurated multiple development schemes in Nagaon district at an event held at Dawson Higher Secondary School on Saturday.

The minister distributed debt-free certificates to 3,992 microfinance beneficiaries, financial aid to flood-affected families, and initial capital to 177 self-help groups under the Prime Minister's Micro Food Processing Entrepreneurship Scheme.

Highlighting the government's achievements, Mahanta emphasised swift assistance to flood victims within two months and reaffirmed the commitment to development. Local MLA Rupak Sarma commended the government for fulfilling pre-election promises.

The event saw the participation of dignitaries, including Nagaon district commissioner Narendra Kumar Shah and SP Swapnil Deka.



Manivanan leads special electoral rolls revision in Silchar



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: In a significant move to strengthen Assam's electoral system, MS Manivanan, the Electoral Roll Observer and Commissioner of the Assam government's General Administration Department, led a crucial meeting on the special summary revision of electoral rolls on Saturday.

It was held at the district commissioner's office in Silchar. The meeting focused on ensuring that the electoral rolls, with January 1, 2025, as the qualifying date are accurate and inclusive.

Presiding over the session, MS Manivanan underscored the critical role of electoral rolls in upholding democratic values and ensuring that no eligible voter is left behind.

He praised the dedication of the officials involved and urged for a coordinated effort to carry out the revision process effectively.

During an interactive session, MS Manivanan addressed questions from attendees, reaffirming the administration's commitment to a fair and impartial electoral system. He emphasised the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in en-

suring a successful revision exercise.

The meeting reviewed critical statistics as of December 19, 2024 reporting 1,575 polling stations with a total of 1,391,479 voters, including 692,663 male voters, 698,798 female voters and 18 third-gender voters. Between October 29 and December 19, 27,862 forms were submitted for revisions with the final voter list slated for publication on January 6, 2025.

The session concluded with a collective pledge to maintain transparency and accuracy throughout the revision process, reinforcing the administration's commitment to a fair and inclusive electoral framework in Assam. This initiative marks a crucial step towards safeguarding democratic rights and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process in the state.

The meeting also witnessed the participation of key officials, including Cachar district commissioner Mrudul Yadav, election officer Mesi Topno, circle officers Maria Tanim, Rituparna Bhadra and Rituraj Bordoloi.

Assistant Commissioners Imkum I Aijkum and Bonnykha Chetia were also present, along with representatives from political parties and various departments.

Over 30 shops destroyed Arson suspected in Margherita's market fire



HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Dec 21: A massive fire broke out in Margherita's upper market area early Saturday night, gutting over 30 shops and causing property damage exceeding ₹ 2 crore.

The fire, which started around 1:30 a.m., is suspected to be an act of arson, as CCTV footage revealed a youth allegedly setting the shops ablaze using petrol.

The timely intervention of Margherita fire fighters prevented the blaze from spreading further,

though efforts to extinguish lingering embers are ongoing. Local shopkeepers expressed their grievances over the absence of night watchmen, which they believe contributed to the scale of the destruction. Appealing for strict action, shopkeepers have urged the Margherita police, co-district commissioner and Municipal Board Chairman to ensure justice for the victims and prevent such incidents in the future. Authorities are set to conduct a detailed investigation into the matter.

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Dec 21: In a bold move to address the ongoing challenges faced by the Assam tea industry, Deboshyam Barua, chairman of the Assam Tea Planters Association (ATPA), has proposed a significant overhaul of the tea selling system.

During the 87th annual general meeting of ATPA, Barua suggested that tea planters should be strictly classified into two categories: those who wish to sell their produce through the transparent and non-biased public auction system, and those who prefer private channels.

According to Barua it should be implemented by the Tea Board at the start of the coming season, with any changes in preference requiring written consent from the board.

Barua, who has spent over three decades in the tea industry, emphasised that the public auction system is the most effective platform for selling tea, ensuring transparency and fairness.

He warned that selling through private channels is counterproductive and conflicts with the industry's broader interests. His suggestion to bifurcate the sellers would be a radical shift in the tea industry's regulatory framework, aiming to address longstanding concerns related to pricing and quality control. Reflecting on the difficulties faced by the industry in 2023, Barua pointed out that poor price realizations and Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) issues had plagued tea production.

While the industry had initially benefited from the Tea Board's directive to route all dust grades through public auctions, result-



ing in a price increase of ₹ 50 per kilogram, the prices had significantly dropped after mid-year. Despite a 110 million kg shortfall up to September, the industry was left grappling with uncertainty after the crop production caught up to 68 million kg in October, which further exacerbated the situation.

He further highlighted the impact of the state government's decision to halt production at the end of November in response to the chief minister's call, which, in conjunction with the Tea Board's circular, created a challenging environment for tea planters.

Amidst the challenges, Barua remained optimistic about the potential for change in

the tea industry. He acknowledged that while technological innovations in factory machinery have significantly reduced costs by up to 40 per cent, the same progress had not been evident in the fields.

However, he noted that the introduction of modern power tools like battery-operated plucking machines, pruning machines, and other field tools has helped improve efficiency and reduce costs in field operations. Barua expressed satisfaction with how younger workers are embracing these technologies, contributing to a more efficient workforce.

In a momentous change for the ATPA,

Barua announced his decision to step down as Chairman and hand over the leadership to Samudra Barua, with Atulit Chokhani taking over as vice chairman.

The transition marks a new chapter for the ATPA as the tea industry faces the challenges of rising production costs, changing market dynamics, and the need for innovation to remain competitive in an increasingly volatile global market.

As the industry looks ahead to a new season, the proposed reforms and Barua's leadership transition signal a commitment to navigating the complexities of the Assam tea sector and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

Assistant professor suspended amid sexual harassment allegations

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Dec 21: Dr Aniruddha Kumar, an assistant professor in the department of Hindi at Assam University's Diphu Campus, has been suspended following allegations of sexual harassment in the workplace.

The suspension comes as part of an ongoing disciplinary proceeding against him.

As per reports, the decision was based on a communication from the District Commissioner (DC) of Karbi Anglong, dated December 17, 2024, and an email from the

Complaint Cell of the National Commission for Women on December 18, 2024.

In response, the university's vice-chancellor took immediate action.

"Invoking Rule 10(1) of the CCS (CCA) Rules, 1965, and relevant university statutes, the competent authority ordered Dr. Kumar's suspension for 90 days. During this period, he is barred from leaving the headquarters without prior approval and will receive a subsistence allowance as per applicable rules," the order of

suspension read.

Meanwhile, the Karbi Nimso Chingthur Asong (KNCA), a women's organisation, has called for stronger action.

"We have visited the university campus, and many female students have come forward with accounts of sexual harassment. A 90-day suspension is insufficient; he should be dismissed and arrested. CCTV cameras must also be installed on campus to prevent such incidents," said KNCA general secretary Protima Engphi during a press conference.

Kokrajhar launches 100-Days campaign for TB elimination

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Dec 21: With a view to eliminate the Tuberculosis (TB) amongst the citizens, a 100-Days intensified campaign on TB elimination began on Saturday in Kokrajhar.

The department of Health & Family Welfare, Kokrajhar has rolled out a 100-Days intensified Campaign on TB Elimination, aligning with the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP).

The campaign was inaugurated with the official flagging off of the

NIKSHAY VAHAN by Dr Umesh Phangcho, director of Health Services, BTC, at the office of the Director of Health Services in Kokrajhar.

The NIKSHAY VAHAN will travel across the district to educate people about tuberculosis prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and highlighting about health awareness. The initiative seeks to involve the community in combating the disease through active participation and awareness programs and urged the citizens for active participation during the campaign.

US tourist dies in road accident

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Dec 21: Berry Thomson, a US tourist traveling through India on a Royal Enfield Himalayan bike, tragically lost her



life in a road accident on Saturday near Blue Hill Dhaba on the Lumding-Haf-long National Highway in Hojai district.

The accident occurred when a speeding truck, reportedly from Ashok Leyland, hit the bike from behind. The truck driver fled the scene immediately after the collision. Local police rushed Thomson to Lumding Civil Hospital, where doctors declared her brought dead. Authorities are investigating the incident while efforts to trace the absconding truck driver are underway.

Home Guard assessment schedule announced

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: The District Commandant of Home Guards, Cachar, has announced the schedule for the Home Guard Volunteers Assessment Board, an official statement said on Saturday.

The assessment will take place on the specified dates and venues as detailed in the official notice.

All concerned Home Guard volunteers are hereby instructed to appear before the selection committee with their original documents for the Physical Efficiency Test (PET) and Medical Efficiency Test.

"Volunteers must bring the original Home Guard Volunteer certificates, PAN Card, Aadhar Card (optional), Character Certificate for verification," the statement said.

The district commandant emphasised that offices of the Urban Wing Home Guards in Hailakandi and Karimganj will not be responsible for any delays or late submissions of forms.

"Volunteers are also cautioned against indulging in misleading information or malpractices that could compromise the fairness of the assessment process," the statement added.

Furthermore, no Travel Allowance (TA), Dearness Allowance (DA), or accommodation facilities will be provided to the volunteers appearing before the board.

The district commandant reiterated the importance of adhering to the guidelines to ensure a smooth and transparent assessment process.

For further details, volunteers are advised to contact the District Commandant Home Guards, Cachar.

Assam Power Workers Union meets minister to discuss issues



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Dec 21: In a bid to discuss pressing concerns regarding the state's power sector, Assam State Power Workers Union leaders met with the newly appointed Power Minister of Assam, Prasanta Phukan, at his Dibrugarh residence on Saturday.

The Union demanded the installation of new power plants, including a 200 MW project at Lakwa Thermal Station and an increase in the capacity of the Namrup

Power Plant. They also called for the relocation of 11/33 KV control rooms to APDCL and the safety of electricity workers, along with provisions for salary and special leave in the event of accidents.

The leaders also raised the issue of the Assam Power Generation Corporation's (APGC) underperformance, generating only 350 MW on average against the state's electricity demand of approximately 2,500 MW.

Minister Phukan assured the Union leaders that he would take the issue of regularising and promoting temporary workers seriously and committed to further discussions to address the concerns raised.

The delegation which was led by chief adviser Brajen Bori, president Sukhen Gogoi, working president Tailendra Saikia, and general secretary Amit Kar, highlighted several grievances, including the promotion of employees, upgradation of companies, and the regularisation of temporary workers.

ATPA chairman proposes tea sale reforms

Barua calls for seller bifurcation and Tea Board changes

Editor's pick

Syria's collapse: Foreign meddling and economic ruin

By: Nilantha Ilangamuwa

By the end of November, the situation in Syria was dire. Government forces were on the brink of exhaustion, stretched thin by an economic crisis that spiralled out of control. Soldiers earned a paltry \$7 a month, with even high-ranking officers receiving only \$40. This was in blunt contrast to militia fighters funded by external powers, who earned up to \$2,000 monthly. This glaring disparity revealed not just economic fault lines but the extent of foreign intervention sustaining these militias. Meanwhile, protests erupted across Suwayda province, historically a stronghold of Assad support, highlighting widespread famine, collapsing services, and the devaluation of the Syrian pound. Discontent was palpable, threatening to upend the regime's fragile grasp on power.

In Iran, Syria's long-time ally, reportedly pressured Assad to address these challenges. Tehran's warnings accentuated the erosion of public trust and a crumbling economy, urging decisive action. Yet Assad seemed increasingly aloof, allegedly seeking new alliances with Gulf nations, hoping these relationships would secure his future.

By December, reports emerged that the United States and the United Arab Emirates were considering lifting sanctions on Assad—but only if he severed ties with Iran and halted arms transfers to Hezbollah. This diplomatic manoeuvre was a calculated strategy to weaken Assad's regime further. Relief from Caesar sanctions was an unlikely prospect given Washington's decade-long effort to dismantle the Assad family rule. The outcome was preordained: Assad was isolated, and the geopolitical chessboard advanced. The trajectory of Assad's downfall mirrors a broader pattern in Western foreign policy. Leaders once celebrated as reformers—from Saddam Hussein to Muammar Gaddafi—are vilified when their geopolitical utility wanes. Assad, who was once lauded for fostering coexistence among Syria's religious and ethnic groups, became the West's pariah.

In 2010, Syria was a stable nation, ranked seventh on The New York Times' "31 best places to visit." Assad met with Queen Elizabeth, hosted Nancy Pelosi, and welcomed Pope John Paul II. Yet the West's affection was short-lived. As geopolitical calculations shifted, Assad's regime was recast as the antithesis of democracy, paving the way for intervention. The Syrian conflict was never just a civil war. It was a proxy war fueled by external actors. Over 100,000 jihadists were funnelled into Syria, backed by a coalition of nations. The United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar allegedly provided financial and logistical support.

Turkey and Jordan facilitated arms shipments and fighter transport. Western media amplified anti-Assad narratives, while the UK-backed White Helmets shaped public perceptions. Each player pursued its agenda, yet all converged on a singular goal: regime change. The motivations driving this coalition were diverse. The United States and Israel sought regional hegemony, neutralising perceived threats while advancing the Greater Israel project. Qatar's pipeline ambitions clashed with Assad's preference for an Iranian alternative, further entrenching divisions.

These dynamics turned Syria into a battleground for competing interests, with devastating consequences for its people. By late 2013, the influx of foreign fighters intensified. Western nations grappled with their citizens joining extremist groups in Syria. The UK reported approximately 600 fighters, while France contributed around 1,200.

Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden also faced significant outflows. However, the greatest contributions came from West Asia and North Africa, with Tunisia leading at 3,000 fighters, followed by Saudi Arabia at 2,500.

Russia's involvement, particularly from regions like Chechnya, underscored the conflict's global reach. The arms supply chain further exacerbated the war. Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia allegedly supplied weapons, supported by over 160 military cargo flights. These arms, transported through Turkey and Jordan, sustained rebel factions. European nations, such as Croatia, indirectly contributed by routing surplus weapons through Jordan. This complex web of arms smuggling empowered extremist groups, further destabilising Syria. Western hypocrisy was stark.

While denouncing Assad's regime, the United States supported "moderate rebels" aligned with Al Qaeda and ISIS. Declassified documents revealed this duplicity. In 2012, General Michael Flynn's memo to the Pentagon warned that the opposition included jihadist factions. Similarly, Hillary Clinton's advisor, Jake Sullivan, acknowledged in an email that "Al Qaeda is on our side in Syria." The West's support for these groups undercut its claims of promoting democracy, revealing a strategy rooted in destabilisation. Atrocious propaganda became a central tool in the anti-Assad narrative. Staged chemical attacks, amplified by the White Helmets, justified military intervention.

Western media perpetuated these fabrications, obscuring the reality on the ground. Idlib province, under "rebel" control, became a dystopian preview of Syria's potential future: public executions, forced veiling of women, and sectarian slogans. This grim reality highlighted the consequences of regime change.

Operation Timber Sycamore, the CIA's covert programme, exemplified Western duplicity. Billions of dollars in weapons were funnelled to extremist factions, prolonging the war.

The irony was stark: the West, claiming to combat terrorism, empowered the very groups destabilising the region. Syria's devastation became a witness to the destructive nature of interventionist policies. Syria's collapse parallels other Western interventions. Iraq's 2003 invasion, justified by the false pretext of weapons of mass destruction, left the nation in tatters. Libya, once Africa's wealthiest country, descended into anarchy following Gaddafi's overthrow—these interventions, framed as humanitarian missions, unleashed chaos, empowering extremist factions and creating power vacuums. The broader motivations behind these actions lie in geopolitics.

Syria's strategic location, its role as a buffer between Iran and Israel, and its proximity to oil-rich regions made it a prime target. The West's desire to reshape the region's political structure has driven decades of intervention, often with catastrophic consequences. Meanwhile, allies like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, despite their human rights abuses, remain central to Western strategy, exposing the moral bankruptcy of interventionist policies. Syria's tragedy is a miniature of a global pattern. The collapse of nations like Iraq, Libya, and Syria reflects a broader system where sovereignty is sacrificed for strategic interests. Foreign interventions, far from promoting democracy or stability, have left legacies of destruction, displacement, and despair.

Syria's collapse serves as both a warning and a call to scrutinise the ethics of intervention. The legacy of these actions is clear: a world shaped by greed, ambition, and the devastating cost of unchecked power. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Right to Information is being constricted by government and judiciary

I saw a video on YouTube in which the Supreme Court was scolding a young lawyer for having sought information about a municipal body by inspection. The court was asking him why he wanted this information and telling him not to use the right to information (RTI) since he was an officer of the court.

The court tells the lawyer that it will impose costs on him. The court lambasts him for asking about recruitment, budget, etc. The judge tells him, "It is high time all this is put to an end." The court asks why he wants to inspect the records of a municipal body.

Recently, a Madras High Court division Bench comprising Justice N. Paul Vasanthakumar and Justice K. Ravichandrababu has ruled that RTI applicants must give reasons for seeking information.

I found it difficult to believe that a citizen could be asked why he was seeking information from a municipal body. I have heard many public servants ask why a citizen is seeking certain information. If we accept this position, we could be asked to explain why we wish to speak or publish something. Our fundamental rights are our human rights recognised by the Constitution.

Since the RTI has been accepted as a fundamental right of citizens under Article 19(1)(a), nobody has the right to ask for reasons. Democracy is the 'rule of the people, for the people and by the people'.

Citizens are sovereigns, and they are seeking what is related to them. To emphasise this, the Parliament stated in Section 6(2) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, "An applicant making a request for information shall not be required to give any reason for requesting the information or any other personal details except those that may be necessary for contacting him."

The first clarion call for the right to information came from Justice Mathew in 1975 in the Raj Narain case where he said: "In a government of responsibility like ours, where all the agents of the public must be responsible for their conduct, there can be but few secrets."

"The people of this country have a right to know every public act, everything that is done in a public way by their public functionaries. They are entitled to know the particulars of every public transaction in all its bearing. Their right to know, which is derived from the concept of freedom of speech, though not absolute, is a factor which should make one wary when secrecy is claimed for transactions which can at any rate have no repercussions on public security."

This was reinforced by many other

Supreme Court judgments such as S.P. Gupta. The Parliament codified this right in 2005 to make it effective. Justice RavindraBhat gave a perfect explanation of the RTI in 2007 in the Bhagat Singh case when he stated: "A rights-based enactment is akin to a welfare measure, like the Act, it should receive a liberal interpretation. The contextual background and history of the Act are such that the exemptions, outlined in Section 8, relieving the authorities from the obligation to provide information, constitute restrictions on the exercise of the rights provided by it."

"Therefore, such exemption provisions have to be construed in their terms; there is some authority supporting this view (see Nathi Devi versus Radha Devi Gupta 2005 (2) SCC 201; B.R. Kapoor versus State of Tamil Nadu 2001 (7) SCC 231 and V. Tulasamma versus Sesha Reddy 1977 (3) SCC 99). Adopting a different approach would result in narrowing the rights and approving a judicially mandated class of restriction on the rights under the Act, which is unwarranted."

The entire approach to citizens' right to information changed in August 2011 when the Supreme Court held in Aditya Bandopadhyay versus CBSE and stated in Para 33: "Some high

courts have held that Section 8 of the RTI Act is in the nature of an exception to Section 3, which empowers the citizens with the right to information, which is a derivative from the freedom of speech; and that, therefore, Section 8 should be construed strictly, literally and narrowly."

In Para 37, it made a comment without any evidence: "The right to information is a cherished right. Information and the right to information are intended to be formidable tools in the hands of responsible citizens to fight corruption and to bring in transparency and accountability. The provisions of RTI Act should be enforced strictly and all efforts should be made to bring to light the necessary information under Clause (b) of Section 4(1) of the Act which relates to securing transparency and accountability in the working of public authorities and in discouraging corruption."

"But with regard to other information [that is information other than those enumerated in Section 4(1)(b) and (c) of the Act] equal importance and emphasis are given to other public interests (like confidentiality of sensitive information, fidelity and fiduciary relationships, efficient operation of governments, etc.)"

"Indiscriminate and impractical demands or directions under the RTI Act for

disclosure of all and sundry information (unrelated to transparency and accountability in the functioning of public authorities and eradication of corruption) would be counter-productive as it will adversely affect the efficiency of the administration and result in the executive getting bogged down with the non-productive work of collecting and furnishing information.

