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- Qatar says Israel-Hamas ceasefire to go into effect at 8:30 am on Sunday
- 'Spirit of Cinema & Sports' mini-festival celebrates films as driver of India-UK ties
- Delhi polls: AIMIM, BSP step up campaign with street plays, wall paintings
- Nitish Kumar govt's caste survey was to befool Bihar people, alleges Rahul Gandhi

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India, US seal pact to enhance cooperation in cybercrime investigations

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Days before it hands over power to President-elect Donald Trump, the Biden administration signed a pact with New Delhi that provides for boosting cooperation in combating cybercrime and related challenges such as terror financing and violent extremism.

The agreement on cybercrime investigations, signed in Washington on Friday, allows the agencies concerned of the two countries to step up the level of cooperation with respect to cyber threat intelligence and digital forensics, according to an Indian readout.

It is the second such move in the last few days by the outgoing Biden administration that reflected the overall upward trajectory of relations between the two nations. The US on Wednesday removed restrictions on three Indian nuclear entities -- Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Centre (IGCAR) and the Indian Rare Earths (IRE).

The lifting of the restrictions is aimed at implementation of the



historic India-US civil nuclear deal sealed around 16 years ago.

The Memorandum of Understanding or MoU on cybercrime investigations was signed by Indian Ambassador Vinay Kwatra and Acting US Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Kristie Cane-gallo. "Cybercrime has intricate linkages with the common security challenges faced by India and the US such as terrorism and violent extremism, terror financing, drug

trafficking, organised crime, human trafficking, illegal migration, money laundering and transportation security," the MEA said in the readout. "The MoU on cybercrime investigations will enable further strengthening of India-US security cooperation, as part of our comprehensive and global strategic partnership," it said.

From New Delhi, the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) of the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ex-gratia cheques given to families of those killed, trapped in Umrangso coal mine

'The dewatering process in the mine is still going on'

GUWAHATI, Jan 18: Ex-gratia cheques were on Saturday given to families of miners whose bodies have been recovered and those still trapped in the flooded Umrangso coal mine, even as the dewatering process of the mine continued.

Assam Mines and Minerals minister Kaushik Rai handed over the cheque of ₹ 10 lakh each to the next of kin of the four miners whose bodies have been recovered. The families of the five miners who remained trapped inside the mine were given cheques of ₹ 6 lakh, with the remaining amount to be handed to them later, an official statement said.

The coal mine in Kalamati area of Umrangso in Dima Hasao district was flooded on January six when water had gushed in suddenly, trapping nine workers inside. Four bodies have been recovered since then in the rescue operations. The



state Cabinet had decided on Thursday that the ex-gratia of ₹ 10 lakh will be given to the next of kin of all nine miners, including those whose bodies have been recovered and those who remained trapped. An amount of ₹ 6 lakh has been given

from the Assam Chief Minister's Relief Fund and the remaining ₹ 4 lakh from the Assam State Disaster Management Authority.

Speaking at the cheque distribution programme held at Umrangso police station premise, Rai con-

veyed condolences to the bereaved families on behalf of the chief minister. "It is really painful that such an unfortunate incident has occurred where lives have been lost. Although value of life is immeasurable and the ex-gratia that we are offering today is nothing in comparison to lives lost, the small amount is only to support the bereaved families and show our solidarity," he said.

The minister said the dewatering process in the mine is still going on and that around 1 crore litre of water is extracted daily.

He added that as per another Cabinet decision, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) is being constituted to enquire into the entire incident on the basis of the FIR already registered on the matter.

The Assam Cabinet had also announced a judicial enquiry into the incident. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amit Shah orders inter-ministerial team to investigate Rajouri deaths

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Union Home Minister Amit Shah has ordered the constitution of an inter-ministerial team to visit a village in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district to ascertain the causes of deaths in three incidents in the past six weeks.

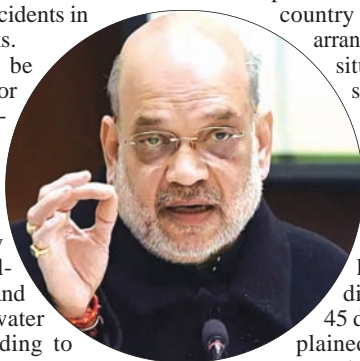
The team will be headed by a senior Union home ministry officer and consist of experts from the ministries of health and family welfare, agriculture, chemicals and fertilisers, and water resources, according to an official statement.

The team will also be assisted by experts from the animal husbandry, food safety and forensic science labs. The central team will proceed on Sunday and, in collaboration with the local administration, also

work on providing immediate relief as well as taking precautionary measures to prevent such incidents in the future, according to the statement. Experts from some of the most reputable institutions in the country have been arranged to manage the situation and understand the causes of the deaths.

At least 16 people have died of a mysterious illness in the Budhal village of Rajouri district in the past 45 days. People complained of fever, pain, nausea and loss of consciousness before dying within days of their admission to hospitals. A girl continues to remain critical.

Earlier, a Jammu and Kashmir government spokesperson said investigations (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Renowned dignitaries voice concern against minority treatment in B'desh

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 18: Former Judge of Gauhati High Court Ajit Borthakur has expressed concern over the hostile situation prevailing in the neighbouring state of Bangladesh.

Speaking as the chief guest during a panel discussion on the topic named 'Violation of human rights laws against Hindus and other religious minorities' organised by Adhivakta Parishad, Jorhat district unit, at the Jorhat Law College on Saturday, Borthakur highlighted that the rights guaranteed under the Constitution of Bangladesh for protection of citizens are now in question.

"Incidents of the kind prevailing in Bangladesh are not at all acceptable, especially in a civilised world. The global community has taken note of it and is keeping a close watch," Borthakur stated citing the recent affairs in the state against the Hindu community and other religious minorities under the present caretaker government as a matter of concern. On the other hand, Monishankar Dutta, assistant professor of the Department of Juridical Studies, Dibrugarh University, in his address, emphasised on historical background regarding human rights violations in Bangladesh.

Stating that this is not the first time that atrocities against Hindus have been committed, Dutta said, "Every citizen has a right to get legal aid and engage a lawyer of his own choice to represent himself before the judiciary."

Dutta was also the guest of honour at the event.

Earlier, Kuldeep Baishya, state general secretary of Adhivakta Parishad, said that the event was not merely a discussion on the issue, but a call for the protection of human lives and a protest against ongoing gross human rights violation of Hindus and other religious minorities in Bangladesh at present.

Bankim Sarma, state vice-president of the lawyers' body, in his address, too expressed anguish over the prevailing situation in Bangladesh over the attacks on Hindus and other religious groups.

Monu Baruah, president of the Jorhat district unit of Adhivakta Parishad, gave his presidential remark, while Angshuman Baruah, general secretary of the Jorhat district unit of the body, offered the vote of thanks.

Meanwhile, S Keyel, zonal secretary of Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad, also attended the programme.

Modi wanted to throw away Constitution, but ended up bowing before it: Rahul



PATNA, Jan 18: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had harboured a wish to "throw away" the Constitution, but ended up bowing before it after the BJP's below-expectation performance in the Lok Sabha polls.

The Leader of the Opposition made the charge at a 'Samvidhan Suraksha Sammelan' here while mimicking the PM, evoking peals of laughter from the

crowds. Holding a copy of the Constitution close to his head, Gandhi said, "When Modiji entered Parliament after winning a third term, he did like this. He wanted to throw the Constitution away. But our concerted fight made him give up his boast of a 400-plus seat win for the BJP."

Notably, remarks by a few BJP leaders that the Constitution might be "changed" if the party won more than 400 seats in the 543-strong Lok Sabha were latched on by the opposition INDIA bloc, led by Congress, in last year's general elections.

According to many surveys, the refrain "Constitution in danger" had resonated with a section of Dalits and backward classes who felt reservations could be done away with and refused to vote overwhelmingly in favour of the BJP-led NDA, causing the saffron party to fall short of majority and becoming heavily dependent on allies.

Gandhi, who spoke for a little over 30 minutes, also linked the Constitution with a long chain of progressive ideas in the country, starting from the Buddha, and continuing till the times of newer icons like Ambedkar, Narayana Guru (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

One killed, several injured as school bus overturns in Dima Hasao

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Jan 18: A 10-year-old class 3 student lost her life, and several others were injured after a school bus overturned in the Dima Hasao district on Saturday, an official said.

The incident occurred between 8:00 and 8:30 AM near the 19 KM area under Umrangso Police Station in Dima Hasao district.

In an official statement, Debojit Borah, field officer of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), said that the student, identified as Dalimar Ronghangpi, died on the spot due to the impact.