"The Act should not be allowed to be misused or abused, to become a tool to obstruct national development and integration or to destroy the peace, tranquility and harmony among its citizens. Nor should it be converted into a tool of oppression or intimidation of honest officials striving to do their duty."

"The nation does not want a scenario where 75 percent of the staff of public authorities spends 75 percent of their time collecting and furnishing information to applicants instead of discharging their regular duties."

"The threat of penalties under the RTI Act and the pressure of the authorities under the RTI Act should not lead to employees of public authorities prioritising 'information furnishing' at the cost of their normal and regular duties."

This passage was used enthusiastically by various public servants to deny information to citizens.

This judgment suggested confidentiality of sensitive information should be kept in mind. It introduced an exemption that was not envisaged by the Parliament.

The law clearly intended that all information held by public authorities, except as provided under Sections 8 and 9, be provided. The quoted passage also suggested that the RTI may be used to oppress and intimidate government servants. It also suggested that RTI queries must meet the standard of 'improving transparency and eradication of corruption'.

It further suggested that it could be used to oppress and intimidate honest officials doing their duty. This was an unfortunate statement that emboldened public servants to refuse information based on their assessment of what information must be given under the RTI.

There has not been a single recorded case of oppression and intimidation of public officials. There are numerous cases of threats and assaults of RTI users. Over 100 RTI users have been murdered. According to one study by the Right to Information Assessment and Advocacy Group (RaaG), a group that conducts studies and assessments on the implementation of the RTI Act in India, about 50 percent of the RTI queries relate to in-

formation that should be available suo-motu under Section 4 of the Act.

Another 25 percent relate to the fact that public servants do not respond to applications, complaints and representations by citizens. This means 75 percent of the RTI queries are a consequence of public authorities not fulfilling their duties.

Unfortunately, the passage quoted above is being used everywhere to indicate that these fundamental rights should be recognised on a case-to-case basis. A narrative has been created that the right to information was inferior to the right to speak and publish.

Practitioners of the RTI were likely to 'obstruct the national development and integration, or to destroy the peace, tranquility and harmony among its citizens'. It may also 'be converted into a tool of oppression or intimidation of honest officials striving to do their duty'.

As to the charge of public servants requiring a disproportionate amount of time to answer RTI queries, one needs to understand that RTI expects information to be provided as it exists.

Some officers claim that it takes a lot of time to trace information. They must first understand the reason for keeping records. Records are primarily kept for referencing. If they take too much time to locate, they will not be useful for referencing.

Section 4 (1)(a) of the RTI Act mandates that all public authorities must "maintain all its records duly catalogued and indexed in a manner and form which facilitates the right to information under this Act and ensure that all records that are appropriate to be computerised are, within a reasonable time and subject to availability of resources, computerised and connected through a network all over the country on different systems so that access to such records is facilitated".

It is unfortunate that public authorities do not implement the law laid down in Section 4 (1)(a) and (b). Across the country, this part of the judgment was quoted enthusiastically and complaints were filed against RTI users.

Some police stations filed first information reports (FIRs) against RTI users and started calling public-spirited citizens extortionists and blackmailers. It appeared to legitimise assaults on RTI activists.

This narrative needs to be challenged. Citizens and the media need to discuss and defend their fundamental rights. Whereas the freedom to speak and publish has been expanded along the way, RTI is being weakened beyond what the law and the Constitution permit. This is an unfortunate curbing of citizen's fundamental rights. (IPA Service)

Humanity needs urgent protection from onslaught of Artificial Intelligence

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Things in the course of development of Artificial Intelligence have come to such a pass that the General Secretary of the United Nations António Guterres had to warn the world about the impending danger to the entire humanity. And any delay in putting in place international guardrails could heighten the risks to global peace and security. The Secretary-General's concluding remarks to the Security Council on Artificial Intelligence were particularly alarming as he warned the ministers and ambassadors participating in the meet on December 19 that the rapid developments in AI are outpacing humanity's ability to govern it, raising important questions about accountability, equality, safety and human oversight in decision-making.

"The fate of humanity must never be left to the 'black box' of an algorithm," he emphasized, stressing the importance of human control over decisions involving the use of force. Particularly alarming, he underscored, was the potential integration of AI with nuclear weapons and the advent of quantum-AI systems that

could destabilize global security.

"No country should design, develop, deploy or use military applications of AI in armed conflict that violate international humanitarian and human rights laws. That includes relying on AI to select or engage targets autonomously," he emphasized, adding that integration of AI into military systems and its misuse in digital security poses great risks. He even cited AI use in autonomous surveillance, predictive policing and reported life-and-death decisions to support his statement that "recent conflicts have become testing grounds for AI military applications."

Pointing to deepfakes and AI-generated disinformation, he warned of the major concern in the information domain which can manipulate public opinion, trigger crises and erode trust in societies.

Environmental risks of AI was another area of concern that the UN Chief drew attention to. Highlighting resource-intensive nature of data centres and geopolitical competition over critical minerals needed for AI technology, he pointed out the risks of exacerbating inequality without global cooperation to ensure AI benefits everyone.

Steps have towards establishing global governance for AI, including the adoption of the UN Global Digital Compact at the Summit of the Future and two key resolutions at the General Assembly on enhancing global cooperation and capacity building were also referred to by the UN chief, but a third resolution is still pending to be considered by the General Assembly which focuses on AI in the military domain.

It is worth recalling that the UN General Assembly had adopted the landmark resolution on the promotion of "safe, secure and trustworthy" artificial intelligence (AI) systems in March 2024. The first resolution reaffirmed that AI would be created and deployed through the lens of humanity and dignity, safety and security, human rights and fundamental freedom. The second resolution committed to close the digital gap within and between nations and using this technology to advance shared priorities around sustainable development.

However, development of AI remained without effective control, and the commitments have remained by and large unaddressed. The UN Chief's comment that AI development has outpaced the

human ability to govern it is, therefore, a matter of serious concern.

The UN Chief had briefed the Council about AI in July 2023 also, and in a short time since Artificial intelligence has moved at break-neck speed. Fueled by record investment, today's AI models are getting more powerful, more versatile, and more accessible – combining not only language, image, sound, video ... but also automating decisions.

"Artificial Intelligence is not just reshaping our world – it is revolutionizing it. ... But the risks are equally huge," warned Guterres. "AI has also entered the battlefield in more troubling ways. ... The 'AI arms race' creates fertile ground for misunderstanding, miscalculation and mistakes. AI-enabled cyberattacks could cripple a country's critical infrastructure and paralyze essential services."

It is worth recalling that the UN Security Council had explored the dual-edged nature of rapid technological advancements in October 2024, ranging from artificial intelligence to neurotechnology – highlighting both groundbreaking solutions and emerging risks to global peace and security.

Director of UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) Robi Geiss had said, "The increasing convergence of different technologies, combined with their inherent dual-use nature, can lead to far-reaching and unintended consequences."

Geiss had drawn attention to quantum technology, which in as little as five to ten years could have multiple and significant impacts on global security. Quantum computing, he explained, could disrupt information and communication security by rendering traditional encryption techniques obsolete. At the same time, it could revolutionize warfare by enabling sensors to detect objects underground or underwater.

Looking ahead, Geiss had predicted that the next decade would also see major advances in artificial general intelligence (AGI), which would be able to "understand, learn, and apply" knowledge across a wide range of contexts. "This profound shift would have far-reaching consequences throughout society," he added, calling for urgent action to anticipate both the threats and opportunities posed by these emerging technologies. (IPA Service)

Elon Musk gets Donald Trump to push for government shutdown

By: Mark Gruenberg and John Wojcik

Apparently heeding his corporate "handler," multimillionaire Elon Musk, Republican President-elect Donald Trump torpedoed a spending agreement covering the federal government from now through March 14 unless congressional Democrats raised the U.S. debt ceiling.

Musk and Trump don't want to deal with the mess of raising the debt ceiling next year even though it doesn't need to be raised until at least June. And, most important, they want it raised now to allow for a massive tax cut for billionaires promised by Trump during his campaign. Musk went on social media all day long yesterday to rant and rave about the bi-partisan compromise deal reached by House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, a deal which put money into the hurricane and storm relief efforts across the country and continued the funding of essential government programs until next January.

If all this sounds convoluted, it is. Showing his ignorance about law-making in a democracy, Musk said that there should be no agreements on legislation until after

Trump takes over on January 20. That would mean intense suffering immediately for millions of Americans and guarantee long term suffering for them next year while he, Musk, wallows in comfort becoming the richest man in the world.

It doesn't matter that Musk is lying when he claims he deserves, because of his innate brilliance, all his riches and wealth. He conveniently ignores that his wealth comes from government contracts paid for by the U.S. working class. Even more important, he forgets that when Tesla was about to collapse into insolvency he went, hat in hand, to then-President Obama to beg for a 600 million-dollar handout from the government which Obama granted to him. Today he shows gratitude to the people who provide him with the money lining his pockets but not even offering a slice of cake to the hungry, as Marie Antoinette famously did just before the French Revolution.

The blowing up of the budget deal and the impending government shutdown show Musk's clout and Trump's satisfaction with being his lap dog as long as he (Trump) gets his stay-out-of-jail-card by being elected again and, if Musk allows him to do it, the

power to grant unlimited drilling rights to his pals in the fossil fuel industry.

The collapse of the deal, already on shaky ground due to flak from Trumpite right-wingers in the U.S. House and the twitterverse, raises the prospect of a government shutdown of all but essential services at midnight at the end of tomorrow December 20.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., had worked out the spending plan, which would give the pro-rated share of a trillion dollars to the military and its contractors and keep domestic spending, also pro-rated, at the same level as it is now, at about \$200 billion less. Those two shares began this past October 1. Their plan would avoid the shutdown. Musk and, then Trump, only in the last minute when it was clear he had marching orders from his master, opposed it. Trump did not even get involved in this fight until after Musk spent a full day sabotaging it on social media.

"We should pass a streamlined spending bill that doesn't give Chuck Schumer and the Democrats everything they want," Trump and Vance tweeted out of reverence for the wishes of Musk. "The only way to do that is

with a temporary funding bill WITHOUT DEMOCRAT GIVEAWAYS combined with an increase in the debt ceiling."

Musk tweeted that anybody "who votes for this outrageous spending bill deserves to be voted out in two years!" Musk owns twitter, now called X. He purchased it allegedly to promote freedom of the press which he and his billionaire pals are busy taking away. The billionaire owner of the LA Times recently hopped on the "free press" bandwagon by ordering his writers to stop producing articles critical of Trump.

The debt ceiling hike is the financial and political key to Musk's clout, however. Both Trump and Musk know full well why the debt ceiling must be raised. If it isn't raised eventually the federal government will run out of financial room to pay its debts.

Demagogues, almost all Republicans, rail against and vote against raising the debt ceiling. They portray it as akin to failing to balance your checkbook. It isn't. It's the equivalent of maxing out on the national credit card and asking for and getting a hike on your credit limit. No increase, and you default. That debt limit hike not only lets the government borrow to pay past bills, but also

to run up future debts—like debt from the planned Trump-GOP tax cuts for corporations and the rich after January 20.

In prior financial fights, the House's Democrats bailed the Republicans out by voting to raise the debt limit, as well as to pass temporary money bills, like the one that Musk via Trump torpedoed. The Democrats bailed out the GOP the only time the Republicans led the nation to the brink of a default, in 2011. It was close. Wall Street downgraded the U.S.'s world-leading credit rating from AAA to AA+. "The downgrade reflects our view that the effectiveness, stability, and predictability of American policymaking and political institutions have weakened at a time of ongoing fiscal and economic challenges to a degree more than we envisioned," Standard and Poor's said then. Sound familiar?

This time, after Trump, under orders from Musk, torpedoed the spending deal, Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., said the Democrats weren't necessarily going to play the game or be the political patsies for Trump and Musk.

"House Republicans have been ordered to shut down the government. And hurt the working-class Americans they claim to sup-

port," Jeffries retorted in a tweet. "You break the bipartisan agreement, you own the consequences that follow." In other words, the shutdown. Or as Gen. Colin Powell said of the results of one U.S. Middle East war: "Once you break it, you are going to own it."

The money bill's numbers count only "discretionary" spending which Congress controls, for everything from air traffic control to food inspections to wage and hour law enforcement to battling monopolies. That spending, and half the government with it, would shut down if Congress doesn't meet the deadline. That figure doesn't cover pre-set programs available to all, notably Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, all of which Trump has muscled about cutting. But "discretionary" spending also includes paying workers who run those three big programs, and all others.

The 1,547-page bill had more than just continuing present levels of spending. Additions included \$110 billion in relief for disaster victims, a one-year extension of farm subsidies, and curbs on so-called pharmacy benefit managers whose rulings on which medicines are covered and which aren't help drive up health care costs. (IPA Service)

The majestic Mahabhairab Temple

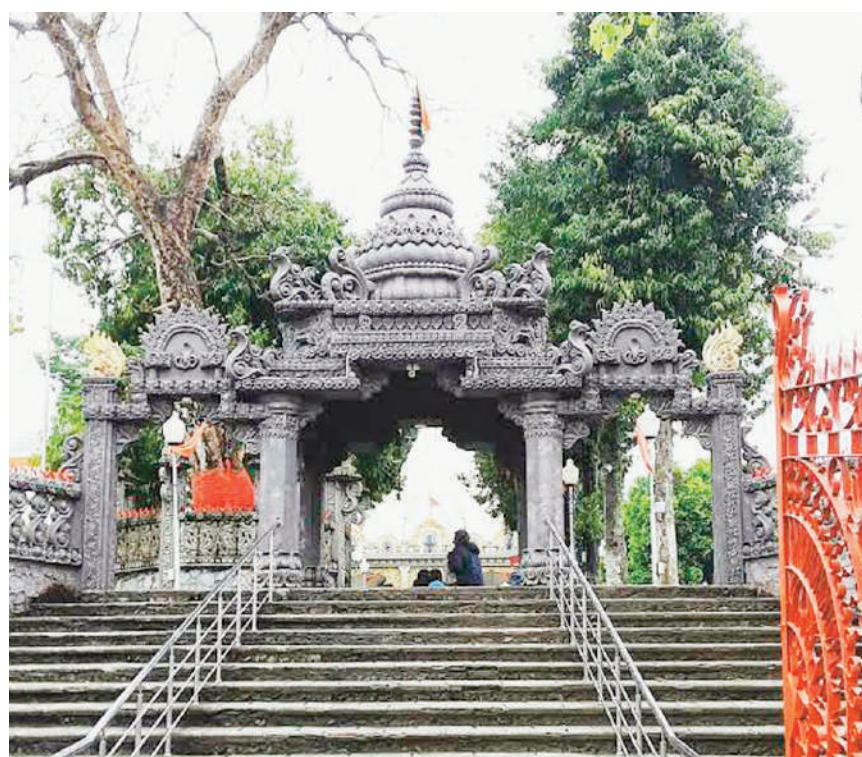
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan

The Mahabhairab temple is one of the most important historical monuments religious places of India set in the bustling city of Tezpur. It not only holds by itself a magnificent architectural wonder but also engulfs the spiritual core, abundant cultural depths, and history-filled strata, which lie on the ground itself. Widely recognized as a temple of the deity Lord Shiva, Mahabhairab Temple has survived centuries of socio-political change, environmental degradation, and evolution. It still stands as a living monument to spirituality and to the role of community.

The history of the Mahabhairab Temple is steeped in mythological and historically conjectural tales. In many accounts, it has been said that the first building of the temple was undertaken by Banasura, the demon king ruling over the city of Tezpur, which has then been called Sonitpur. The temple was created during the reign of Banasura according to Hindu mythology as a center of worship to their god, Lord Shiva. All this epic story is mixed up in the story of Lord Krishna and his fight with Banasura when Aniruddha, grandson of Krishna, was being saved. As described in the Puranic texts, this which has given the city the epithet "City of Blood" as well as lent a mystical character to the temple building, making it a special place. As these are very strong parts of folklore, it has been the opinion of the historians that the construction of the temple must be seen in terms of a long period from the pre-medieval time, and indeed, as this is a time when different forms of Shaivite traditions came up in Assam.

Architecturally, the Mahabhairab Temple is a result of old with traditional assamese style. The temple is essentially stone structure, which contains some intricate carvings which describe the adeptness of the artist mixing in which religious images are present. The sanctum sanctorum houses one of the oldest and largest Shiva Lingams in stone, which is venerated by devotees with much devotion. This Lingam forms the center of identity to this temple, reflecting an unbroken continuity of the spiritual practice, generation after generation. This layout and design share also with the Hindu architecture all the essential features, including garbhagriha (sanctum), mandapa (hall) and open courtyard which is open to pilgrims during the important festivals like Mahashivratri.

The majestic and pious festivals at Mahabhairab Temple are unique in some way in respect to Mahashivratri. Veneration taking place in this sacred place transforms the temple into a point of attraction for followers throughout Assam and neighbouring states, who come to pay their respects to Lord Shiva. The rituals performed during Mahashivratri are intricate and profound, beginning with the traditional abhisheka (ritual bathing)



of the Shiva Lingam using water, milk, honey, and other sacred substances. Below are the offerings given by individuals, throwing a combination of bell leaves and blossoms mixed with prayer onto their deity, the general atmosphere, whatever it may incorporate, reveals piety and reverence. It holds within its cadences residues of chanting the "Om Namah Shivaya", other within the immobility of the air, imbues to the community and it remains into late hours; devotees can stay until the vigils chanting the hymns or, through discourse, they can make and explain the different aspects that Shiva, both the philosophy based on it or the cult, gives rise to.

Besides religious significance, Mahabhairab Temple is a cultural hub which continues to be a significant socio-cultural backbone of Tezpur. Cultural events, including classical music concerts or Assamese traditional dances, are commonplace in temple grounds. These activities not only radiate the local culture, but also facilitate community gathering and artistic dissemination. The temple's stewardship, usually administered by local trust boards and committees, guarantees the temple's inclusiveness and openness to people of different backgrounds, thereby sustaining the temple's role as a representation of commonality.

The temple has suffered a great deal of tribulations in the course of its long past, with invasions, natural disasters, and periods of abandonment. Yet, thanks to the adaptability of the community and to patronage by different rulers throughout history, it has survived and has been reconstituted. Based on historical data, in the medieval age the temple may have been attacked by invaders who sought to destroy areas of Hindu worship. Despite such challenges, the temple was rebuilt

and maintained, with contributions from local rulers and patrons who realized its importance. The Mahabhairab Temple also captivated the eyes of British scholars and travelers that visited during the colonial era. They described the morphology and religious practices of this temple, making it to wider academic debate in Indian temples.

Due to the fact that this lovely temple stands on a hilltop, which enhances its scenic view and presents a vast landscape for a stunning panorama, covering the Brahmaputra River. This geographical positioning is not only decorative but also has strategical and religious value. Hindus have long viewed hills as holy places, as a closer embodiment of the divine. The height of the Mahabhairab Temple not only has a literal presence, but also a figurative one, as a spiritual lighthouse for the area. Crucially, pilgrims describe the ascendance to the temple as a symbolic journey from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

Structure preservation interventions undertaken over the past few decades sought to preserve the structural integrity from the temple while adhering to its historical authenticity. Renovations have been conducted with care in a manner that preserves the original architectural essence, which is a major draw equally for academic and travel purposes. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and other local heritage organizations have also come to appreciate the significance of the temple value, with support and guidance provided to facilitate restoration projects which preserve its cultural importance. This type of action is also very important to protect the temple not only as a place of religious significance but as a living archive of the historical and artistic in-

heritance of the area.

The Mahabhairab Temple is not only of great spiritual and cultural importance in Tezpur, but is a major economic contributor to the economic system in Tezpur as well. Pilgrimage tourism has a direct impact on the local economy as it promotes retail, restaurants, and bed breakfasts. Pilgrims provide support to craftspeople who produce religious objects, from idols to items decorative, especially during festival periods. This relationship of economic activity highlights the fact that culture, religion, and way of life are inseparable, thereby affirming the temple's role as a support for the community's existence.

Examining the Mahabhairab Temple, one cannot just disregard its influence on the spiritual walk of the individual devotee. For many, a trip to the temple is viewed as a religious act, but more so as a personal one that brings to the individual a sense of inner tranquility and a link to the ultimate power. The quietness and the echoed soft songs of the devotional songs, and aroma of incense, condition the temple to be conducive for meditation and contemplation. The introspective element of personal worship in the Mahabhairab Temple is often exemplified in the stories of devotees who describe hailing a profound experience of combination of serenity and spiritual realization.