"Six students sustained severe injuries and were immediately transported to Hojai Ham Hospital for urgent medical attention. The injured students are Arklingson Hanse, 9 years old; Felyha Chingthongpi, 10 years old; Sarmukrang Terang, 8 years old; Divya Ronghangpi, 15 years old; Ruplin Engtipi, 17 years old and Malyn Teronpti, 18 years old," Borah added.

He further stated that 16 students suffered minor injuries. Some received medical attention, while others were treated on-site. A thorough investigation is underway to determine the cause of the accident, and authorities are taking all necessary measures to prevent such incidents in the future.

RG Kar verdict

Kolkata court pronounces accused Sanjay Roy guilty of rape-murder of on-duty medic

KOLKATA, Jan 18: A Kolkata court on Saturday found Sanjay Roy guilty of raping and murdering an on-duty doctor at the state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, a heinous crime that ignited nationwide outrage and led to prolonged protests.

The Sealdah court, where Roy's trial was held, will announce his sentence on Monday. Additional District and Sessions Judge Anirban Das said. The verdict was delivered nearly two months after the in-camera trial began in November 2024, and 162 days after the brutal crime on August 9, 2024.

Roy, arrested a day after the crime, was found guilty under Sections 64 (rape), 66 (punishment for causing death), and 103(1) (murder) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Section 103(1) carries a possible punishment of death or life imprisonment. The judge stated that Roy was found guilty of sexually assaulting the doctor and strangling her to death, and that the CBI had proven all the charges against him.

Das noted that Roy had entered the hospital around 4 am and attacked the

on-duty doctor while she was asleep in the seminar room of the hospital.

"You sexually assaulted the doctor. You throttled her and covered her face and she ultimately died owing to the attack," he said.

"On the basis of these allegations, charges were framed against you under Sections 64, 66 and 103(1) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). On the basis of the statements of the witnesses and the documents produced in this matter, your guilt has been proved and you are being pronounced guilty," the judge said.

Das said Roy's statement will be heard at 12:30 pm on Monday, and the sentence will be pronounced thereafter.

At the time of the delivery of the verdict, Roy claimed in court that he was framed. In his defense, Roy said, "I wear rudrakash necklace, and if I had committed the crime, it would have snapped." Following the verdict, Roy was escorted under strict police security to the Presidency Correctional Home, preventing waiting media persons from speaking to him.

(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Census indicates increase of avian guests at Pobitora

MORIGAN, Jan 18: A waterbird census was conducted at Assam's Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary on Saturday, with initial estimates indicating an increase in the number of avian visitors, an official said.

Pranjal Baruah, the regional forest officer of the sanctuary, said the survey was carried out by the forest department in collaboration with NGOs, experts and local people.

"The sanctuary was divided into 10 zones and a total of 12 teams completed the bird count. Compared to the last count of around 8,000 birds from 56 species in 2023-2024, this year's count has identified around 10,000 birds," Baruah said. "This initial estimate indicates an increase in bird population and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP, Congress to clash with Constitution-Ambedkar rallies, campaigns over next few days in MP

BHOPAL, Jan 18: Top leaders of the BJP and Congress will take part in several programmes in Madhya Pradesh related to the Constitution over the next few days as both parties continue their acrimonious political fight over the apex document and its chief architect Babasaheb Ambedkar.

For the ruling BJP, Union ministers Amit Shah, JP Nadda, Nitin Gadkari among others will address rallies from January 20-21 under the party's 'Samvidhan Gaurav Abhiyan', with a leader telling PTI on Saturday that the dates of these visits will be finalised soon.

The BJP launched Samvidhan Gaurav Abhiyan in MP on January 11. The Congress will hold a mega rally on January 27 in Mhow, the birthplace of Babasaheb Ambed-

kar, near Indore, in which party president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will participate.

The Congress' rally in Mhow will launch its 'Jai Babu-Jai Bhim-Jai Samvidhan' campaign with the aim of saving the Constitution and people's rights. AICC general secretary in charge of MP and Assam political affairs Jitendra Singh had said last week.

Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891 in the military cantonment of Mhow, now officially known as Dr Ambedkar Nagar. "Under the Samvidhan Gaurav Abhiyan, several programmes are being held and senior leaders will take part. The campaign will end on January 25," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Few countries can tell the world that they have Met services 150 years old' Strong Met services key to development, India model for developing countries: WMO chief

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: India is very well positioned in terms of the quality of climate services and it understands the critical role of strong meteorological services in the development agenda, World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) chief Celeste Saulo has said.