The history and legendary founders that are attached to it, add to the reputation of the temple. Stories of devotion from Banasura and epic battle between Lord Krishna, all bringing a sense of cohesion between mythology and history, characteristic of Tezpur, adding to its uniqueness. These are not myths from another era but have the role of inspiring present-day cultural practices, such as theatrical performances and traditional storytelling sessions recounting legends associated with the temple. These are still interlinking mythology and history in the common memory of the society, thus passing them down to the different generations.

The timeless allure of the Mahabhairab Temple resides in its multifacetedness. It is a church, a historical monument, and a cultural center where the influence of the people of Tezpur still permeates and shapes. Its blend of mythology, painting, and communal activities (which is in fact a miniature version of the larger cultural world of Assam) is a microcosm that offers not only spiritual benefits but also historical and social benefits, as well. The history of the temple is not a static entity but a living, dynamic process in time and responding to the demands of the moment while maintaining the customs of antiquity. Narration that fulfils the above role guarantees that the Mahabhairab Temple will continue to hold such sacred meaning as embodiment of the majestic divine power and the human devotion in the foreseeable future. (The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAM-PROTUK who can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

Poem

A Little

By: Shahnaz Islam

Little by little
I did find you
Like chronic
I have been affected
Ages and ages unknowingly
Called for,
A affair with him

Or,

The life only to live for him
And deadly unbiased...

The Nature

By: Aradhana Sharma

Ever thought from where did they come!
The things that surrounds you,
The place where you live,
The water that you drink,

And

The air that you breathe?
The Earth where you stay,
The Solar System, which you learnt in books,
The forests, the oceans, the sky.....
Even the heaven,
From where did they come?

Oh!

It can do things of it's own like and dislike,
And everyone knows of it-
Cause.....
It's only the NATURE.

The Song of the Silent Tree

By: Mowsam Hazarika

By the river's edge,
the trees sing,
a gentle hum that floats,
a melody meant only
for the river's ear.

Along the riverbank,
the trees stand tall,
reaching skyward,
branches stretching out,
yearning toward the heavens.

In the glow of dusk,
the trees are washed,
bathed in shadow;
leaves murmur softly,
whispering their secrets.

By the river's side,
the trees sing
ancient songs of their own.

Do not silence their voices,
do not break their limbs—
all I seek
is peace.

Spirit Nights: Easterine Kire's beacon of Naga heritage and universal truths

By: Dipak Kurmi

Easterine Kire, a trailblazing literary voice hailing from the Northeast Indian state of Nagaland, stands as an exemplar of how deeply rooted cultural narratives can transcend borders and resonate universally. A poet, novelist, and short story writer, Kire's contributions to literature have placed her in the vanguard of contemporary indigenous storytelling, crafting narratives that intertwine the mythic, the spiritual, and the profoundly human. Her latest novel, Spirit Nights, is a testament to her remarkable ability to weave the oral traditions of her Naga culture into modern literary frameworks, earning her the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for the English language category in 2024.

Born in Kohima, Nagaland, Easterine Kire has consistently drawn from her indigenous roots, translating the rich tapestry of Naga oral traditions and histories into the global literary consciousness. Her journey began with her debut as the first Naga poet to publish poetry in English in 1982, a bold step that not only marked her as a pioneer in her community but also set the stage for her expansive literary career. Over the decades, her literary portfolio has grown to include novels, poetry collections, short stories, and children's literature, each piece deeply imbued with her cultural ethos and a sense of universal connectivity.

Spirit Nights, Kire's latest work, delves into the mythical and moral dimensions of human existence through the lens of a Naga fable. Inspired by a tale from the Chang Naga tribe, the novel paints a vivid portrait of Shumang Laangnyu Sang, a village where the supernatural and the mundane are inextricably linked. At its heart lies Tola, a grandmother who has faced life's harshest adversities with unwavering resilience, and her grandson Namu, whom she raises after the tragic loss of his parents. As spirits forewarn Tola of a looming darkness that will test the moral and spiritual fabric of her community,

the novel unfolds into a gripping tale of survival, courage, and redemption.

What distinguishes Spirit Nights is its nuanced portrayal of its characters and their development amidst adversity. Kire's restrained yet evocative prose allows the moral dilemmas and internal conflicts of her characters to surface gradually, inviting readers to connect deeply with their journeys. The village itself, with its rhythms of agrarian life and close-knit community ties, is depicted with an authenticity that neither romanticizes nor diminishes its simplicity. Instead, Kire treats this setting with the intuitive acceptance of someone intimately familiar with its essence, creating a world that is both specific and universal.

The novel's narrative, steeped in the oral storytelling traditions of the Naga people, exemplifies Kire's mastery of language. Her prose, often characterized by short, impactful sentences, evokes a lyrical quality that lingers in the reader's mind, resonating with mysterious profundity. This stylistic choice not only honors the traditions that have preserved such tales but also enhances the story's fable-like quality, which, in turn, reflects the communal values and moral balance central to the life depicted in the novel.

In Spirit Nights, Kire demonstrates a unique ability to address universal themes of grief, love, courage, and kinship while remaining firmly rooted in the specificity of Naga culture. The novel's ambiguity regarding time and place does not detract from its power; instead, it elevates the narrative to a timeless plane, inviting readers to engage with its truths on their terms. Through this, Kire underscores the importance of alternative worldviews and belief systems, challenging the dominance of modern, linear logic as the sole lens through which to interpret reality.

Kire's literary journey has been marked by significant milestones that reflect her dual commitment to preserving and evolving Naga culture. Her debut novel, A Naga

Village Remembered (2003), was the first Naga novel in English, setting a precedent for indigenous storytelling in global literature. In 2016, her novel When the River Sleeps received the Hindu Lit for Life prize, further cementing her status as a leading voice in contemporary literature. Beyond her novels, she has authored poetry collections, children's books, and essays, each contributing to the preservation and celebration of Naga traditions.

Her impact extends beyond the written word. A founding member of Barkweaver Publications, Kire has championed the collection and dissemination of Naga folk tales and oral histories. She is also a member of the Norway-based band Jazzpoesi, blending poetry and music in innovative ways that further illustrate her creative versatility. Through these endeavors, Kire has become, as one critic aptly described, "the keeper of her people's memory."

Kire's accolades are numerous and well-deserved. In addition to her Sahitya Akademi Award and the Hindu Lit for Life prize, she has been recognized with the Governor's Medal for Excellence in Naga Literature and the Free Voice Award from Barcelona. Her literary achievements are paralleled by her contributions as a cultural ambassador, bridging the traditional and the contemporary in ways that resonate far beyond her Naga heritage.

Spirit Nights exemplifies Kire's unique ability to humanize the didactic, crafting a tale that is both deeply personal and universally relevant. It is a story of how communities navigate the delicate balance of moral and spiritual life, and how even the smallest actions can disrupt or restore this equilibrium. Through her unyielding commitment to her craft and culture, Easterine Kire has emerged as a luminous figure in contemporary literature, a voice that not only preserves the past but also envisions a future where indigenous stories are given their rightful place in the global narrative. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

The history of thriller stories in Indian literature

By: Satvrat Borah

The history of thriller stories in Indian literature is an exciting journey through time. Thrillers have always been about suspense, mystery, and the unexpected. In India, the genre evolved slowly, influenced by the rich storytelling traditions of the country and later by global literary trends. These stories have entertained, intrigued, and kept readers on the edge of their seats for generations.

The roots of Indian thrillers can be traced back to ancient times. Indian literature has a long history of stories involving suspense, deception, and unexpected twists. Texts like the "Mahabharata" and the "Ramayana" contain elements of mystery and strategy, often involving complex characters and their cunning plans. For example, in the "Mahabharata", the game of dice is a moment of high tension and betrayal. Similarly, the schemes and counter-schemes in the "Ramayana" add layers of suspense to the narrative.

Indian folklore is another rich source of early thriller-like elements. Across the country, folk tales have been filled with cunning villains, brave heroes, and unexpected outcomes. Collections like the "Panchatantra" and the "Jataka Tales" often featured stories of wit, deception, and problem-solving. While these stories were primarily moral and educational, they also laid the groundwork for suspenseful narratives.

During the medieval period, the art of storytelling took on new forms. The "Kathasaritsagara" (Ocean of Stories) is a notable example of an ancient Indian text that includes elements of suspense, adventure, and intrigue. This collection of tales, written in Sanskrit, features stories of clever tricks, hidden motives, and dramatic resolutions. These narratives often kept readers guessing, creating the thrill that is central to the genre.

The Mughal era introduced new themes and styles to Indian literature. Persian and Arabic storytelling traditions, brought to India by the Mughals, influenced local narratives. Stories of royal courts, secret assassins, and hidden treasures became popular. Works like "Hamzanama", an epic tale of adventure and intrigue, showcased thrilling plots filled with battles, espionage, and clever tactics.

With the arrival of British colonial rule in the 18th and 19th centuries, Indian literature underwent significant changes. The introduction of printing technology and Western literary forms brought the thriller genre to a wider audience. Writers began

experimenting with detective stories, crime dramas, and mystery novels. One of the earliest Indian thriller writers was Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, whose novel "Durgeshnandini" combined elements of romance, adventure, and suspense. Though not a pure thriller, the story had moments of high tension and dramatic twists.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Bengali literature became a hub for thriller stories. Writers like Hemendra Kumar Roy and Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay became pioneers of the genre. Hemendra Kumar Roy wrote gripping adventure and detective stories, often featuring daring heroes and intricate plots. Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay created the iconic character Byomkesh Bakshi, a detective who solved mysteries with sharp intellect and careful observation. The Byomkesh Bakshi series became immensely popular, laying the foundation for Indian detective fiction.

Around the same time, the influence of Western detective fiction grew in India. Writers like Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie inspired Indian authors to create their own mystery and thriller stories. However, Indian writers often added a cultural twist, blending local settings, traditions, and values into their narratives. This unique fusion made Indian thrillers stand out, giving them a distinctive charm.

The post-independence period saw a rise in the popularity of thriller stories across different Indian languages. Hindi pulp fiction became a phenomenon, with cheap paperback flooding the markets. Writers like Surender Mohan Pathak and Ved Prakash Sharma captivated readers with their fast-paced crime stories, full of suspense and action. These books were often set in urban India, reflecting the changing social dynamics and challenges of the time. The stories featured corrupt politicians, gangsters, and undercover heroes, creating a gritty and thrilling experience for readers.

Regional literature also contributed significantly to the genre. Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi, and Kannada writers explored themes of mystery and suspense, often rooted in local culture and traditions. Malayalam writer Kottayam Pushpanath, for instance, became famous for his detective novels and horror thrillers. His works combined eerie atmospheres with engaging mysteries, keeping readers hooked from start to finish.

The advent of Indian cinema in the mid-20th century brought thriller stories to a larger audience. Bollywood and regional film industries adapted popular thriller novels into movies, creating a new wave of

suspenseful storytelling. Films like "Jewel Thief", "Teesri Manzil", and "Khiladi" showcased intricate plots, unexpected twists, and edge-of-the-seat action. These movies often borrowed themes and techniques from thriller literature, further popularizing the genre.

In recent decades, Indian thriller literature has continued to evolve, influenced by global trends and advancements in technology. Contemporary authors have explored new themes, blending traditional storytelling with modern elements. Writers like Ashwin Sanghi, Ravi Subramanian, and Vikram Chandra have gained acclaim for their gripping novels that combine history, crime, and mystery. Ashwin Sanghi's "The Rozabal Line" weaves historical and religious themes into a thrilling narrative, while Ravi Subramanian's banking thrillers expose the dark side of the financial world.

The rise of digital technology has also transformed the way thrillers are written and consumed. E-books, online platforms, and social media have given new writers a chance to showcase their talent. This has led to a surge in self-published thrillers, covering a wide range of themes and styles. Thrillers in Indian literature now include psychological dramas, political conspiracies, and even science fiction, reflecting the genre's versatility.

One of the strengths of Indian thrillers is their ability to adapt to changing times while staying rooted in cultural nuances. Indian writers often draw on the country's rich history, mythology, and social fabric to create stories that resonate with readers. This connection to local contexts makes the suspense and drama even more engaging, as readers can relate to the settings and characters.

Today, Indian thriller literature is a vibrant and dynamic field, with stories that cater to diverse tastes. From classic detective tales to modern-day psychological thrillers, the genre has something for everyone. The popularity of thrillers in Indian literature shows no signs of slowing down, as new writers continue to experiment and push boundaries.

The history of thriller stories in Indian literature is a testament to the power of imagination and storytelling. From ancient epics to modern novels, these stories have captivated readers with their suspense, drama, and intrigue. They reflect the changing times and challenges of Indian society while offering timeless entertainment. As the genre continues to grow and evolve, it will undoubtedly remain a cherished part of Indian literary tradition, thrilling readers for generations to come.

Key ally vows to topple Canadian PM Trudeau in fresh blow to his govt

TORONTO, Dec 21: The future of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's leadership appeared increasingly uncertain after New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh, a key ally, said he would introduce a motion to topple the minority Liberal government.

Singh, whose party has been helping keep Trudeau in office, announced in an open letter posted on social media that he would declare a loss of confidence in the Trudeau-led Liberal government next year, a move that would trigger an early election if other opposition parties support his move.

Canada's next election must be held on or before October. Singh is the last of Canada's three main opposition parties to turn on Trudeau. In his letter, Singh said the Liberals were undeserving of "another chance."

"That's why the NDP will vote to bring this government down and give Canadians a chance to vote for a government who will work for them," he wrote.

He said the New Democrats plan to use their next opposition day in the House of Commons — during which opposition priorities are given precedence over government business — to introduce the vote.

The House is currently on its winter break and is set to resume on January 27. Singh's letter came as questions swirled about the future of Trudeau, with at least 21 Liberal MPs now calling for him to resign, CBC News reported.

Singh's announcement is the latest in a series of political setbacks suffered by Trudeau since he reported the resignation of Chrystia Freeland, his deputy prime minister and finance minister. Freeland quit

hours before she was set to deliver an economic statement on Monday, citing political disagreements between her and Trudeau on the "best path forward for Canada" in light of tariff threats posed by US President-elect Donald Trump.

"No matter who is leading the Liberal party, this government's time is up," Singh's letter read.

Singh also said the Liberals have frequently not lived up to their promises and that the time for change is now.

The letter was released just before Trudeau announced his revamped front bench on Friday morning.

The New Democrats ended their parliamentary alliance with the Liberals in early September, but have repeatedly declared confidence in the government when the Conservatives have introduced votes to bring the Liberals down.

Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre has repeatedly called for an election as soon as possible.

Had Singh voted with the Conservatives, "we would be a third of the way into an election campaign right now," Poilievre told reporters on Friday.

"But he suddenly had an epiphany and says that he can no longer support the costly chaos that he has enabled as part of the NDP-Liberal coalition."

The Conservative leader said he was writing to Governor General Mary Simon "asking her to urgently reconvene Parliament and require a non-confidence vote" to end Trudeau's reign.

Trudeau has not responded publicly to these calls and has reportedly told members of the party that he will take the holidays to reflect and decide what to do. (PTI)

16 soldiers killed, eight injured in terror attack in NW Pakistan

PESHAWAR, Dec 21: Sixteen soldiers died and eight others were injured as terrorists attacked a security check post in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of north-west Pakistan early Saturday, security sources said.

The terrorist attacked Lita Sar check post in Makeen in South Waziristan district bordering Afghanistan, sources added.

This is one of the biggest attacks on the security forces in months.

The attack comes days after Pakistani security forces killed two

terrorists in an intelligence-based operation in the Sararogha area of the same district.

Law enforcement personnel acted on the reported presence of militants and killed two terrorists while two militants were apprehended in the operation in December first week.

South Waziristan is one of the seven semi-autonomous tribal areas, where the Army has for more than a decade been battling militants linked from banned outfits. (PTI)

Ukrainian drones strike deep into Russian territory, hundreds of miles from front line

KYIV, Dec 21: Ukraine brought the war into the heart of Russia Saturday morning with drone attacks that local authorities said damaged residential buildings in the city of Kazan in the Tatarstan region, over 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) from the front line.

The press service of Tatarstan's governor, Rustam Minnikhanov, said that eight drones attacked the city. Six hit residential buildings, one hit an industrial facility and one was shot down over a river, the statement said. A video posted on local Telegram news channel Astra, verified by The Associated Press, shows a drone flying into the upper floors of a high-rise building.

Local authorities said there were no casualties. Flights were halted at Kazan's airport and all mass gatherings cancelled on Saturday and Sunday. The attacks, which Ukraine didn't acknowledge in keeping with its security policy, comes after a Ukrainian attack Friday on a town in Russia's Kursk border region using U.S.-supplied missiles killed six people, including a child.

Moscow sent 113 drones into Ukraine overnight into Saturday, Ukrainian officials said. According to Ukraine's Air Force, 57 drones were shot down during the attacks. A further 56 drones were "lost," likely having been electronically jammed.

The governor of Ukraine's Kharkiv region, Oleh Synyehubov, said eight people were wounded Friday night in drone attacks on the regional capital, also called Kharkiv. (AP)

Death toll in attack on Christmas market in Germany rises to 5



MAGDEBURG (GERMANY), Dec 21: Germans on Saturday mourned both the victims and their shaken sense of security after a Saudi doctor intentionally drove into a Christmas market teeming with holiday shoppers, killing at least five people, including a small child, and injuring at least 200 others.

Authorities arrested a 50-year-old man at the site of the attack in Magdeburg on Friday evening and took him into custody for questioning. He has lived in Germany for nearly two decades, practising medicine in Bernburg, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of Magdeburg, officials said.

The governor of the surrounding state of Saxony-Anhalt, Reiner Haseloff, told reporters that the death toll rose from two to five and that more than 200 people in total were injured.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that nearly 40 of them "are so seriously injured that we must be very worried about them."

Several German media outlets identified the suspect as Taleb A., withholding his last name in line with privacy laws, and reported that he was a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Mourners lit candles and placed flowers outside a church near the market on the cold and gloomy day. Several people stopped and cried. A Berlin church choir whose members witnessed a previous Christmas market attack in 2016 sang Amazing Grace, a hymn about

God's mercy, offering their prayers and solidarity with the victims.

There were still no answers Saturday as to what caused him to drive into a crowd in the eastern German city of Magdeburg.

Describing himself as a former Muslim, the suspect shared dozens of tweets and tweets daily focusing on anti-Islam themes, criticising the religion and congratulating Muslims who left the faith.

He also accused German authorities of failing to do enough to combat what he said was the "Islamism of Europe." Some described him as an activist who helped Saudi women flee their homeland. He has also voiced support for the far-right and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

Recently, he seemed focused on his theory that German authorities have been targeting Saudi asylum seekers.

Prominent German terrorism expert Peter Neumann said he had yet

to come across a suspect in an act of mass violence with that profile.

"After 25 years in this business you think nothing could surprise you anymore. But a 50-year-old Saudi ex-Muslim who lives in East Germany, loves the AfD and wants to punish Germany for its tolerance towards Islamists — that really wasn't on my radar," Neumann, the director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence at King's College London, wrote on X.

The two people confirmed dead were an adult and a toddler, but officials said additional deaths couldn't be ruled out because 15 people had been seriously injured.

"As things stand, he is a lone perpetrator, so that as far as we know there is no further danger to the city," Saxony-Anhalt's governor, Reiner Haseloff, told reporters. "Every human life that has fallen victim to this attack is a terrible tragedy and one human life too

many." The violence shocked Germany and the city, bringing its mayor to the verge of tears and marling a festive event that's part of a centuries-old German tradition. It prompted several other German towns to cancel their weekend Christmas markets as a precaution and out of solidarity with Magdeburg's loss. Berlin kept its markets open but has increased its police presence at them.

Germany has suffered a string of extremist attacks in recent years, including a knife attack that killed three people and wounded eight at a festival in the western city of Solingen in August.

Magdeburg is a city of about 240,000 people, west of Berlin, that serves as Saxony-Anhalt's capital. Friday's attack came eight years after an Islamic extremist drove a truck into a crowded Christmas market in Berlin, killing 13 people and injuring many others. The attacker was killed days later in a shootout in Italy.