Saulo told PTI in an interview here that meteorological and climate services play a critical role in all sectors of the economy, including logistics, transportation, tourism, energy and agriculture.

However, she also pointed out that unlike India, many developing countries have not yet fully integrated these

services into their various sectors.

Highlighting the role of weather services in renewable energy, Saulo said, "If you think about renewables -- wind, solar and hydro -- they all depend on weather. Energy transition needs a strong Met service. While India understands the critical role of the Met service in the whole development agenda, many developing country colleagues are not there yet."

"India is very well positioned in terms of the quality of the meteorological and climate services that they provide, thanks to the India Meteorological Department," said Saulo, who at-



tended the IMD's 150th year celebrations here.

She said the IMD turning 150 is a unique achievement.

"Few countries can tell the world that they have Met

services 150 years old. This speaks of history but it's also a policy within the country that understands that new technology and climate are important. You need to invest in them," she said.

Underscoring the broader economic implications of accurate weather forecasts, she said, "The value of good weather prediction is huge for investors, businesses, productivity, logistics, trans-

portation, tourism (and) everything. Can you think of an activity that is not impacted by weather?"

"What we need to put in the agenda is the role of Met services in the decision-making that impacts the economy and the sustainability of the economy of every single country, and that is particularly relevant for the developing world," she added. Saulo stressed that failing to integrate weather data into decision-making processes is a missed opportunity for growth.

"If you don't use weather information in your decision-making process, you lose (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM distributes over 65 lakh SVAMITVA property cards

The initiative will bolster economic activities and alleviate poverty

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday distributed more than 65 lakh property cards under the SVAMITVA scheme, and said it will bolster economic activities and help in poverty alleviation.

The Prime Minister virtually addressed the event and also interacted with some beneficiaries.

He also said rural land digitisation is "furthering rural empowerment by leveraging the power of technology and good governance".

The property cards are being distributed to beneficiaries across more than 50,000 villages in 10 states -- Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and two Union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

Modi said the scheme will help people get loans and benefits of other government schemes.

"Around 2.24 crore beneficiaries in villages will now have SVAMITVA property cards after 65 lakh cards are distributed today," the Prime Minister said.

"Property rights are a major challenge across the world. Years ago, the United Nations had led a study, which revealed people did not have legal documents for property rights in several countries. The UN has said property rights are im-



portant for poverty alleviation," he said. Modi said an eminent economist had opined that property in villages is a "dead capital" because people cannot do anything with it, and it can't help increase their income.

"India was also impacted by this challenge. People in villages have property worth lakhs of crores (of rupees), but they do not have papers for it. There were disputes, properties were snatched, and even banks did not provide loans over it," he said.

The Prime Minister emphasised that no sensitive government could leave its villagers in such distress.

"Previous governments should have taken steps to do something about it but nothing much was

done," he said. Modi said Dalits, backward classes and tribals were the worst affected by this.

Elaborating on the SVAMITVA Yojana, he said it involved mapping houses and lands in villages using drones and providing legal documents for residential properties to villagers. He added that the benefits of this scheme are now visible. "India has over six lakh villages, with drone surveys completed in nearly half of them," Modi said. He highlighted that after receiving legal documents, lakhs of people had taken loans from banks based on their properties and started small businesses in their villages.

"After getting legal property rights, lakhs of people have taken

loans. They have used this money to start their businesses. Many of these are farmers, for whom this property card is a guarantee to financial security," he said.

Modi said that once property cards are issued in all villages, the scheme will unlock economic activities worth over Rs 100 lakh crore. He emphasized the substantial capital that will be added to the country's economy.

Noting that earlier, land disputes were common for farmers and obtaining land documents is challenging, often requiring multiple visits to offices and leading to corruption, the Prime Minister said that land records are being digitised to deal with these issues.

Highlighting that SVAMITVA and Bhū-Aadhaar are foundational systems for village development, he said that Bhū-Aadhaar provides a unique identity to land, with around 23 crore Bhū-Aadhaar numbers issued, making it easy to identify land plots.

"Over the past seven-eight years, approximately 98 per cent of land records have been digitised, and most land maps are now digitally available," Modi added. Later, in a post on X, the Prime Minister said rural land digitisation is "furthering rural empowerment by leveraging the power of technology and good governance". (PTI)

NITI Aayog's Virmani revises FY'25 GDP growth projection

'Political uncertainties created by US elections much higher than anticipated'

KOLKATA, Jan 18: NITI Aayog member and renowned economist Arvind Virmani on Saturday said he has revised his GDP growth projection for India on the lower side for FY'25 due to rising global uncertainties and risks, particularly from the United States and China.