Chancellor Scholz and Interior Minister Nancy Faeser traveled to Magdeburg on Saturday, and a memorial service is to take place in the city cathedral in the evening. Faeser ordered flags lowered to half-staff at federal buildings across the country.

Verified bystander footage distributed by the German news agency dpa showed the suspect's arrest at a tram stop in the middle of the road. A nearby police officer pointing a handgun at the man shouted at him as he lay prone, his

head arched up slightly. Other officers swarmed around the suspect and took him into custody.

Thi Linh Chi Nguyen, a 34-year-old manicurist from Vietnam whose salon is located in a mall across from the Christmas market, was on the phone during a break when she heard loud bangs and thought at first they were fireworks. She then saw a car drive through the market at high speed. People screamed and a child was thrown into the air by the car.

Shaking as she described the horror of what she witnessed, she recalled seeing the car bursting out of the market and turning right onto Ernst-Reuter-Allee street and then coming to a standstill at the tram stop where the suspect was arrested. The number of injured people was overwhelming.

"My husband and I helped them for two hours. He ran back home and grabbed as many blankets as he could find because they didn't have enough to cover the injured people. And it was so cold," she said.

The market itself was still cordoned off Saturday with red-and-white tape and police vans every 50 meters (about 54 yards). Police with machine pistols guarded every entry to the market.

Some thermal security blankets still lay on the street. Christmas markets are a German holiday tradition cherished since the Middle Ages, now successfully exported to much of the Western world.

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry condemned the attack on X. (AP)

Pope Francis reprimands Vatican staff for gossiping in annual Christmas message

ROME, Dec 21: Pope Francis told Vatican bureaucrats on Saturday to stop speaking ill of one another, as he once again used his annual Christmas greetings to admonish the backstabbing and gossiping among his closest collaborators.

A wheezing and congested sounding Francis, who just turned 88, urged the prelates instead to speak well of one another and undertake a humble examination of their own consciences in the Christmas holiday season.

"A church community lives in joyful and fraternal harmony to the extent that its members walk in the life of humility, renouncing evil thinking and speaking ill of others," Francis said. "Gossip is an evil that destroys social life, sickens people's hearts and leads to nothing. The people say it very well: Gossip

is zero." "Beware of this," he added.

By now Francis' annual address to the priests, bishops and cardinals who work in the Vatican Curia has become a lesson in humility — and humiliation — as Francis offers a public dressing down of some of the sins in the workplace at the headquarters of the Catholic Church.

In the most biting edition, in 2014, Francis listed the "15 ailments of the Curia," in which he accused the prelates of using their Vatican careers to grab power and wealth. He accused them of living "hypocritical" double lives and forgetting — due to "spiritual Alzheimer's" — that they're supposed to be joyful men of God.

In 2022, Francis warned them that the devil that lurks among

them, saying it is an "elegant demon" that works in people who have a rigid, holier-than-thou way of living the Catholic faith.

This year, Francis revisited a theme he has often warned about: gossiping and speaking ill of people behind their backs. It was a reference to the sometimes toxic atmosphere in closed environments such as the Vatican or workplaces where office gossip and criticism circulate.

Francis has long welcomed frank and open debates and even has welcomed criticism of his own work. But he has urged critics to tell it to his face, and not behind his back.

The annual appointment kicks off Francis' busy Christmas schedule, this year made even more strenuous because of the start of the Vatican's Holy Year on Christmas Eve. (AP)

Rocket fired from Yemen strikes area of Tel Aviv overnight; 16 people slightly injured

TEL AVIV, Dec 21: The Israeli military says a rocket fired from Yemen hit an area of Tel Aviv overnight, leaving 16 people slightly injured by shattered glass from nearby windows.

A further 14 people sustained minor injuries as they rushed to shelters when air raid sirens sounded before the projectile hit just before 4 am Saturday, the military said.

The attack comes less than two days after a series of Israeli airstrikes on Yemen's Houthi rebel-held capital, Sanaa, and port city of Hodeida killed at least nine people. The Israeli strikes were in response to a Houthi attack in which a long-range missile hit an Israeli school building. The Houthis also claimed a drone strike targeting an unspecified military target in central Israel on Thursday.

The Israeli military says the Iran-backed Houthis have launched more than 200 missiles and drones during the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The Houthis have also been attacking shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden — attacks they say won't stop until there is a ceasefire in Gaza.

The Israeli strikes Thursday caused "considerable damage" to the Houthi-controlled Red Sea ports "that will lead to the immediate and significant reduction in port capacity," United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. The port at Hodeida has been key for food shipments into Yemen in its decade-long civil war.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said both sides' attacks risk further escalation in the region and undermine UN mediation efforts. (AP)

'Cyprus can help rid Syria of chemical weapons, search for missing people'

NICOSIA (CYPRUS), Dec 21: Cyprus stands ready to help eliminate Syria's remaining chemical weapons stockpiles and to support a search for people whose fate remains unknown after more than a decade of war, the top Cypriot diplomat said Saturday.

Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos said Cyprus' offer is grounded on its own past experience both with helping rid Syria of chemical weapons 11 years ago and its own ongoing, decades-old search for hundreds of people who disappeared amid fighting between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriots in the 1960s and a 1974 Turkish invasion.

Cyprus in 2013 hosted the support base of a mission jointly run by the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to remove and dispose of Syria's chemical weapons.

"As a neighbouring country located just 65 miles from Syria, Cyprus has a vested interest in Syria's future. Developments there will directly impact Cyprus, particularly in terms of potential new migratory flows and the risks of terrorism and extremism," Kombos told The Associated Press in

written replies to questions.

Kombos said there are "profound concerns" among his counterparts across the region over Syria's future security, especially regarding a possible resurgence of extremist groups like Islamic State in a fragmented and polarised society.

Other challenges include new migratory flows from the country as well as ensuring the safety and rights of women and minorities including Druze, Christians, Jews and Kurds, so that the "rich mosaic of Syria is preserved."

"This is particularly critical in light of potential social and demographic engineering disguised as "security" arrangements, which could further destabilize the country," Kombos said. The diplomat also pointed to the recent proliferation of narcotics production like the stimulant Captagon that is interconnected with smuggling networks involved in people and arms trafficking.

Kombos said ongoing attacks against Syria's Kurds must stop immediately, given the role that Kurdish forces have played in combating extremist forces like the IS group in the past decade.

A Syrian-led process transitioning the country to an inclusive democracy should integrate the Kurds' "legitimate asks" while safeguarding the country's unity and territorial integrity.

Saleh Muslim, a member of the Kurdish Presidential Council, said in an interview that the Kurds primarily seek "equality" enshrined in rights accorded to all in any democracy.

He said a future form of governance could accord autonomy to the Kurds under some kind of federal structure.

"But the important thing is to have democratic rights for all the Syrians and including the Kurdish people," he said.

Muslim warned that the Kurdish-majority city of Kobani, near Syria's border with Turkey, is in "very big danger" of falling into the hands of Turkish-backed forces, and accused Turkey of trying to occupy it.

Kombos said the international community needs to ensure that the influence Turkey is trying to exert in Syria is "not going to create an even worse situation than there already is."

"Whatever the future landscape in Syria, it will have a direct and far-reaching impact on the region, the European Union and the broader international community," Kombos said. (AP)

Meditation transcends all religions, borders: Leaders on 1st World Meditation Day at UN

'Today, meditation is not a luxury, but it is a necessity'

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 21: Meditation transcends all religions and borders and is also a powerful instrument of diplomacy in the current global landscape marked by escalating conflicts and deep-seated mistrust, top spiritual and UN leaders said on the first World Meditation Day commemorated here.

The Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations organised a special event 'Meditation for Global Peace and Harmony' to mark the first World Meditation Day at the global body's headquarters on Friday.

"Today meditation is not a luxury, as it was thought, but it is a necessity," spiritual leader Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar said in his keynote address at the packed event attended by UN Ambassadors, officials, staff, civil society members as well as members of the Indian-American diaspora.

"Meditation is something you can do anywhere, everywhere, by everyone. In this sense, international Meditation Day plays a very important role and opens the door to those who have some reservations," he said.

At the moment they hear the word meditation, they may feel that the practice either has to be from some religion or it is not taught in their religion.

He underscored that meditation "transcends all religions, all geographical boundaries and age groups so it is very, very useful in many, many ways."

President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly Philemon Yang said in his remarks that meditation "transcends borders, faiths, traditions and time, offering each of us the opportunity to pause, to listen and to connect with our inner selves."

Yang said that the world today needs peace more than ever before. "The tensions in the world require that we embrace peace and anything that brings peace....Let us build on the practice we have shared to bring about a safer, more just and equitable future for everyone, everywhere."

Earlier this month, the 193-member UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution declaring December 21 as World Meditation Day.

India was a member of the core



group of countries that guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution titled 'World Meditation Day' in the UNGA. Andorra, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Nepal and Sri Lanka were the other members of the core group.

Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare said at the event that at the UN, civilian and uniform personnel work tirelessly on the world's most pressing challenges with colleagues operating under high pressure, including in high-risk environments, often far away from their family and country of origin.

"This can and does take a toll on their mental health. Our uniform personnel are often tasked with protecting civilians against physical violence, and are often themselves exposed to atrocities, war crimes and crimes against humanity," Khare said.

While the physical safety of peacekeepers of is of utmost importance, it is equally critical that their mental health is also taken care of, he said.

In this context, Khare said that a special app called 'MindCompanion' was launched by the UN in October this year.

The app is aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of mental health issues and its self-assessment feature will help users gauge their mental well-being regularly.

"I take this opportunity on this Meditation Day to encourage everyone to reaffirm our commitment to overall mental health and to use the tools available, such as meditation, to seek inner transformation and peace. Let us embrace this practice to create a more peaceful world, starting with the world within ourselves," Khare said.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathani Harish said that the ancient wisdom of meditation offers a beacon of hope amid growing stress and anxiety at the individual level and conflicts and tensions at the global level.

"In our current global landscape, marked by escalating conflicts and deep-seated mistrust, meditation emerges not merely as a personal practice but as a powerful instrument of diplomacy. Meditation helps us to cultivate empathy, deep self-awareness, capacity to understand complex situations with

greater clarity.

"These are skills that are critical to navigating an increasingly interconnected and complex global environment," Harish said.

Harish noted that December 21 marks the Winter Solstice, which in Indian tradition is the beginning of Uttarayana — an auspicious time of the year, especially for inner reflection and meditation. It also falls exactly six months after the International Day of Yoga commemorated on June 21, which is the Summer Solstice.

In 2014, India took the lead at the UN in declaring June 21 as the International Day of Yoga.

Permanent Representative of Nepal to the UN Ambassador Lok Bahadur Thapa said that the world is at a pivotal crossroads and "our collective dreams and aspirations" for a better, just, equitable, prosperous and sustained world are thwarted by multiple, intersecting and recurring global challenges.

"Geopolitical competition, economic instability, social divisions and environmental degradation among others have threatened global peace, security and stability," Thapa said.

He added that the importance of meditation cannot be overstated. It influences various aspects of human life, society and the global community at large. "It transcends cultural, geographical, societal and religious boundaries, embodying truly humanistic values and reflecting the highest ideals of humanity," he said.

Chargé d'affaires at the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka Sugeeshwara Gunaratna noted that the UNGA resolution was co-sponsored by over 70 countries from all geographical regions and different cultural and religious backgrounds. "This speaks volumes on the universal applicability and acceptance of the different techniques and practices which we call meditation."

"It is our collective wish that in a world that seeks peace and harmony among the tragedy of conflicts, meditative practices could provide the essential ingredient in creating peaceful individuals, which is the fulcrum to building a sustainable and peaceful world," Gunaratna said.

The event also included a special meditation session led by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. (PTI)

Constitutional provisions violated in Manipur: Cong

IMPHAL, Dec 21: Senior Congress leader Okram Ibobi Singh on Saturday alleged that the Manipur government was violating provisions of the Constitution by not holding the winter session of the state assembly.

The Congress legislature party leader, while speaking to reporters at Congress Bhawan here, said, "The state government is violating the provisions and articles of the Constitution. As per the rules, three assembly sessions -- budget, autumn and winter -- must be held at least once a calendar year. However, for Manipur, the winter session is yet to be summoned and held and the calendar year is almost over now."

"Memorandums have been submitted to the governor, the Speaker and the chief minister in this regard yesterday," Singh said.

"We are compelled to raise this issue because of the failure of democratic institutions to function normally. As an opposition party, we will not remain mute spectators if the government does not discharge its duties timely and responsibly," the former chief minister added. (PTI)

3 held with arms, ammunition in Manipur

IMPHAL, Dec 21: Manipur Police has arrested three persons with arms and ammunition, including a cadre of a banned outfit, during separate operations in Churachandpur and Imphal West districts, officials said on Saturday.

The arrested member of the outlawed Kangleipak Communist Party (Peoples' War Group) was involved in extortion activities, they said.

Security forces also apprehended two persons from Lamzang village in Churachandpur district on Friday.

Pistols, a machine gun, a rifle, ammunition and a two-wheeler without registration number were among the articles recovered from their possession, a police officer said. (PTI)

Allocate equal budget to NESIDS, NEC schemes: Mizoram CM urges Centre

AIZAWL, Dec 21: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Saturday urged the Centre to allocate equal budget to the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) and North Eastern Council (NEC) scheme to accelerate development in the region, an official statement here said.

Speaking at the North East Council's plenary session chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Agartala, Lalduhoma emphasised the need for appointment of a full-fledged NEC secretary to enhance administrative efficiency, it said.

He said equal budgetary allocation to NESIDS and NEC schemes will benefit key sectors such as agriculture, healthcare and tourism.

Lalduhoma urged for the extension of NESIDS to cover urban water supply to address the challenges of rapid urbanisation.

NESIDS is a central scheme to address infrastructural gaps in some sectors in the northeastern region.

He called for special consideration in cost-sharing arrangements under schemes such as Command Area Development (CAD), urging a 90:10 funding pattern for the Northeast, similar to other centrally sponsored schemes.

The chief minister urged the DoNER Ministry to enhance sanctioning power of NEC to expedite project implementation and simplify project approval process to

Centre urged to review decision to reimpose PAR in Mizoram



AIZAWL, Dec 21: The ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) in Mizoram on Saturday urged the Centre to review its decision to reimpose Protected Area Regime (PAR) as it would obstruct foreign tourists from visiting the northeastern state.

The Centre on Tuesday had reimposed the PAR in Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland to regulate the movement of foreigners amid growing security concerns arising out of influx from neighbouring countries.

In 2011 the Centre had relaxed the PAR from Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram to boost tourism and exempted all foreigners except Afghanistani, Pakistani and Chinese from the PAP.

This relaxation was later extended for five years at a time, with the latest order issued in December 2022 and valid until December 2027.

From now on, foreigners intending to visit the three states must seek prior permission and obtain PAP or Restricted Area Permits (RAP) as mandated by the Foreigners Protected Areas Order, 1958. Mizoram home secretary Vanlalmaria on Friday said that the state government is in the process of implementing the PAP.

He had said that they are yet to demand PAP or RAP from foreigners visiting the state at the state's lone airport in Lengpui and other entry points of the state.

He had also said that training is being conducted for officials of the Foreigner Registration Office in Aizawl on the matter, including issuance of permits through e-portal. (PTI)

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Amit Shah to inaugurate Rs 668.39 crore projects in Tripura today

AGARTALA, Dec 21: Union Home and Cooperatives Minister Amit Shah will inaugurate six major development projects worth ₹ 668.39 crore and lay the foundation for seven new projects at Kulai RF Village Ground in Dhalai District today.

The event will be attended by Tripura chief minister Manik Saha, who will be the chief guest.

The six projects being inaugurated include a Senior Basic School in Bruhapara, Dhalai district, built at a cost of ₹ 1.56 crore, a Health and Wellness Centre in the same district costing ₹ 35 lakh, a Market Shed worth ₹ 1.9 lakh, a new building for Birashi Mile Primary Health Centre valued at ₹ 4.85 crore, another Health and Wellness Centre at Ultachhara



worth ₹ 35 lakh, and a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) under the Smart City project at Agartala Akhaura Road, costing ₹ 25.86 crore.

In addition, the foundation stone will be laid for seven more development projects. These include the ₹ 120 crore Central Detective Training Institute in Agartala, a new office building for the Sub-Divisional Magistrate in Ambassa worth ₹ 12.5 crore, a Sub-Divisional Hospital at Gandatwisa

costing ₹ 19.2 crore, approach roads and two railway overbridges in Jirania, West District, valued at ₹ 37 crore, a road construction project from Debendra Chowdhury Para (Belchhara) to Chanakha under the Padmabil RD Block in Khowai, costing ₹ 40.38 crore, the construction of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) in 11 cities with a total cost of ₹ 88.15 crore, and the improvement of 16 km of main roads in Agartala for ₹ 318 crore.

The event will also see the presence of distinguished guests including Lok Sabha MP Kriti Devi Debbarman, Union Home Secretary Govinda Mohan, Additional Secretary (North East) of the Ministry of Home Affairs Piyush Goyal, Tripura Chief Secretary JK Sinha, among others.

Mein pleads for alternative funding mechanism in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, Dec 21: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein has requested the Centre for alternative funding mechanisms to the state to harness the benefits of both financial assistance and technical expertise.

Attending the pre-Budget consultative meeting chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at Jaisalmer in Rajasthan on Friday, Mein who also holds the Finance portfolio, underscored the importance of externally aided projects from organisations like World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Arunachal Pradesh has been unable to access funds from these organisations due to objections by China.

Mein in the meeting, highlighted the urgent need for replacing the state's dilapidated semi-permanent structures from the NEFA era with robust RCC

buildings, proposing a special financial package for the same, an official communication said here on Saturday.

Expressing gratitude to the Centre for its consistent support, Mein commended initiatives like the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI), which has enabled Arunachal Pradesh to expedite crucial infrastructure projects.

He also requested an enhanced allocation under SASCI (Part-I) to further accelerate the development process in the state.

The DyCM said that Arunachal Pradesh being a carbon sink state looks forward to incentivization mechanisms for its role in environmental sustainability.

Mein brought attention to the financial challenges posed by the state's challenging terrain, where the cost of development is 2.5 times higher compared to other regions. (PTI)

জাননী

ইয়াৰ দ্বাৰা কাৰি আংলং আৰু পশ্চিম কাৰি আংলং জিলাৰ ৫৫ বছৰৰ অনূৰ্ধ্ব মাদ উকলি যোৰা যিসকল গৃহৰক্ষীয়ে পৰৱৰ্তী ৩ (তিনি) বছৰৰ কাৰণে পুনৰ কাৰ্যকাল বৃদ্ধি কৰাৰ বাবে আবেদন কৰিছে তেখেতসকলক অহা ৭ জানুৱাৰী, ২০২৫ তাৰিখৰ পৰা ১০ জানুৱাৰী, ২০২৫ তাৰিখৰ ভিতৰত নিম্ন উল্লেখিত কুপন ক্ৰমিক নম্বৰ অনুসৰি পৰা ৯ বজাৰ পৰা দিনৰ ১২ বজাৰ ভিতৰত মঞ্জুৰিত জিলা গৃহৰক্ষী প্ৰশিক্ষণ কেন্দ্ৰত উপস্থিত হ'বলৈ আহান জনোৱা হ'ল।

তাৰিখ	কুপন ক্ৰমিক নম্বৰ
৭ জানুৱাৰী, ২০২৫	০১ ৰ পৰা ৩৩০ লৈ
৮ জানুৱাৰী, ২০২৫	৩৩১ ৰ পৰা ৬৬০ লৈ
৯ জানুৱাৰী, ২০২৫	৬৬১ ৰ পৰা ৯৯০ লৈ
১০ জানুৱাৰী, ২০২৫	৯৯১ ৰ পৰা ১৩২৯ লৈ

বিঃদ্রঃ— (১) গৃহৰক্ষী স্বেচ্ছাসেৱক/স্বেচ্ছাসেৱিকাসকলে আবেদন জমা কৰা ক্ৰমিক নম্বৰ কুপন লগত আনিবলৈ জনোৱা হ'ল।
(২) গৃহৰক্ষী স্বেচ্ছাসেৱক/স্বেচ্ছাসেৱিকাসকলে আবেদন লগত জমা কৰা নথিৰ মূল কপি লগত আনিবলৈ জনোৱা হ'ল।

জিলা অধিনায়ক
Janasanyog/D/10845/24/22-Dec-24 গৃহৰক্ষী বাহিনী, কাৰি আংলং, ডিফু

Strengthen community policing programs to check drug menace: Arunachal Guv

ITANAGAR, Dec 21: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) on Friday exhorted police officers to strengthen community policing programmes to check the growing drug menace in the state.

Addressing the inaugural session of the two-day annual conference of Superintendents of Police (SPs) and Commandants at Dorjee Khandu Convention Centre here, the governor said that substance addiction demands a response that is both firm and compassionate.

"Drug menace is a silent war being waged in our communities, affecting our youth, our families, and the future of the state. It demands a response that is both firm and compassionate," Parnaik said while sharing his concerns about the menace of substance addiction in the northeastern state.

He emphasised ensuring discipline, law and order, smart policing and countering the drug menace, while touching on new criminal laws and the welfare of police personnel.

The governor said that district police chiefs and commandants are the custodians of the state's safety and security. Their decisions, actions, and leadership shape the perception of law enforcement and the sense of justice within the communities.

"Let every citizen, woman, and child feel that they live under the protection of the state police that is ethical, disciplined, and dedicated to their well-being," he said.

Stating that discipline and accountability form the cornerstone of a professional and respected police force, Parnaik urged the officers to implement and reinforce a culture of ethical leadership.

He said that the essence of 'Smart Policing' is the forward-thinking, technology-driven, and community-centred approach to modern law enforcement. The SPs must shift from traditional policing methods to embrace technology and data-driven approaches.

Equip your officers with skills and knowledge to operate modern tools effectively. Be transparent, ethical, and people-focused in your leadership, he advised.

Referring to the three new criminal laws, the governor said that these laws are people-oriented and are the backbone of a well-functioning society, ensuring order, justice, and equality. (PTI)

No.CHD/UDD/2/15th FC/Tied/2nd Inst./2024/NIT-CS/3180 Dated Kokrajhar the 07th December/2024

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Council Head of Department, Urban Development Department, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bid for the following scheme under 15th FC (Tied Grant) 2nd Installation for the year 2022-23 during 2024-25.

Group No.	Name of Schemes	Bid cost (Rs.)	Tender Value (Rs.)
Group-1	Supply of Dustbin 240 ltrs. Capacity in Urban area of Kajalgaon Town.	500.00	13,70,000.00
Group-2	Supply of Dustbin 240 ltrs. Capacity in Urban area of Basugaon Town.	500.00	13,70,000.00
Group-3	Supply of Dustbin 20 ltrs. Capacity (For Door to Door Garbage Collection) for BPL/EWS beneficiary in Urban area of Basugaon Town.	100.00	2,10,000.00
Group-4	Supply of Dustbin 20 ltrs. Capacity (For Door to Door Garbage Collection) for BPL/EWS beneficiary in Urban area of Kajalgaon Town.	200.00	4,37,500.00
Group-5	Supply of Dustbin 20 ltrs. Capacity (For Door to Door Garbage Collection) for BPL/EWS beneficiary in Urban area of Bijni Town.	200.00	4,37,500.00
Group-6	Supply of Dustbin 30 ltrs. Capacity (For Door to Door Garbage Collection) for BPL/EWS beneficiary in Urban area of Basugaon Town.	100.00	2,38,900.00
Group-7	Supply of Dustbin 30 ltrs. Capacity (For Door to Door Garbage Collection) for BPL/EWS beneficiary in Urban area of Kajalgaon Town.	200.00	4,97,500.00
Group-8	Supply of Dustbin 30 ltrs. Capacity (For Door to Door Garbage Collection) for BPL/EWS beneficiary in Urban area of Bijni Town.	200.00	4,97,500.00
Group-9	Supply and Installation of Dustbin 60 ltrs. Capacity in Urban area of Bijni Town.	600.00	18,82,300.00
Group-10	Supply and Installation of Dustbin 60 ltrs. Capacity in Urban area of Kajalgaon Town.	600.00	19,89,860.00
Group-11	Supply and Installation of Dustbin 60 ltrs. Capacity in Urban area of Basugaon Town.	500.00	16,13,400.00
Group-12	Supply of Basic Usage kit to the Safai Mitras of Kajalgaon Municipal Board.	600.00	19,76,200.00
Group-13	Supply of Basic Usage kit to the Safai Mitras of Bijni Municipal Board.	600.00	19,76,200.00
Group-14	Supply of Basic Usage kit to the Safai Mitras of Basugaon Municipal Board.	300.00	9,88,100.00
Group-15	Supply of Bio Toilet (2 nos. Compartment) at Kajalgaon Municipal Board.	600.00	17,00,000.00
Group-16	Supply of Bio Toilet (2 nos. Compartment) at Bijni Municipal Board.	300.00	8,50,000.00
Group-17	Supply of Bio Toilet (2 nos. Compartment) at Basugaon Municipal Board.	300.00	8,50,000.00

Last date of submission of completed tender is 30.12.2024 (up to 2:00 PM) and will be open on the same day. The detail tender documents may be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours till 27.12.2024.

N.B.: The bill of contractor will be paid only after receiving the fund from BTC.

Sd/- CHD
Urban Development Department,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1163

Arunachal made remarkable progress in reducing poverty: Guv

ITANAGAR, Dec 21: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik on Saturday asserted that the state has made a remarkable progress in reducing multidimensional poverty.

He said the state has achieved a 166 per cent increase in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) since the 2015-16 fiscal.

Addressing the 72nd plenary of North Eastern Council (NEC) at Agartala, he said that the people of Arunachal Pradesh take pride in the fact that the state is among the "front-runner states" on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) scorecard for 2023-2024.

Parnaik informed the regional forum that concerted efforts are being made towards enhancing education standards in the state, right from strengthening anganwadis and upgrading government schools, implementing NEP 2020, and using technology by means of smart classes and establishing 'advanced learning centres' in the districts, an official statement from Raj Bhawan said here.

"Arunachal Pradesh is one of India's most aspirational states, where significant focus has always been on fostering development, growth, and empowerment of our young population," he said.

He said the government's major focus is on tourism including, creating infrastructure in destinations, skilling the youth as guides and tour operators, and marketing as the state has a wide scope to develop eco, religious and adventure tourism.

Highlighting the progress in agriculture and allied sectors, Parnaik said that the state is



producing 5,04,801 metric tonnes of cereals, including millets and 5,000 MT of kiwis.

He stressed the requirement of support from the NEC for establishment of warehouses for the storage and carriage of cereals and kiwi products by rail to enable marketing in the rest of the country.

"The state is nurturing a dynamic startup ecosystem with the Arunachal Pradesh Innovation and Investment Park (APIIP), actively supporting investment, startup growth, and enhancing ease of doing business," he said.

The state's UNNATI scheme is positioned to propel towards realising our industrial

potential, while the focus remains on the non-polluting industries, the governor said.

Parnaik added that the state has also made notable strides in law and order, including the launching of 14 mahila police stations and 'pink patrolling' to safeguard women, and implementing GIS and AI-based crime monitoring in Itanagar as a pilot project. He added that the Arunachal Pradesh's law enforcement personnel have undergone extensive training on new criminal laws and in addition, the state's legal professionals have been trained on the laws to ensure preparedness for legislative changes. The governor said that financial inclusion remains a challenge in Arunachal Pradesh.

Expressing gratitude to the Centre and the DoNER Ministry, for support to the state, Parnaik stressed that the NEC, as a knowledge institution for the region, could play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges and advancing development goals in the state, the statement added. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, P.W.D. (B&NH)

DIPHU BUILDING CIRCLE, DIPHU

No.SEBC/TECH/RJQ/35/2024-25/04 Dated Diphu the 17th December 2024

PRESS NOTICE

The Superintending Engineer, P.W.D. (B&NH) Diphu Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites bids from Govt. Registered eligible contractors having experience in similar nature of works for the following works.

Details of bid may be seen at e-procurement portal www.assamtenders.gov.in
The bidders must be enrolled in www.assamtenders.gov.in

Sl. No.	Name of Work	LAC	District	Bid Security drawn in favour of	Approx value of work (Bid value in Lakh)	Completion Period	Bid Security	Cost of Bid (in Rs.)
1	Construction of Diphu Residential Judicial Quarter, at Diphu, Dist.: Karbi Anglong, Assam	Diphu	Karbi Anglong	E.E, Karbi Anglong District Territorial Building Division, Diphu.	Rs. 8,12,99,196.26	18 Months (Eighteen Months)	2 % of Bid value for General category and 1% of Bid value for Reserved category	Rs. 5000

N.B.:- 1. Value of work may vary according to the detail NIT.
2. The Press Notice will form a part of the Bidding Document.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer, P.W.D (B&NH),
Diphu Building Circle, Diphu

Memo No.SEBC/TECH/RJQ/35/2024-25/ 04-A Dated Diphu the 17th December 2024.

Why is ECI afraid of transparency: Congress after election rule tweak

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: The Congress on Saturday hit out at the Election Commission for tweaking an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage, asking why the poll panel was afraid of transparency.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the party would legally challenge amendment.

"If there was ever a vindication of our assertions regarding the rapidly eroding integrity of the electoral process managed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in recent times, this is it," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Sharing a December 20 notification, the Congress leader said, "This move of the ECI will be challenged legally right away."

The government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as



video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse.

Based on the recommendation of the poll panel, the Union law ministry has amended Rule 93 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be

open to public inspection.

The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers".

Ramesh said sunlight was the best disinfectant and information would restore faith in the process - a reasoning Punjab and Haryana High Court agreed with when it directed the ECI to share all information that was legally required to with

the public.

"Yet, the ECI, instead of complying with the judgment, rushes to amend the law to curtail the list of what can be shared," he said.

"Why is the ECI so afraid of transparency?" the Congress general secretary asked.

Transparency and openness are key in exposing and eliminating corruption and unethical practices and information restores confidence in the process, Ramesh noted.

Law ministry and ECI officials separately explained that a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment.

Punjab and Haryana High Court had recently directed the poll panel to provide copies of the required documents related to the Haryana Assembly elections to advocate Mehmood Pracha.

He had filed a petition seeking the videography, CCTV camera footage, and copies of Forms 17-C Parts I and II related to the conduct of elections. (PTI)

Nehru 'anti-reservation'; Opposition does not have concrete issue to raise: Manjhi



NEW DELHI, Dec 21: Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi on Saturday said the country's first Prime Minister and Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru was "anti-reservation" and the Opposition is claiming Home Minister Amit Shah insulted B R Ambedkar as it does not have any important issue to raise.

The Union MSME minister and leader of Hindustani Awam Morcha, a key NDA ally, made the remarks when asked about the Opposition's claim that Shah insulted Ambedkar during his speech in the Rajya Sabha.

"The (Opposition) do not have any (concrete) issue to raise that is why they are saying this. We have the agenda of taking the nation forward from a political as well as economic point of view. He

(Shah) challenged them (Congress) saying you keep taking his (Ambedkar's) name but do you follow him ... You insulted him whereas this government is honouring him. It has become their tendency to cast allegations as they do not have any other issue," he told PTI.

Earlier, addressing a press conference here, he claimed that the country's first Prime Minister and Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru was "anti-reservation" as he believed that it would cause division in the society.

"Nehru aarakshan ke paksh mein nahin the ... Maante the bhed-bhaav ho jayega ... Congress ka neta Nehru, unka nazariya scheduled caste ke khilaf tha ... Ambedkar Maharashtra se do baar chunav lade. Ambedkar ko haraane wale ko Nehru ne felicitate kiya (Nehru was not in favour of reservation ... He believed this will lead to discriminations... Congress leader Nehru, his opinion was against the scheduled caste ... Ambedkar contested elections from Maharashtra twice. Nehru felicitated those who defeated Ambedkar," Manjhi said.

The Union MSME Minister further shared that nearly 5.6 crore micro small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are registered in the country on government portals. (PTI)

Provide names of 40 organisations: Yogendra Yadav on Fadnavis' 'Bharat Jodo' remarks

LATUR, Dec 21: Activist Yogendra Yadav on Saturday dared Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to disclose the names of 40 frontal organisations of Naxalites which had allegedly participated in the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Yadav's demand came two days after Fadnavis told the assembly that 40 of the 180 outfits that took part in the Bharat Jodo Yatra were named as frontal bodies when the Congress-led UPA governments ruled Maharashtra and the Centre.

"How can we, as followers of Mahatma Gandhi, be labelled as Naxalites?" the national convener of Bharat Jodo Abhiyan asked while addressing a press conference in Latur city in Maharashtra.

Responding to a query, Yadav challenged Fadnavis to disclose the names of these 40 organisations and clarify under which banner an alleged meeting in Nepal was conducted.

Fadnavis had told the legislative assembly that 40 of the 180 outfits that participated in the Bharat Jodo Yatra were named as frontal organisations when the Congress-NCP ruled Maharashtra and the UPA was in power at the Centre.

The CM had also said that a meeting was held on November 15 in Kathmandu which was attended by some organisations which took part in the (Rahul Gandhi-led) Bharat Jodo Yatra and issues like opposing EVMs and introduction of ballot papers states were discussed.

Yadav said the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi lost the assembly polls in Maharashtra as they failed to take a decisive stand on social and political issues post their impressive performance in Lok Sabha polls.

"They lost the assembly elections badly because the opposition allies couldn't come up with a cohesive game plan," he claimed. (PTI)

Proposed GST hike for Kashmiri shawl will finish craft, says Mehbooba

SRINAGAR, Dec 21: PDP supremo Mehbooba Mufti on Saturday said the proposed increase in GST for Kashmiri shawl will finish the craft and appealed to Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to address the issue.

She also alleged that the Centre was trying to make the people of Jammu and Kashmir dependent solely on tourism.

"The Kashmiri shawl is not just a means of livelihood for us but an identity of Jammu and Kashmir. It is famous all over the world. The (previous) National Conference government banned the Shahtoosh, which was our heritage. That also caused economic losses," Mehbooba told reporters.

"Today, when you increase GST on Kashmiri shawl to 28 per cent, our art will automatically die," the People's Democratic Party (PDP) president added.

The former chief minister of the erstwhile state alleged efforts were being made to destroy Jammu and Kashmir by undertaking development work on horticulture land and imposing GST on the handicraft sector. "These keep

Jammu and Kashmir alive in its difficult times. I request Omar (Abdullah) that these are our assets, you have 50 MLAs, three MPs, for God's sake, tell us what you are doing to save our assets. What are you doing on the issue of increasing GST to 28 per cent," she asked.

The PDP chief alleged that these measures were an attempt by the Centre to make Jammu and Kashmir dependent solely on tourism.

"If our horticulture and handicraft are finished, we will only be dependent on tourism. Perhaps, the central government wants to finish the horticulture and the handicraft sectors to make the people of Jammu and Kashmir dependent only on tourism so that when they can send tourists whenever they want," Mehbooba said.

She also claimed huge development projects were wreaking havoc on agricultural and horticultural land.

The PDP supremo said, "Railway lines, ring roads, the Baramulla-Rajouri highway -- there is an onslaught on orchards through which youngsters earn their livelihood. It can have a very bad impact on Jammu and Kashmir's economy and

our situation can become worse than those states from where labourers come here. So, Omar (Abdullah) should pay special attention -- our lands are being taken away for huge projects."

She also urged the chief minister to provide clarity on the people being settled in the 30 satellite townships built in the valley.

"Thirty satellite townships are being built, 1.20 lakh land is needed for those. He (Abdullah) should tell us for whom those are being built. Who are being settled there? There are apprehensions about who are being settled as there are examples around the world like in Gaza and Syria where people's land was snatched," Mehbooba said.

"The people of Jammu and Kashmir are already reeling from uncertainty. There was no need to build these townships. Our agricultural land is being taken for those," she further said.

The PDP chief also claimed around 1.5 lakh ration cards of people below the poverty line were cancelled in Jammu and Kashmir.

People are facing hardship due to the intense cold and problems in electricity supply have added to their misery, she said. (PTI)

Former Haryana CM O P Chautala cremated with state honours

SIRSA, Dec 21: Former Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala was cremated on Saturday with full state honours in Teja Khera village in his native Sirsa district.

Chautala, who was a five-time chief minister, died in Gurugram on Friday. He was 89.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal reached Teja Khera to attend the last rites of the departed leader.

Many Haryana ministers, state Assembly Speaker Harvinder Kalyan, former Union minister Venod Sharma, SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia, BJP's Manpreet Badal and Manjinder Singh Sirsa and several other leaders also reached Teja Khera to pay their last respects.

Political leaders cutting across parties laid floral wreaths to pay their last respects to the departed leader.

Earlier, Chautala's mortal remains were Saturday kept at the family's Teja Khera farmhouse here for people to pay their last respects to the departed Indian National Lok Dal chief. His body was wrapped in the Indian Tricolour and decked with garlands.

An INLD spokesperson said Chautala was rushed to a hospital

after his health worsened on Friday.

Om Prakash Chautala's younger son Abhay Singh Chautala, an INLD leader, elder son Ajay Singh Chautala, who heads the JJP party, and other family members, including former deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala, ex-CM Chautala's brother Ranjit Chautala, were present in Teja Khera.

The funeral pyre was lit amid chants of Vedic hymns by priests.

Congress leaders Randeep Singh Surjewala and Kumari Selja had reached the Chautala farmhouse in the morning to pay their last respects to the five-time chief minister.

Common people also gathered in the village in large numbers to attend the cremation.

The Haryana government declared a three-day state mourning on Friday. It has also declared Saturday a public holiday in all its offices as a mark of respect.

Shortly after laying a wreath, Dhankhar, who was seated next to Chautala's younger son Abhay Chautala and SAD leader Sukhbir Badal, said, "Yesterday I got the news (of the demise). Five days back, I spoke to Chaudhary sahib and he was inquiring about my health. He was more concerned about me."

"Whenever I got the chance, I got his blessings," he said. (PTI)

PM Modi urges people to visit Rann Utsav for 'lifetime' experience

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged people to visit Gujarat's Kutch during the ongoing Rann Utsav, saying it will be an unforgettable experience.

"Kutch awaits you all! Come, discover the pristine White Rann, the spectacular culture and warm hospitality of Kutch during the ongoing Rann Utsav," the prime minister said in a post on X.

The festival, which goes on till March 2025, promises to be an unforgettable experience, he said.

Kutch is known for its unique culture, wildlife sanctuary and white salt desert.

Modi also wrote a more detailed description of the region in a LinkedIn post, noting that it vast salt desert gleams under the moonlight, offering an otherworldly experience.

It is equally celebrated for its thriving arts and crafts, he said.

He added, "And, most importantly, it is home to the most hospitable people, proud of their roots and eager to engage with the world."

Through the post, Modi said he was extending a "personal invitation" to the dynamic, hard-working professionals and their families to visit Kutch and enjoy the Rann Utsav.

The festivities commenced on



December 1 will continue till February 28, while the tent city at Rann Utsav will be open till March end.

Modi said, "I assure you all that Rann Utsav will be a lifetime experience."

For those who want to relax, this is just the place to be, he said, adding that those looking to discover new facets of history and culture, there is much to do as well.

"Connect with our ancient past with a visit to Dholavira, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Connect with nature by visiting the Vijay Vilas Palace, Kala Dungar. The 'Road to Heaven', surrounded by white salt pans, is the most scenic road in India," Modi said, citing a few other places too.

He also praised Kutch handicrafts.

CT Ravi ill-treatment claim an attempt by BJP to deviate public attention, says Shivakumar

BENGALURU, Dec 21: By claiming ill-treatment of party leader and MLC CT Ravi by police post his arrest, the BJP was attempting to deviate public attention from the original issue of him allegedly using derogatory language against a woman minister, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar alleged on Saturday.

Highlighting that conscience was important, he hit out at the BJP leadership in the state for supporting Ravi, who was arrested for making a derogatory comment against state minister Laxmi Hebbalkar.

"...ask them (BJP) if what he (Ravi) said was right or not. Let's discuss other things later. This shows the culture of their party and leader...what happened in the court is left to him (Ravi) and the police and the crime he committed. The main issue is his language and his culture," Shivakumar told reporters here in response to a question on the High Court ordering Ravi's release on Friday.