Virmani, who had earlier predicted GDP growth in the range of 6.5-7.5 per cent, adjusted the projection to 6.5-7 per cent now with a high probability of it being sub-7 per cent, amidst heightened risk aversion stemming from global political and economic challenges. "My focus from the beginning of the year was 7 per cent plus-minus 0.5 per cent, which means 6.5-7.5 per cent. But now I am revising it to 6.5-7 per cent.

The political uncertainties created by the US elections are much higher than I had anticipated," Virmani said.

"The US election uncertainty has a domino effect, influencing Europe, China, and other regions, indirectly impacting India," he said on the sidelines of an interactive session with MCCCI.

He highlighted the significant slowdown in China's economy, noting its "irrational" capacity-building approach despite reduced capacity utilisation. "China's overcapacity, coupled with its slowing economy, has exacerbated global uncertainty and risk aversion, and may further affect India's growth trajectory," he added.

Despite these challenges, Virmani remained opti-



mistic about India's long-term prospects.

"If India sustains 6 per cent growth for the next 25 years, it is well-placed to become an upper-middle-income or even a high-income country, coming close to China," he said.

Addressing the uneven distribution of investments across various states, Virmani said the NITI Aayog is working on benchmarks and indices to help states improve their investment climate, including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows. "Currently, only a few states attract the majority of investments. The Modi government recognises the crucial role of states and aims to provide actionable insights for others to catch up," he said. International institutions estimate the GDP growth of India at 6.4-6.5 per cent. (PTI)

Aaiji Group forms JV for development in Dholera

AHMEDABAD, Jan 18: Gujarat-based Aaiji Group's arm Aaiji InfraSpace has formed a joint venture (JV) with Infinity Infracon to spearhead residential and commercial development projects worth Rs 200 crore in Dholera Special Investment Region (SIR), a statement said on Saturday.

"The joint venture aims to execute projects worth Rs 200 crore in a phased manner catering to the

growing demand for high-quality infrastructure in this emerging industrial and smart city hub," Lalit Parihar, Managing Director, Aaiji Group said in the statement.

The JV's first project is coming up in Kadipur Village, Dholera where it aims to develop a housing scheme. The project is estimated to be completed within 2-3 years, it said. The entities aim to explore new opportunities in Dholera, a re-

gion, Aaiji Group said. The group said that Dholera is emerging as a preferred destination for industries and investors, with over 100 companies, including Tata Electronics, already establishing their presence. The city is also emerging as India's hub for semiconductor manufacturing and advanced urban planning. Tata Electronics is setting up a USD 10.9 billion semiconductor plant in the region. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

India, US seal pact to enhance

Union Home Ministry will be responsible for execution of the MoU, the MEA said. From the US side, it will be the Department of Homeland Security, and its constituent agencies -- the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Homeland Security Investigations Cyber Crimes Center (C3) which are tasked to execute the pact. (PTI)

Ex-gratia cheques given to

with retired High Court judge Anima Hazarika to head the one-person panel. She will also be monitoring the police SIT probe.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said after the cabinet meeting that if the dewatering continues at the current rate, it will take about 25 to 60 days for the process to be completed, which will continue till the 'logical conclusion' is reached. Seepage of fresh water from underground streams was replenishing the water, slowing down the dewatering process, he had said. (PTI)

Kolkata court pronounces accused

The parents of the deceased doctor expressed gratitude to the court for delivering justice, with her father stating, "The trust we had placed in you, you have honoured it completely." The mother of the medic, while acknowledging the verdict, voiced concerns that justice had not been fully served. "That Sanjay is guilty was proven by medical evidence. He stood silent during the trials, proving his role in torturing and killing my daughter. But, he was not alone. Others who are yet to be arrested should also be brought to book," she told PTI.

She added, "We will continue our fight for justice till our last breath." In its chargesheet, the CBI identified Roy, a civic volunteer with the city police, as the prime suspect in the brutal crime. Roy's elder sister, speaking from her home in Bhawanipore, said that the family would not challenge the court's decision.