Alleging that Ravi had used derogatory language against several people in the past, the deputy CM said he is the leader from a national party, and "is it right for him to speak about women in such a manner."

Ravi allegedly used a derogatory word against Hebbalkar in the Legislative Council on Thursday during an altercation between them, when the House was adjourned for a while.

He was arrested on Thursday evening and taken into a police van from the premises of Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi, where the legislature session was held.

Stating that conscience is important, Shivakumar said, "BJP supporting him (Ravi) just because he is their party leader is not right...one should be condemned if he is wrong and should be told that he is wrong. If anyone had used such words in my party, I would have condemned it...Ashoka



(Leader of Opposition) is supporting him (Ravi). He is a party to it in this crime."

"This is their party (BJP) leadership. Let them say that this is how their party is. We will be happy. Let them keep their gems to themselves happily. Let them not send them out," he further said.

Ravi on Friday accused the police of "violating" human rights, as he alleged that they took him on rounds the entire night to various places without providing proper food and rest.

Responding to a question about police action against Ravi and allegations that he pressured the police, Shivakumar said, "...it is a police matter. I don't know...for everything that happens they hold me responsible...they don't get sleep without remembering me."

Stating that conscience will give justice in this matter, he said, "They (BJP) are trying to deviate from the main issue. To cover up his (Ravi) usage of a derogatory word, he is now blaming the police..."

The High Court on Friday ordered immediate release of Ravi in its interim order, observing that police failed to follow the procedures in arresting him. However, the bench of Justice M G Uma asked Ravi to cooperate with the investigation and be available for questioning.

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Saturday, responding to a question by reporters on HC ob-

jecting that police failed to follow the procedures in arresting Ravi, said he wouldn't want to make any statement, as the matter is before the court. "As the matter is sub judice. It wouldn't be appropriate to speak."

Asked whether the arrest was done legally according to the government, he said, "The police argument will be that their action was right, but the matter is before the court and it will decide what is right and what is wrong."

To a question as to why police took Ravi on rounds to four districts through the night on Thursday after his arrest, the Home Minister said, "I have sought for information. Once I get it I will share."

Noting that police had arrested 24 people in connection with an attempt to attack Ravi at the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha on Thursday, Parameshwara in response to another question said, "they were arrested to ensure that no untoward incident should happen and they were later released."

Asked whether someone else operating the Home Department superseding him, considering the way in which Ravi's arrest was done and the things that followed, Parameshwara said, "It cannot be done. Can it be done? Other than CM, no one else can do it. The CM is above the Home Minister and other ministers...I have a lot of freedom (in running the department)." (PTI)

Congress to hold weeklong campaign, seek Amit Shah's resignation



NEW DELHI, Dec 21: The Congress will hold protest marches against Union Home Minister Amit Shah for "insulting" BR Ambedkar and observe a weeklong campaign on the issue, party leaders said on Saturday.

As part of the "Ambedkar Samman Saptah", Congress workers and leaders will hold marches and press conferences to remember the legacy of B R Ambedkar, they said.

AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said party MPs and leaders will hold press conference at 150 locations across the country on December 22 and 23 and workers will take out protest marches across the country on December 24.

"Our agitation demanding Home Minister Amit Shah's resignation will continue! We will fight to protect Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy against the Manusmriti wor-

shippers," Venugopal said in a post on X.

"The INC will mark the upcoming week as Dr. Ambedkar Samman Saptah," he said.

"On 24 December, all across the country, we will hold Babasaheb Ambedkar Samman Marches and submit a memorandum to President of India through District Collectors demanding Amit Shah's resignation."

"All INC workers will garland Babasaheb's statue, hold his giant portrait at the front of the march and carry huge placards with our key demands," the Congress leader said.

"On 26-27 December, we will hold an extended CWC session and a mega rally in Belagavi where we will reiterate our commitment to Dr. Ambedkar and his ideals. Jai Bhim! Jai Hind!" Venugopal said in his post. (PTI)

Kutch had witnessed a super cyclone in 1999, he said, writing glowingly of the region's rise in the new century.

It is a turnaround that is unparalleled in history, he claimed.

He said, "Together, we worked on the all-round development of Kutch. We focussed on creating infrastructure that was disaster resilient, and at the same time, we focussed on building livelihoods that ensured the youth of Kutch did not have to leave their homes in search of work."

The land known for perpetual droughts became known for agriculture. Fruits from Kutch, including mangoes, made their way to foreign markets, he said.

He said, "In 2005, Rann Utsav was born to tap into the previously unseen tourism potential of Kutch. It has grown into a vibrant tourism centre now."

Rann Utsav has also received several domestic and international awards.

Dhordo, a village where every year Rann Utsav is celebrated, was named the 2023 Best Tourism Village by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, Modi said.

The village was recognized for its cultural preservation, sustainable tourism, and rural development. (PTI)

ENGINEERING WORKS IN MALIGAON

Tender Notice No.: 39 of 2024. Date: 19-12-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Tender No.:** DENGHY-31-2024. **Name of Work:** Ashon Narengi. **Renewal of Sluice gate 459 Nos. Tender Value:** ₹ 1,14,58,956/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹ 2,07,300/-. **Tender No.:** DENGHY-32-2024. **Name of Work:** Desilting and removal of desilted materials from drains and culverts including repairs to colony and Yard drains under the jurisdiction of DEN/Guwahati (For one year). **Tender Value:** ₹ 1,92,30,656/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹ 2,46,200/-. **Date & time of closing of tender at 13:00 hrs. on 10-01-2025 and opening on 10-01-2025 after closing.** For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to in the website <http://www.dreps.gov.in>

CONSTRUCTION OF TRANSIT BUILDING

E-TENDER NOTICE NO. TSK/Engg/ 59 of 2024. dated 19-12-2024. E-tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work. **Item No.1: Brief Description of item:** At New Tinsukia. Construction of Transit building (4 units). **Tender Value:** ₹ 1,73,50,476/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹ 2,36,800/-. E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 10-01-2025 and opened at 16:00 hrs. on 10-01-2025. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 10-01-2025 in website www.dreps.gov.in

DRM (Work)/Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a smile"

PM Modi embarks on 2-day visit to Kuwait, likely to firm up roadmap for futuristic partnership

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: As he embarked on a two-day visit to Kuwait, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said India and the Gulf nation have shared interest in peace, security and stability in West Asia.

Modi's visit to Kuwait, the first by an Indian prime minister in 43 years, comes two weeks after the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria and amid signs of a possible ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

The last Indian prime minister to visit Kuwait was Indira Gandhi in 1981.

In a departure statement, Modi said his talks with the top Kuwaiti leadership would be an opportunity to chalk out a roadmap for a futuristic partnership between India and Kuwait.

"I am confident that this visit will further strengthen and rein-



force the special ties and bonds of friendship between the people of India and Kuwait," Modi said.

The prime minister said he was looking forward to his meetings with the Emir, the Crown Prince and the prime minister of Kuwait.

"It would be an opportunity to chalk out a roadmap for a futuristic partnership for the benefit of our people and the region," he said.

"I eagerly look forward to meeting the Indian diaspora in Kuwait who have immensely contributed to strengthening of bonds of friendship between the two nations," he added.

Modi's engagements in Kuwait include a visit to an Indian labour camp, an interaction with the Indian community and gracing the

opening ceremony of the Gulf Cup football tournament.

"I express my gratitude to the leadership of Kuwait for the special gesture of inviting me to the inauguration ceremony of the Arabian Gulf Cup, a premier sporting event in the Gulf region," the prime minister said.

"I look forward to being a part of this celebration of athletic excellence and regional unity," he said.

On Friday, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said India and Kuwait are expected to focus on shoring up ties in a range of key areas including defence and trade during the prime minister's visit to the Gulf nation.

Discussions are underway with

Kuwait on a bilateral investment treaty and a defence cooperation pact, according to officials.

At a media briefing, Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary (Overseas Indian Affairs) in the MEA, said a few bilateral documents are expected to be signed during the prime minister's visit.

"The historic visit by the prime minister is expected to open a new chapter in India-Kuwait bilateral relations," he said.

"It will not only consolidate the partnership in existing spheres but also unveil new avenues for future cooperation, reinforce our shared values and build a stronger and more dynamic partnership for the future," he added.

India is among the top trading partners of Kuwait. The Indian community is the largest expatriate community in Kuwait.

The Gulf nation is among India's top trading partners, with bilateral trade valued at USD 10.47 billion in 2023-24.

Kuwait is India's sixth largest crude supplier, meeting 3 per cent of the country's energy needs.

Indian exports to Kuwait reached USD 2 billion for the first time in 2023-24 while investments by the Kuwait Investment Authority in India exceeded USD 10 billion. (PTI)

Shortage of manpower at every level of health care institutions in Maharashtra: CAG report

NAGPUR, Dec 21: The shortage of manpower at every level of healthcare institutions under the Maharashtra Health Department and overburdening of infrastructure are the main concerns flagged by the CAG in its audit report.

The Comptroller and Auditor General noted that providing adequate and quality healthcare services to a large population requires a robust healthcare infrastructure and services.

This performance audit report for 2023-2024 was tabled in the legislative assembly on Saturday.

The shortage of doctors, nurses and paramedical staff was 22 per cent, 35 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively in primary and secondary healthcare under the state Health Department.

The shortage of doctors, nurses and paramedical staff was 23 per cent, 19 per cent and 16 per cent respectively in primary and secondary healthcare for women hospitals. The shortage is 42 per cent in the cadre of the specialist doctors.

The CAG stated that the overall shortage of doctors, nurses, and paramedics in the Health Department and Medical Education and Drugs Department was 27 per cent, 35 per cent, and 31 per cent respectively. The audit also noticed the regional disparity in the availability of manpower.

Similarly, vacancies in the trauma care centres under the



Health Department and Medical Education and Drugs Department were 23 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively. The CAG stated vacancies of doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff in AYUSH colleges and hospitals are 21 per cent, 57 per cent and 55 per cent respectively.

The sanctioned strength of doctors was less than the requirement as per Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS), 2012, by 17 per cent under the Health Department.

The CAG report asked the government to fill up vacancies in the health sector in a time-bound manner to ensure optimal and qualitative delivery of healthcare services to people. It said the government may also increase the sanctioned strength of doctors under the Department as recommended in IPHS.

The public health infrastructure is overburdened due to shortages of healthcare institutions, which are

catering to the population in excess of the norms laid down in IPHS, the CAG stated.

The audit noticed that 70 per cent of the work for constructing new healthcare institutions and 90 per cent of the work for upgrading healthcare institutions as per the master plan (January 2013 and June 2014) was not completed as of September 2022.

It said a Super Speciality Hospital (Phase II), Amravati, constructed at the cost of ₹ 31.91 crore in June 2015 remained unutilised for more than three years. Further, 433 works included in the master plan could not be started due to non-availability of land. Out-Patient Department (OPD) services in hospitals were inadequate with 93 per cent of rural hospitals having only one registration counter as against two required as per IPHS in seven selected districts, the CAG said. (PTI)

Rajasthan accident: Experts blame incomplete construction, sudden cuts

JAIPUR, Dec 21: Incomplete construction, sudden cuts and a lack of traffic sense might have caused the Jaipur-Ajmer highway accident that killed 14 people, experts said on Saturday and called for a comprehensive statewide road safety action plan. They also attributed the absence of proper signages and road markings for the accident.

"The stretch of the Jaipur-Ajmer highway where the crash occurred is an accident-prone spot, with poor traffic management and on-going construction creating hazardous conditions," said George Cheriyan, a prominent voice of Road Safety Network in India and a former member of the Rajasthan chief secretary's traffic management committee.

He said physical measures should have been in place to prevent big tankers from making u-turns on the highway.

It is difficult to apply brakes when moving at high speeds, Cheriyan said.

An LPG tanker collided with a truck on Friday, sparking a massive fireball that turned a stretch of the Jaipur-Ajmer highway into an inferno in which 14 people died and nearly 40 vehicles were engulfed in flames.

More than 30 people who suffered burn injuries in the massive crash are undergoing treatment.

Cheriyan said road accidents in Rajasthan surged by 13 percentage points in 2022, accompanied by an 11 percentage point increase in fatalities.

The data, released by Rajasthan's department of transport and road safety, showed that the number of accidents rose to 23,614 in 2022 compared to 20,951 in the previous year.

Rajasthan was also among the six large states that accounted for nearly 55 per cent of the 1.73,000 (1.73 lakh) road accident deaths in the country in 2023. It recorded the

sharpest increase in fatalities among them, with an almost six percentage point rise from 2022, according to data shared by state governments with the Centre.

According to Cheriyan, the continuing trend of such road accidents in Rajasthan called for a comprehensive statewide action on road safety for 2025 to 2030.

Bagru Udhog Mitra co-convenor Navneet Jhalani, who passes the accident spot daily, said, "The foundation of Friday's accident was laid when the ring road was hastily inaugurated six years ago to bypass the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct for elections. A cloverleaf interchange had to be constructed on the busy highway but it is still pending."

He added that they submitted several memoranda to the National Highways Authority of India regarding this.

Road safety expert Dr Prerna Arora Singh said, "There is no high mast lighting system at the intersection. Visibility becomes very low during winters. There is no radium, reflector or signal marker of any kind at the cut."

She also said the width of the cut at the intersection was too narrow.

"If a big truck such as a container or gas tanker passes through, it blocks the road on both sides. This could possibly be the reason for the accident," Singh said.

She also said there was a lack of road traffic sense among people that needed to be improved through interventions.

Talking to reporters after meeting the accident victims at Sawai Man Singh Hospital, Congress leader Sachin Pilot also highlighted several shortcomings and demanded a probe.

"We all know about the accident spot. Why was construction not completed? Who is the contractor and agency? We need to know the facts after a detailed probe," he said. (PTI)

Gazette notification issued for complete takeover of Bettiah Raj land by Bihar govt

PATNA, Dec 21: Decks have been cleared for complete takeover by the Bihar government of about 15,358 acres of land belonging to the erstwhile princely estate of Bettiah Raj, one of the largest zamindari of the state, with the notification to this effect being issued in the Gazette, an official said.

The 'Vesting of Bettiah Raj Properties Act—2024's gazette notification dated December 11 followed a bill passed by the state legislature in the winter session last month.

Earlier, properties of the estate were managed by the Court of Wards, Board of Revenue (Bihar Government).

"All the existing properties, to the knowledge of the court and being looked after by the court, of the Bettiah Raj, located in or outside the state of Bihar, whether movable or immovable, shall stand vested with the state government from the date on which this Act comes into force. Bettiah Raj Properties means and includes all movable and immovable properties of the erstwhile Raja of Bettiah", says

the gazette notification.

"With the publication of gazette notification of the 'Vesting of Bettiah Raj Properties Act—2024',

now the Board of Revenue of the state government is framing rules of the Act which will be further approved by the state cabinet", Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Revenue and Land Reforms department, Dipak Kumar Singh told PTI on Saturday.

The Act has been passed with a view to ensure effective protection and management of Bettiah Raj land, said the ACS.

According to office of the Court of Wards, Bettiah Raj (authority which used to manage properties of the estate earlier), details of properties were submitted to the Secretary, Board of Revenue, on September 9, 2021, total land—15,358.60 acres, worth ₹ 7957.38 crore -- belonging to the concerned estate are in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Out of a total of 15,358.60 acres of land, 15,215.33 acres is in Bihar and 143.26 acres is in Uttar Pradesh. According to officials, a

large chunk of land that came under the erstwhile Bettiah Raj has been encroached upon over the years.

Cities in Bihar where land belonging to Bettiah Estate are located include: 9758.72 acres in West Champaran, 5320.51 acres in East Champaran, 35.58 acres in Gopalganj, 7.29 acres in Siwan, 4.81 acres in Patna, 88.41 acres in Saran.

Similarly, cities in Uttar Pradesh where land belonging to Bettiah Estate are located include: Kushinagar (61.16 acres), Maharajganj (7.53 acres), Varanasi (10.13 acres), Gorakhpur (50.92 acres), Basti (6.21 acre), Allahabad (4.54 acre), Ayodhya (1.86 acre).

After taking over the possession of all land of Bettiah estate, the department concerned may allot these lands to other wings of the state for several infrastructural projects, sources said. A large chunk of land may be allotted to the Bihar Industrial Area Development Authority (BIADA) for developing townships, mall and parks in West Champaran district, an official said on the condition of anonymity. (PTI)

Election rule tweaked to restrict public inspection of electronic records

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: The government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse.

Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission (EC), the Union law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be open to public inspection.

The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers". Law ministry and EC officials separately explained that a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment.

While documents such as nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results and election account statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of



Conduct period are not covered. "CCTV coverage, webcasting of polling stations are not carried out under Conduct of Election Rules but are the result of steps taken by the EC to ensure a level playing field," a former EC official explained.

An EC functionary said, "There have been instances where such electronic records have been sought, citing the rules. The

amendment ensures that only papers mentioned in the rules are available for public inspection and any other document which has no reference in the rules is not allowed for public inspection."

EC functionaries said the misuse of CCTV camera footage from inside polling booths could compromise voter secrecy. They also said the footage could be used to generate fake narrative using AI.

"All such material is available to candidates, including footage. After the amendment, too, it will be available to them. But other people can always approach the courts to get such electronic records," said another functionary.

Candidates already have access to all documents and papers. Nothing has been amended in the rules in this regard, the functionary added. Punjab and Haryana High Court, in the recent Mahmood Pracha vs EC case, had directed sharing all documents related to the Haryana Assembly elections, including treating CCTV camera footage as permissible under Rule 93(2), with Pracha. (PTI)

From vision to reality: The journey of 2 bureaucrats to establish world's first pvt tribal university

KOTA (RAJASTHAN), Dec 21: In 2023, two former bureaucrats came together to open the world's first private tribal university. A year later, 600 students are studying at Jai Minesh Adivasi University's 30 acre campus in the Ranpur industrial area here.

"What was once unimaginable has become a reality," says R D Meena, co-founder of Jai Minesh Adivasi University, which is named after revered deity of Rajasthan's Meena community and dedicated to advancing research on tribal issues and culture.

Now, he hopes to make it a global hub for tribal studies, driving research and policy for the betterment of these communities.

Meena conceptualised the idea to open the university with retired IPS officer Laxman Meena.

Jai Minesh Adivasi University (JMAU) opened in May 2023 in Kota, a city renowned for grooming aspirants for IIT-NEET entrance exams.

R D Meena, who is also the pres-



ident of the All India Shri Meena Social and Educational Committee, told PTI. "The Adivasi University, named after the community's lord, Jai Minesh, aims to be a global hub for tribal studies, providing affordable, quality education to students from all sections of society across the country and abroad."

In view of the tribal nature of the university, the state government not only allotted land for the institution at a concessional rate but also, in a

significant decision, authorised each of the 200 MLAs in the state assembly to donate ₹ 10 lakh to the university from their respective MLA funds, Meena further said.

A contribution of ₹ 25 lakh was also made by Lok Sabha Speaker and Kota-Bundi MP Om Birla, along with contributions from 2,500 community members.

The university offers 50 per cent reservation to children from the tribal community and enrolled 600

students in its first academic session.

The university primarily focuses on enhancing research on tribal issues and culture, as tribal communities represent 6 per cent of the global population across around 50 countries, Meena added.

Besides various academic degree and diploma courses in vocational programs, the university also provides free coaching to its students for civil service exams, he added.

"In the next 30-40 years, this university will be a global hub for tribal studies, driving research and policy for the betterment of these communities," R D Meena remarked.

The Drawing and Painting department of the university has incorporated tribal art and cultural practices into its curriculum, as recommended under the New Education Policy, Dr Mukti Parashar, Dean of Drawing and Painting, Jai Minesh Adivasi University (JMAU), told PTI.

The labs at the university are

equipped with advanced technology and apparatus, and classes are regularly held to offer quality education, said Dr Devendra Acharya, Head of the Department of Physiotherapy, adding that the fee structure at JMAU is comparatively nominal.

With an objective to integrate tribal communities while preserving their identities, the journey for this university has just begun.

The destination appears promising, and Kota has evolved beyond being solely the city of coaching; it has transformed into a center for inclusive education and cultural preservation.

The institution embraces students from all backgrounds, transcending barriers of caste, class, or religion, establishing itself as an inclusive center for learning.

"My target is to crack the civil service exams after graduation, and I am availing myself of free coaching for the same at the university," said Priya Meena, an Arts student at the university. (PTI)

Railway Ministry blames land acquisition hurdles for delays in Bengal projects

KOLKATA, Dec 21: The Ministry of Railways has reported significant delays in several railway infrastructure projects across West Bengal, primarily due to challenges in land acquisition, an official statement said.

Despite a substantial increase in funding, with allocations rising three times from ₹ 4,380 crore during 2009-14 to ₹ 13,941 crore in 2024-25, the pace of project execution remains hindered, the ministry statement said.

As of April 1, 2024, there are 43 railway projects in West Bengal, encompassing 4,479 km and costing ₹ 60,168 crore. These projects, which fall fully or partly within West Bengal under the Eastern, South Eastern, and North East Frontier Railways, involve new lines and modernisation efforts.

Of these, 1,655 km have been commissioned, with a capex outgo of ₹ 20,434 crore up to March 2024. The ministry stated that acquisition remains a significant bottleneck as out of the total 3,040 hectares required, only 640 hectares (21 per cent) have been acquired, leaving a balance of 2,400 hectares (79 per cent) yet to be secured.

It said the Railways acquires land for its projects through state governments.

Railways pointed out some key projects experiencing delays due to land acquisition issues include: Nabadwipghat-Nabadwipdham new line (10 km); requires 106.86 hectares; only 0.17 hectares acquired. Chandaneshwar-Jaleswar new line (41 km); requires 158 hectares; no land acquired to date. Naihati-Ranaghat third line (36 km); requires 87.83 hectares; only 0.09 hectares acquired. Balurghat-Hilli new line (30 km); requires 156.38 hectares; 67.38 hectares acquired. Bypasses at Sainthia (5 km) and Sitarampur (7 km); require 22.28 hectares; but only 2.22 hectares could be acquired.

The completion of railway projects depends on various factors, including prompt land acquisition by state governments, forest clearances, cost-sharing deposits, shifting of utilities, statutory clearances, geological and topographical conditions, law and order situations, and climatic conditions affecting the number of working months available annually, the ministry said. (PTI)

'ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT' LEADS BARACK OBAMA'S 2024 RECOMMENDED MOVIES LIST



LOS ANGELES, Dec 21: Filmmaker Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light" has topped former US president Barack Obama's list of recommended films for the year 2024.

Obama has made it an annual tradition to share his favorite books, movies, and music of the year, a habit that began during his presidency and continues post-office.

The former US president shared the latest list on his social media pages on Friday evening.

"Here are a few movies I'd recommend checking out this year," Obama wrote in the caption. "All We Imagine As Light", a Malayalam-Hindi film that marks Kapadia's feature directorial debut, was listed on the top, followed by Ralph Fiennes-starrer "Conclave"; "The Piano Lesson" by Denzel Washington's son Malcolm Washington; Mads Mikkelsen's Danish film "Promised Land"; and "The Seed of the Sacred Fig" by exiled Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof.

The curated list, which often leads to public interest and discussions, also includes Denis Villeneuve's "Dune: Part Two"; "Anora", which won Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival; "Didi", a coming of age movie by Taiwanese American film director Sean Wang; documentary "Sugar cane"; and "A Complete Unknown", filmmaker James Mangold's biopic on country music legend Bob Dylan.

An official India-French co-production, "All We Imagine As Light" charted history by becoming the first Indian title from India to win the Grand Prix Award at the Cannes Film Festival in May.

The film follows two nurses Prabha (Kani Kusruti) and Anu (Divya Prabha) from Kerala navigating life and love in Mumbai along with their friend and cook Parvaty (Chhaya Kadam). The movie was recently named the Best International Film by New York Film Critics Circle and won an award in the same category at the Gotham Awards.

At the Golden Globe Awards 2025, the film has received nominations for Best Motion Picture Non-English Language and the Best Direction (Motion Picture) for Kapadia. It has also bagged a nomination in the Best Foreign Language Film category at the Critics Choice Awards.

The film is being distributed in the US by Janus Films and Sideshow. Rana Daggubati's Spirit Media released the film across India in November.

Besides the list of recommended movies, Obama has also shared his favourite music and books of 2024. (PTI)

'Pushpa 2' most watched film of 2024, Coldplay concert to be biggest draw in 2025: report

MUMBAI, Dec 21: Allu Arjun-starrer "Pushpa 2: The Rule" has emerged as the most-watched movie of the year 2024 with 10.8 lakh solo viewers, according to a year-end report by BookMyShow.

As 2024 draws to a close, the entertainment platform has come out with a report, titled #BookMyShowThrowback, highlighting the pivotal trends that defined cinematic experiences in India and globally, as well as the meteoric rise of live entertainment.

"Pushpa 2: The Rule", a sequel to 2021's blockbuster Telugu film "Pushpa: The Rise", has become a runaway hit at the box office, shattering many records while earning ₹ 1,500 crore at the global box office.

The follow-up, which arrived in cinemas on December 5, was released in Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Bengali and Malayalam languages.

According to the report, which analysed data between January 1 to December 5, November 1 was a blockbuster day on BookMyShow as the company sold a record-breaking 2.3 million tickets in just 24 hours.

The most watched movies of 2024 also included Hindi hit like "Street 2", "Singham Again" and "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3" as well as "Kalki 2898 AD" (Telugu), "Hanuman" (Telugu), "Amaran" (Tamil), "The Greatest of All Time" (Tamil), "Devara" (Telugu) and "Manjummel Boys" (Malay-

alam).

The company revealed that one cinephile watched 221 movies during the year.

Taking note of the trend of old movies re-releasing in theatres, the report said films like "Kal Ho Na Ho", "Timbad", "Rockstar" and "Laila Majnu" turned "theatres into time machines for fans revisiting beloved classics".

Hollywood films, especially franchise titles like "Deadpool & Wolverine", "Dune: Part Two", "Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes" and "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire", set screens ablaze with high-octane excitement, it added.

Small-budget films like "Aavesham", "Laapaata Ladies", and "Merry Christmas" proved that authentic narratives resonate deeply, regardless of scale, the report said.

On the live events front, 2024 proved to be a year of exceptional experiences.

BookMyShow offered a wide platter of an extraordinary 30,687 live events across 319 cities, marking a growth of 18 per cent in India's live entertainment consumption.

The year began with Nick Jonas and the Jonas Brothers captivating India at Lollapalooza 2024, followed by Ed Sheeran's concert in March where he was joined on stage by Diljit Dosanjh.

Maroon 5 performed in the country on December 3 and made waves by filling arenas on a Tuesday evening, proving that weekday concerts can be just as electric.

certs can be just as electric.

"Music tourism surged, becoming one of the defining trends of the year. Over 4,77,393 fans travelled outside their cities to attend live music events... Tier 2 cities experienced a dramatic 682 per cent growth in live events, including markets like Kanpur, Shillong and Gandhinagar, signalling a democratisation of entertainment access across the country," the report said.

For Coldplay's upcoming concert in Ahmedabad, people from over 500 cities and 28 states have booked tickets on the company's platform.

The concert, part of Chris Martin-led band's 'Music Of The Spheres World Tour', will be held at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium on January 25, 2025.

The group will also perform three shows in Mumbai's DY Patil Sports Stadium on January 18, 19 and 21.

In 2025, Sheeran will also return to India with his Mathematics Tour and is set to perform in six cities --

Pune on January 30, Hyderabad on February 2, Chennai on February 5, Bengaluru on February 8, Shillong on February 12 and lastly

Delhi NCR on February 15. Additionally, comedy, art and immersive experiences found steady audiences, with Nykaaland 2024, Van Gogh 360 and Peppa Pig's adventure. (PTI)

Tom Holland on film with Christopher Nolan: Don't know anything about it



LOS ANGELES, Dec 21: Hollywood star Tom Holland says he is excited to work with Academy Award-winning filmmaker Christopher Nolan for his next movie but doesn't know anything about the project.

Nolan has lined-up a star-studded cast, including Matt Damon, Zendaya, Robert Pattinson, Anne Hathaway, Lupita Nyong'o and Charlize Theron, for the project, which is his follow-up multiple Oscar-winning movie "Oppenheimer".

The untitled project will mark the maiden collaboration between Nolan and Holland, known for starring as superhero Spider-Man in multiple Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) films.

"It hasn't started shooting, to be perfectly honest with you. I don't know anything about it," the actor said on the Dish podcast.

"I'm super excited, but it's been pretty quiet about the project. I met with (Nolan) and it was awesome. He kind of loosely pitched what it is, and I'm sure when he's ready he'll announce what it's about," he added.

Nolan wrote the script and is directing the film, which will be distributed by Universal Pictures.

The filmmaker is also backing the project alongside producing partner and wife, Emma Thomas, for their Syncopy banner. The studio has set a release date of July 17, 2026, for the movie. (PTI)

RAFI@100: MOHAMMED RAFI IS MY MUSICAL FATHER, SAYS SONU NIGAM

MUMBAI, Dec 21: There can be no comparison between a father and a son. For Sonu Nigam, who considers Mohammed Rafi his "musical father", the very idea of comparing himself to the legendary singer is unthinkable.

After all, whatever he sings, he can never be quite like the master himself, said Nigam ahead of Rafi's 100th birth anniversary on December 24. "Rafi sahab was the prime reference point. It was like 'Be like him, he can sing a qawwali, a bhajan, a sad song, a high-pitch song, a semi-classical'. So that's what a singer should be like. He was my inspiration," Nigam told PTI.

It began right in childhood itself.

Nigam's singer parents – Agam and Shobha – encouraged him to emulate the great

Rafi who covered the spectrum of every genre and emotion through his effortlessly versatile voice.

"He has helped me be what I'm today and I still keep learning from him. He is my musical father," Nigam said.

The 51-year-old, sometimes compared to Rafi, gave his career's first performance when he was just four. The song was "Kya Hua Tera Vada" from the 1977 film "Hum Kisi Se Kam Nahin". And on Tuesday, Nigam will pay tribute to his guru with a special concert in Mumbai to celebrate Rafi's 100th birth anniversary.

Regarded perhaps as the greatest playback singer of Hindi cinema, Rafi lent his voice to evergreen songs such as "Main Zindagi Ka Saath Nibhata Chala Gaya", "Kaun Hai Jo Sapnon Mein Aaya",

"Aaja Aaja", "Parda Hai Parda", "Gulabi Aankhein" and "Kya Se Kya Ho Gaya" among many thousand others.

Nigam, popular for tracks such as "Suraj Hua Madham", "Kal Ho Naa Ho", "Saathiya" and "Abhi Mujhmein Kahin", is not worried about comparisons with Rafi.

"They will compare but they must understand but he is my father. You cannot compare a father and son. The father will always be the father. No matter what I sing, I will never be able to be like him," he added.

Rafi, the voice behind the movie greats like Dev Anand, Shamma Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Dharmendra and many other leading stars, passed away at the age of 55 in 1980 due to a heart attack. Nigam was only seven at the time.

"I've done hundreds of

cover versions of his songs. That has been my net practice. I used to make notes from his songs and add pointers. I've studied Rafi sahab properly. I've gone into the detailing of Mohammed Rafi like nobody else.

"Rafi sahab was an amazing versatile singer. I've tried to imbibe that quality in me. I've also tried to sing all kinds of songs. Rafi sahab was an introvert, I'm not an introvert, I speak. Rafi sahab wouldn't speak that much," the self-confessed fan said.

He said he could never meet his idol but it doesn't matter.

"He lives inside me so I don't really miss not meeting him," he added.

"I'm touched and humbled that I'm getting this chance to perform his songs on his 100th birthday." (PTI)



KERALA BLASTERS FC AIM TO GET BACK TO WINNING WAYS



KOCHI, Dec 21: Vulnerable in defence, Kerala Blasters FC will look to compensate with their strike force as they aim to record a league double over a goal-shy Mohammedan SC in their ISL match here on Sunday.

The Kerala Blasters FC secured a 2-1 victory in the reverse fixture on October 21. Achieving another win would mark

only the second instance of Kerala Blasters FC completing a league double against a team in their debut attempt, with the first being FC Pune City in 2014.

However, the home side will come into this game on the back of a disappointing run of form, having lost their last three matches. They parted ways with head coach Mikael Stahre and will look to avoid

equalling their longest losing streak (four games) registered in the 2022-23 season.

After 12 games, the Kochi-based team has garnered 11 points and occupy the 10th spot in the points table. Mohammedan SC have five points from 11 matches and are placed at the bottom of the standings.

Noah Sadaoui has been crucial for Kerala Blasters FC, contributing directly to eight goals (four goals and four assists) and winning them six points this season. His contributions will be crucial for the hosts to return to winning ways.

The Kerala Blasters FC have the lowest save rate in the league (48.9%) and have conceded 46 shots on target, highlighting their drawbacks at the back. The 1.8 saves per game made by the team this campaign is the second lowest such rate by any side, only behind Mumbai City FC's 1.6 saves in every match.

Mohammedan SC have been unable to score in their last two ISL matches. The last team to go three or more consecutive games without scoring in their debut season was East Bengal FC, enduring a four-game streak from November to December 2020 in the 2020-21 season.

Overall, Mohammedan SC have netted five times this season. Only 20% of Mohammedan SC's goals have come through their strikers. They will need to strengthen

their defence, especially against Kerala Blasters FC's forward line, which accounts for 79% of the home team's goals this season.

The Kolkata-based side has ended up giving away 19 strikes in the current campaign. Kerala Blasters FC have won the only ISL meeting between these two teams so far this season. (PTI)

Shrijith's 150 trumps Shreyas Iyer's 114 as Karnataka win

AHMEDABAD, Dec 21: KL Shrijith's whirlwind unbeaten 150 trumped Shreyas Iyer's fiery 114 as Karnataka etched a memorable seven-wicket win over Mumbai in a Group C match of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Saturday.

Shreyas' unbeaten 55-ball knock combined with fifties from Ayush Mhatre, Hardik Tamore and Shivam Dube guided Mumbai to an imposing 382 for four in 50 overs.

But Shrijith, who was sold to Mumbai Indians for ₹30 lakh in the recent IPL auction, hammered 150 off 101 balls with 20 fours and four sixes to help Karnataka scale down 383 with 3.4 overs to spare.

He was ably supported by KV Anesh, Praveen Dube

and captain Mayank Agarwal.

Explosive left-hander Utkarsh Singh and centurion Virat Singh helped Jharkhand to successfully chase Assam's challenging 257 for 9 in their seven-wicket center.

The 26-year-old Utkarsh and Virat, both mentored by former India skipper MS Dhoni, raised 141 runs for the third wicket in just 25 overs as Jharkhand made a strong start to their campaign.

India all-rounder Hardik Pandya will not be available for the league stage matches of the Vijay Hazare Trophy because of personal reasons, but he will join Baroda if they progress to the knockouts.

However, his absence was hardly felt as Baroda pum-

elled Tripura by 92 runs, riding on fifties by Shivalik Sharma and Vishnu Solanki and an excellent spell by Mahesh Pithiya.

Young wicketkeeper-batter Abhishek Porel hammered a 170 and India pacer Mukesh Kumar grabbed four wickets as Bengal scored a facile six-wicket win over Delhi to get off the block in style. Bengal razed down Delhi's 272 in 41.3 overs.

Madhya Pradesh pacer Avesh Khan took three wickets to restrict Bihar to 196 all out, as young batter Vaibhav Suryavanshi was dismissed for four.

MP then rode on an unbeaten 55 by skipper Rajat Patidar and an 83 by opener Harsh Gawali to go past the

target in just 25.1 overs for a six-wicket win.

Brief scores: Group C: Ahmedabad: Mumbai: 382/4 in 50 overs lost to Karnataka: 383/3 in 46.2 overs by 7 wickets.

Group A: Jaipur: Assam: 257/9 in 50 overs lost to Jharkhand: 261/3 in 44.3 overs by 7 wickets.

Group E: Hyderabad: Baroda: 302/7 in 50 overs beat Tripura: 210 all out in 44.4 overs by 92 runs.

Group E: Hyderabad: Bihar: 196 all out in 46.4 overs lost to Madhya Pradesh: 197/4 in 25.1 overs by 6 wickets.

Group E: Hyderabad: Delhi: 272/7 in 50 overs lost to Bengal: 274/4 in 41.3 overs by 6 wickets. (PTI)

Soccer's top players have had enough, as FIFA's new super-sized tournament sparks revolt

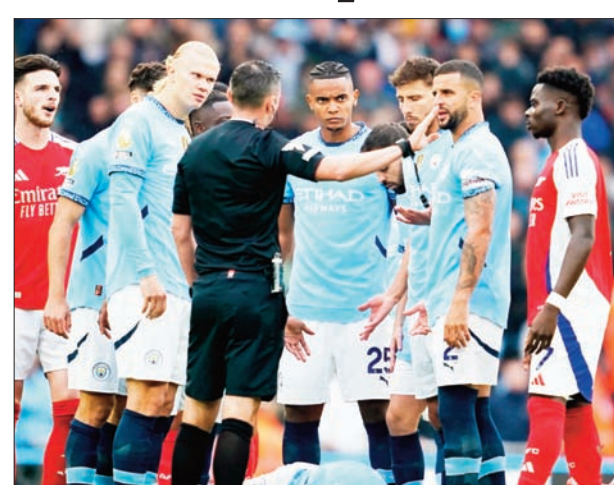
MANCHESTER, Dec 21: One of the most striking moments of soccer in 2024 was when Rodri hobbled onto a stage in Paris on crutches to receive the prestigious Ballon d'Or for best male player of the year.

The Manchester City and Spain midfielder had been one of the most outspoken critics against the increasingly congested soccer calendar, warning that the lack of downtime was detrimental to players' performance and health. Then, just a month before the Oct. 28 award ceremony, he tore his ACL during a seemingly routine run in a Premier League game against Arsenal.

Though such injuries have occurred throughout the history of the sport and aren't necessarily linked to overplaying, Rodri's season-ending injury became a visual representation of the physical toll of modern soccer at a time when the busy match schedule is facing legal challenges and the possibility of strike action.

Top footballers are now routinely playing more than 60 games per season for club and country, while the game is getting faster and more intense. Injuries are on the rise. Already pushed to their limits, some players say FIFA's newly expanded Club World Cup, to be held in the United States next year, is the last straw.

Players say they are "at breaking point, that they are at the limit, that it's actually too much," Alexander Bielefeld, from global players' union FIFPRO, told The As-



sociated Press.

The new Club World Cup is a super-sized version of what used to be a short tournament with only seven teams. The new edition includes 32 teams from around the world and will be held every four years, starting next summer in the United States from June 14 to July 13. As its name suggests, it's envisioned to be club version of the World Cup for national teams.

That means top players will have a monthlong tournament on top of their domestic league season three out of every four years. With more games also added to the Champions League in Europe this season as well as the next World Cup in 2026, the soccer calendar is filling up quickly.

"It's something that worries us because we are the guys who suffer," Rodri said in September, just days before he was injured. He said players may have no choice but to refuse to play if the trend con-

tinues. FIFPRO says a significant number of players routinely play 60-70 matches a season. The union's recommended limit is 55.

Last season Julian Alvarez played 75 games for former club Manchester City and Argentina in 10 different competitions spanning the Premier League, Champions League, Copa America and Olympics.

The season before, Manchester United midfielder Bruno Fernandes played 70 times, including a run of 20 consecutive games.

The Men's European Football Injury Index, an annual report by global insurance broker Howden, found there were 4,123 injuries in the top divisions of England, Spain, Germany, Italy and France last season. It said the number of injuries had risen year-on-year since the index was first published in 2021 and that "it would be fair to expect a continuation of this upwards trajectory."

Tony Strudwick, medical director for West Bromwich Albion and former head of performance for Manchester United, said injuries are on the rise despite advancements in sports science and medicine.

"That to me looks like there's a mismatch between what the players can physically tolerate and what they've been exposed to," he told The AP. "During the last eight seasons, incidents of hamstring injuries, in particular, have increased."

Strudwick said the risk of too many games was ultimately injury and burnout. But he said players are unlikely to raise the issue with their clubs or national teams.

"Players are very reluctant to say they don't want to play and they're very, very tired. It takes a relatively brave person to do that," he said.

Manchester City played 61 games in the 2022-23 campaign when it won a trophy treble of the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup. This season that number could rise to 71 because of an expanded group stage and potential playoff in the Champions League and the Club World Cup.

A heavy workload is also an issue in women's soccer, FIFPRO said earlier this week, though it noted that while some top players have a packed schedule, others don't get to play enough.

If successful, the Club World Cup could rival the Premier League and Champions League as one of the most lucrative and watched tournaments in club soccer. (AP)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, P.W.D. (B&NH)
DIPHU BUILDING CIRCLE

No.SEBC/TECH/RJQ/35/2024-25/05 Dated Diphu the 17th December 2024

Detail Notice Inviting Bid

The Superintending Engineer, P.W.D. (B&NH), Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites bid for the following works from APWD (Building) Registered eligible contractors having experience of similar nature of works.

Details of bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website i.e. www.assamtenders.gov.in
The bidders must be enrolled in www.assamtenders.gov.in

Sl. No.	Name of Work	LAC	District	Bid Security drawn in favour of	Approx value of work (Bid value in Lakh)	Completion Period	Bid Security	Cost of Bid (in Rs.)
1	Construction of Diphu Residential Judicial Quarter, at Diphu, Dist. Karbi Anglong, Assam	Diphu	Karbi Anglong	E.E, Karbi Anglong District Territorial Building Division, Diphu.	Rs. 8,12,99,196.26	18 Months (Eighteen Months)	2 % of Bid value for General category and 1% of Bid value for Reserved category	Rs. 5000

The Bidders may submit bid for be work as follows:

- The Contractors / Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system provider for participating in the bidding process. The Bidding document may be downloaded through the P.W.D portal assamtenders.gov.in by using own user ID.
- Online submission of Technical & Financial Bid is mandatory. Manual submission of Technical Bid (without online submission) of bid will be considered as non-responsive. Bidders are to submit the required papers for technical bid by scanning and uploading the same before the expiry of the sequence- 'Bid submission' in the activity schedule mentioned below at S1-4.
- The bidder shall submit the Cost of the bid document by online method through net banking or RTGS/NEFT as per office memorandum no. FEB.269/2017/27 dtd: 21st August'2019 (copy enclosed) and bid security/EMD through an Interest-bearing instrument in Account No.100223860075, IFSC Code- INDB0000001, INDUSIND BANK, DIPHU BRANCH in favour of EE, PWD KA Dist. Territorial Building Division Diphu.
- The bidder shall submit the Trading License/ Temporary Trading permit and P/Tax issued by the Department of Taxation KAAC, Diphu vide KAAC Notification No. KAAC/Tax/Miscellaneous/2022-23/24/86 Dated. 20.11.2023. Diphu which will be a part bidding document.
- The activity schedule for tendering process of the above-mentioned packages shall be as per the schedule shown below.

Stage No	APWD Stage	Start		End	
		Date	Time	Date	Time
1	Publishing Date	17.12.2024	04:00 PM	05.01.2025	12:00 PM
2	Download of Tender	17.12.2024	05:00 PM	05.01.2025	12:00 PM
3	Bid Submission (online)	18.12.2024	11:00 AM	06.01.2025	12:00 PM
4	Technical Bid Opening	08.01.2025	01:00 P.M		
5	Financial Bid Opening	TO BE NOTIFIED LATER			

Pre bid Meeting will be held as per following time & venue.

Starting Date & Time	Closing Time	Venue
21/12/2024 13:00 hrs	16.00 hrs.	O/o the Superintending Engineer, P.W.D (B&NH), Diphu Building Circle, Diphu

- In the event of any holiday in the sequence of the Activity Schedule, the activities will take place on the next working day.
- Original Copy of the following documents must be submitted within 48 hours after the last date and time of online submission at the office chamber of the undersigned along with the hard copy of the technical bid.
 - Original Power of Attorney for signing the BID.
 - Scan copy of online payment receipt of Cost of bid & BID Securities.
 - Original copy of banker certificate for Credit facility.
- A hard copy of the technical bid submitted online is to be submitted up to **07.01.2025 up to 2:00 PM**. For any discrepancy between the online bid and the hard copy of the bid, the online bid will govern and will be considered for evaluation.
- Bidders are advised to scan their Technical Papers at 100 dpi (In Black & White mode) in pdf format for multiple pages with maximum file size of 5MB. If numbers of pages exceed, the bidders are advised to create multiple files and upload the same in c-procurement website www.assamtenders.gov.in only. For any assistance for Online Bidding, Bidders may write to assamtenders.gov.in
- The Detail Notice Inviting bid will be a part of the bidding Documents.
- Survey Report of work location and geotagged photograph duly signed by the EE, KADT Building Division, Diphu to be submitted along with the tender documents.
- The bidder must have experience in Installation of 5 MVA with sub-station under KANCH Electrical Circle.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer, P.W.D.(B&NH)
Diphu Building Circle, Diphu

Memo No. SEBC/TECH/RJQ/35/2024-25/05-A

Dated Diphu the 17th December 2024.

Jadeja urges top-order to fire in Boxing Day Test

MELBOURNE, Dec 21: Star India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja on Saturday said lack of runs from the top-order builds pressure on the lower-order and called for an improved performance from the batting unit in the Boxing Day Test here.

Jadeja played a crucial role in the rain-hit third Test against Australia at Brisbane, scoring a gritty 77 in the first innings to help India secure a draw.

"Top-order runs are very important when you play outside India, especially in Australia and South Africa. When the top order doesn't score runs, the responsibility and pressure increase on the lower order," Jadeja said during an interaction at the MCG.

"Hopefully, the top-order and the middle-order do well in this Test. As a team, we need the top order to perform. If everyone contributes in the batting unit, the team will do well."

India's top-order struggled in Brisbane, barring opener KL Rahul, who scored a valiant 84. The rest of the top and middle order crumbled, but Jadeja, playing his first match of the tour, kept India afloat.

The match was eventually saved by the last-wicket stand between Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep, who produced a heroic partnership to avoid the follow-on.

While Washington Sundar was preferred in the opening Test in Perth, Ravichandran Ashwin featured in the second Test in Adelaide. Jadeja said missing the first two matches worked to his advantage as it allowed him to acclimatize to the conditions and prepare for the Gabba Test.

"I got a nice few days to understand and get used to the conditions. I was here so many days, I used to bowl and bat on the tracks here. I got more familiar with the conditions here," he said.



"All my handwork in the nets helped me in the match and I played as per my plans."

India had secured a massive 295-run win at Perth, but Australia levelled the series with a commanding 10-wicket victory in the Pink Ball Test at Adelaide.

With the series tied 1-1, India needs just

one win in the remaining matches to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Jadeja emphasized the significance of the Boxing Day Test.

"It's good that we are 1-1 after three Tests. The next two games will be very interesting too. If we win even one Test, we'll retain the

trophy because we won the last two series. "It's a good opportunity to make that one good effort. We'll see what happens in the last match but this is a very important and crucial match for us."

The Brisbane Test also witnessed the retirement of veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, a decision that took Jadeja by surprise.

"I got to know about it at the last moment, almost five minutes before the press conference," Jadeja said.

"Someone told me it was about to happen. We spent the whole day together, and he didn't even give me a hint. I got to know at the last minute. We all know how Ashwin's mind works."

Ashwin retired with an illustrious record of 537 Test wickets at an average of 24 and 3,503 runs, including six centuries. He also claimed 156 wickets in ODIs and 72 in T20Is.

Describing Ashwin as his mentor, Jadeja said: "He played like my on-field mentor. We have been playing together for so many years as bowling partners. We kept passing messages to each other on the field regarding the match situation. I will miss all these things."

Jadeja and Ashwin shared a fruitful partnership in Tests, combining for 587 wickets across 58 matches.

Following Ashwin's retirement, Jadeja expressed hope that the team could find a suitable replacement.

"Hopefully, the Indian team gets a better all-rounder and bowler. It's not like nobody can replace a player. Everyone goes, but you get the replacement," he said.

"We have to move on. We will have to move on. It is a good opportunity for youngsters to grab the opportunity." (PTI)

Ashwin's wife pens heartfelt tribute after his sudden retirement



CHENNAI, Dec 21: Ravichandran Ashwin's wife Prithi Narayanan has penned a heartfelt tribute for her husband following his recent retirement from international cricket, saying "it is time to set the burden of being you down" and embrace life beyond the game.

Ashwin made a surprise announcement of his retirement after the drawn third Test at Brisbane. The veteran off-spinner picked up just one wicket during the tour, including the 10-wicket loss at Adelaide.

The 38-year-old retired with a stellar record of 537 Test wickets at an average of 24, in addition to scoring 3,503 runs, including six centuries. He also claimed 156 wickets in ODIs and 72 in T20Is.

Describing her tribute as a "Love letter from a fan girl", Prithi wrote on Instagram: "Dear Ashwin, from not knowing how to put a kit bag together to following you to stadiums all over the world, rooting for you, watching you and learning from you, it has been an absolute pleasure. The world you introduced me to gave me the privilege to watch and enjoy a sport that I love from close quarters."

"It also showed me how much passion, hardwork and discipline is needed to keep your head above water. And sometimes even that is not enough. I remember us talking about why you, R Ashwin, had to do all of this and a lot more to even stay relevant in the scheme of things."

Ashwin, who debuted in 2011 against the West Indies, earned a reputation for his relentless pursuit of excellence. His near-equal tally of 269 wickets against right-handers and 268 against left-handers

highlights his versatility.

"How awards, the best of stats, the POMS, the accolades, the records didn't matter if you didn't sharpen your skill sets constantly and did not put in the work. Sometimes, nothing is enough," Prithi continued.

"As you end your wonderful international run, I only want to tell you that it's all good. It is all going to be good. It is time to set the burden of being you down. Live life on your terms, make space for those extra calories, make time for your family, make time to do absolutely nothing, share memes all day, create a new bowling variation, bug our kids out of their minds. Just do it all."

Prithi, who has been a constant companion on Ashwin's cricketering journey, reflected on his meticulous approach to his craft.

"When I saw Ashwin's PC, I thought of small and big moments. Many many memories over the last 13-14 years. The big wins, the MOS awards, the quiet silence in our room after an intense game, the sound of the shower running for much longer than usual on some evenings post play, the scratch of pencil over paper as he scribbled thoughts down, the constant streaming of footage videos when he is making a game plan, the calm of meditative breathing before leaving for each game, certain songs playing on repeat while he unwinds."

"The times we wept in joy - after the CT final, after the MCG win, after the Sydney draw, The Gabba win, after making a comeback in T20s...the times we sat in silence and the times when we had our hearts broken," she wrote. (PTI)

Pulin Das Memorial Open Prize Money Sports Quiz on Dec 29

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Dec 21: The seventh edition of the Pulin Das Memorial Open Prize-Money Sports Quiz Competition - 2024, organised by the Guwahati Tennis Association (GTA) will be held at the auditorium of NAP Cultural Complex for Performing Arts, Guwahati (behind Kamrup Academy School) on December 29. This year, the organising committee is also introducing a new initiative, a Written Sports Quiz Competition for school children till class twelve, which is designed to fuel passion for sports while challenging young minds to showcase their knowledge of sports, players and iconic moments. The competition is sponsored by Pride-East Entertainment Private Limited.

The preliminary screening and selection round will be held at 11.00 AM at the same venue. The three winning teams of open sports quiz competition will receive a cash award of ₹ 12,000/-, ₹ 8,000/- and ₹ 6,000/- and the fourth, fifth and sixth team will receive ₹ 2,000/- while the three winning teams of school quiz competition will receive ₹ 2,000/-, ₹ 1,500/- and ₹ 1,000/- respectively. Any team comprising two members are eligible to take part in the competition. The quiz will be conducted by renowned quiz masters Dipankar Kaushik and Dilip Sarma. General Secretary of GTA, Bhaskar Sarma informed in a press release that the teams intending to participate may contact 7896008890, 7086335011 and 9101264498.

Anmolpreet smashes fastest List A hundred by an Indian as Punjab beat Arunachal Pradesh

AHMEDABAD, Dec 21: Anmolpreet Singh smashed the quickest List A hundred by an Indian, a 35-ball effort, to guide Punjab to an easy nine-wicket win over Arunachal Pradesh in a Group C Vijay Hazare match here on Saturday.

Anmolpreet, who went unsold in the recent IPL auction, broke the record of former India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan, who had scored a hundred off 40 balls for Baroda against Maharashtra in 2009-10.

This knock is also the third fastest List A hundred behind Aussie Jake-Fraser McGurk, who smashed a 29-ball ton for South Australia against Tasmania in 2023-24, and South African AB de Villiers' 31-ball hundred against the West Indies at Johannesburg in 2014-15.

The right-handed Anmolpreet made 115 off 45 balls (12x4, 9x6) as Punjab chased down a target of 165 in just 12.5 overs, reaching 167 for one.

After the early fall of skipper Abhishek Sharma (10), Anmolpreet and Prabhsimran Singh (35 not out, 25b) milked 153 runs for the unbroken second wicket alliance to guide Punjab home.

Earlier, Arunachal were bowled out for 164 with pacer Ashwani Kumar and leg-spinner Mayank Markande taking three wickets apiece.

Brief scores: Arunachal Pradesh: 164 all out in 48.4 overs (Tech Neri 42, Hardik Varma 38; Ashwani Kumar 3/37, Mayank Markande 3/31) lost to Punjab: 167/1 in 12.5 overs (Anmolpreet Singh 115 not out) by 9 wickets. (PTI)



Khel Maharan 2.0 begins in Kokrajhar

HT Bureau



KOKRAJHAR, Dec 21: The LAC-level Khel Maharan 2.0 of the Baukhangri Legislative Assembly Constituency commenced on Saturday at the Kokrajhar District Sports Association (KDSA) Stadium playground in Kokrajhar district. The event was inaugurated by Kokrajhar East LAC MLA Lawrence Isary, in the presence of officials and members of the sports fraternity. Various sporting events, including athletics, football, volleyball, kabaddi, cycling, and chess, are being organised across three venues: the KDSA Stadium, SAI Kokrajhar, and the Kashibari Sayamaya playground.

Players from 29 Village Council Development Committees (VDCs) under the Baukhangri Assembly Constituency are participating in the competition. The event aims to promote sportsmanship, nurture talent, and encourage community engagement through sports in the region.

1st Women ODI: In-form India hold all aces against West Indies

VADODARA, Dec 21: India will be eager to exploit their recent form and a historical advantage to subdue the West Indies in the three-match Women ODI series, beginning here with the first contest on Sunday.

India notched up their first home T20I series win in over five years with a 2-1 victory over the Caribbean in Mumbai earlier this week. Dating back to 2017, India also hold a significant 4-1 head-to-head lead over the Windies in ODIs.

The lone worry for India will be the fitness of regular skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who missed the last two T20Is with a knee niggle.

Smriti Mandhana led India in Harmanpreet's absence and she made a strong impression too in the T20Is, striking three fifties in a row.

The graceful left-hander will be keen to continue in the same vein in the one-dayers as well. Her form in the last 10 ODIs is outstanding, scor-

ing 599 runs at an average of 60 while striking at 98. But India's batting has more depth to it beyond these two seasoned players.

Jemimah Rodrigues has shown signs of returning to her run-making ways, and Richa Ghosh showed her ability to rip apart a bowling unit with a breezy fifty in the third T20I.

The addition of Tejal Hasabnis and Harleen Deol will add some more meat to the middle-order.

India's bowling unit has a fine blend of youth and experience and they could be a handy force in the newly-constructed Kotambi Stadium here, which is hosting its first international match. The likes of Deepti Sharma, who has taken 15 wickets in her last 10 matches, Renuka Singh and Saima Thakor can rattle the West Indies on an unfamiliar pitch. India will also have the option of fielding the impressive young pacer Titas Sadhu here.

West Indies' biggest hopes to

counter a strong Indian bowling unit will be skipper Hayley Matthews and veterans Deandra Dottin and Shemaine Campbelle. Matthews' seven matches this season have produced 308 runs at an average of 45.

But the visiting bowlers will have to raise their game several notches to stop a strong Indian batting line-up.

Squads: India: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Pratika Rawal, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Richa Ghosh (WK), Uma Chetry (WK), Tejal Hasabnis, Deepti Sharma, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Tanuja Kanwer, Titas Sadhu, Saima Thakor, Renuka Singh Thakor.

West Indies: Hayley Matthews (c), Shemaine Campbelle (vc), Aaliyah Alleyne, Shamilia Connell, Nerissa Crafton, Deandra Dottin, Afy Fletcher, Shabika Gajabi, Chinelle Henry, Zaida James, Qiana Joseph, Mandy Mangru, Ashmini Munisar, Karishma Ranharack, Rashada Williams. (PTI)

Hockey in 2024: Consecutive Olympic medals, Sreejesh, HIL make headlines

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: Back-to-back Olympic medals after a hiatus of 50 years and the revival of the much-awaited HIL lit up the year for Indian hockey which also saw one of its biggest stars walk into sunset after a glorious career.

With their third-place finish in the Paris Olympics this summer, the Harmanpreet Singh-led men's team proved that the historic bronze in the Tokyo Games three years ago was not a flash in the pan.

The medal ensured the legendary PR Sreejesh, one of the team's biggest pillars for nearly two decades, got the send-off he deserved after he decided to retire from the sport. That he is now associated with the junior teams bodes well for Indian hockey as it seeks more success in the coming times.

Before Tokyo and Paris, the last time the Indian hockey team won successive Olympic medals was at 1968 Mexico City and 1972 Munich Games.

Under chief coach Craig Fulton, the Indians had to alter their playing style, concentrating more on defence and relying on counters to build fast-paced at-

tacks, and the players embraced the approach before the big event came calling.

The Indians played fearless hockey throughout the Games and the win against Great Britain in the quarter-finals, with 10 men, was a reflection of the players' mental toughness.

India played with a man less for nearly 43 minutes and eventually won the match in shoot-out thanks to resolute defending and PR Sreejesh's brilliance under the bar to progress to a second straight Olympic semifinals.

It was not just about defending, Fulton's team also showed their attacking prowess to stun mighty Australia 3-2 in their final pool game, ending a 52-year wait for a win over the formidable Kookaburras in the Olympics.

That victory held great significance as it came against a side which mauled them 5-0 in a Test series Down Under earlier this year.

India's hopes of playing an Olympic final were dashed by Germany in a close contest but, within 24 hours, they regrouped and beat Spain 2-1 to clinch another podium finish, showing signs of a



bright future.

Many stars sparkled and some new ones emerged in the year gone by but none can come close to what old warhorse Harmanpreet and Sreejesh did

for the team. The duo complemented each other on the field and played a massive role in the team's success.

While Sreejesh was as solid as ever in front of the post in his final hurrah, Har-

manpreet was sturdy in the backline and ferocious with his dragflicks, finishing as the top scorer in Paris with 10 strikes from eight games.

Harmanpreet's exploits throughout the year, especially in Paris, won him his third FIH Male Hockey Player of the Year award.

Among women, young Deepika emerged as a bright spot in 2024 and she not only is a fine striker but also a potent dragflicker.

Nicknamed 'The Wall of Indian hockey', Sreejesh has worked on his craft every day to become one of the world's top goalkeepers. So when he announced his decision to retire after the Games just after reaching Paris, it came as a shock for the entire sports fraternity.

In his final hurrah also, he never put a foot wrong, making saves after saves to keep India in the hunt.

The much-anticipated revival of the Hockey India League after a gap of seven years was the icing on the cake for the national sport as the event has been the biggest feeder line for players in the past, producing stars like Harmanpreet, Manpreet Singh and many others.

The league also provides young Indian players the chance to rub shoulders with the best of world hockey.

This year the HIL has come in a new look with the introduction of a four-team women's event alongside eight-team men's league. While the men's league will be held in Rourkela from December 28, the women will play in Ranchi from January 12.

Another big retirement of the year was that of the undisputed queen of Indian women's hockey, Rani Rampal, which brought the curtains down on a 14-year long illustrious career.

The lowest point came at the beginning of the year when the women's team failed to qualify for the Paris Games through the Olympic Qualifiers in Ranchi. It led to widespread changes in the team, with stalwart Harendra Singh taking over the coaching duties from Janneke Schopman.

But the year ended on a good note for both the men and women as they claimed the Asian Champions Trophy titles in Hulburi, China and Raigir, Bihar respectively, raising hopes of a bright future. (PTI)