"If he has committed any crime, he should get proper punishment. We don't plan to challenge the order," she said, adding that family members did not attend the trial. The junior doctors, who were at the forefront of the protests following the crime, have called for further investigation into the larger conspiracy allegations raised by the victim's parents. "There are a lot of unanswered questions. Allegations that the crime scene was tampered with and that influential people were involved must be fully investigated. This is just partial justice. The fight isn't over," said a junior medic.

The verdict also evoked mixed political reactions. Senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari welcomed the judgement, but called for further investigation into the conspiracy allegations by the victim's family. "We would have been happier if former RG Kar hospital principal Sandip Ghosh and former Kolkata police commissioner Vineet Goyal were also punished today. We must investigate whether anyone else was involved in the crime," he said.

Senior Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Sougata Roy also welcomed the ruling, calling for the "harsh punishment" for Roy to set a strong precedent. The ghastly incident sparked nationwide protests, particularly from junior doctors in Kolkata, who demanded justice for the victim and stronger security measures in state-run hospitals.

Initially investigated by Kolkata Police, Roy was arrested on August 10, a day after the medic's body was found in the seminar room of the hospital. The Calcutta High Court later transferred the case to the CBI, which had sought death penalty for Roy.

The in-camera trial, which began on November 12, saw 50 witnesses testify. The trial concluded on January 9. Civil society groups in Kolkata and other cities held demonstrations and midnight rallies under the 'Reclaim the Night' campaign, calling for justice for the victim, who was affectionately christened 'Abhaya' and 'Tilotama' by some people. The crime also became a political flashpoint, with opposition parties, including the BJP and CPI(M) criticising the Mamata Banerjee-led government over the state's law and order situation. (PTI)

Modi wanted to throw away

and Mahatma Phule. The function was addressed by people from various walks of life, two of whom were formerly associated with NDA partner JD(U), headed by Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar.

While Ali Anwar, an ex-MP who runs an organisation dedicated to the cause of Pasmanda Muslims, spoke at some length about issues he strongly felt about, Bhagirath Manjhi, the son of legendary stone-cutter Dashrath Manjhi, nicknamed "mountain man", gave a barely five minutes long speech in which he stressed on the need for placing society before self. (PTI)

BJP, Congress to clash with

MP BJP media cell chief Ashish Agrawal told PTI. Meanwhile, NSUI national spokesperson Viraj Yadav said the Congress' January 27 mega rally will also be attended by chief ministers of several states, all CWC members etc. Preparations are in full sway under MP Congress chief Jitu Patwari to ensure a massive crowd assemblies for the rally. Yadav added.

The Lok Sabha poll campaign saw Rahul Gandhi and other opposition leaders attacking the BJP with claims that the ruling party intended to change the Constitution and end reservations if it got more than 400 seats. Recently, the opposition upped the ante against Amit Shah after accusing him of disrespecting Ambedkar during a speech in Parliament. (PTI)

Strong Met services key to

the opportunity to get the best out of your business," she warned. The senior meteorologist also told PTI that the WMO and governments across the world were doing their best to improve the quality of forecasts but the efforts were not enough considering the unprecedented rate of warming.

She also said that governments and the private sector are not doing enough to mitigate climate change which will have irreversible consequences on future generations but stopped short of saying that the planet has reached the point of no return. (PTI)

Census indicates increase of

several new species have been spotted. The final special count and individual count will be announced after the compilation of the complete data," he said. In all, 12 enumeration teams comprising 22 experts, including ornithologist Anuwaruddin Choudhary and forest department officials, participated in the survey covering nine 'beels' (water bodies) of the sanctuary. (PTI)

Amit Shah orders inter-ministerial

and samples empirically indicated that the incidents were not due to a communicable disease of bacterial or viral origin and that there is no public health angle. (PTI)

Maruti Suzuki launches 1st BEV SUV inspiring decarbonisation

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 18: Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL), one of the trusted names in the car sector in India, unveiled its first BEV (Battery Electric Vehicle) SUV -- the e VITARA, along with the comprehensive 'e for me' Electric Eco-Solutions at the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 on Saturday.

Built on the ground-up HEARTECT-e platform, the e VITARA offers superior performance and excellent range, with uncompromised comfort and safety. Set to be introduced in the premium NEXA channel, the e VITARA embodies NEXA's core values of innovation, sophistication, and premium customer experiences. Speaking at the unveiling, Toshihiro Suzuki, representative director and president of Suzuki Motor Corporation, said, "We aim to make BEVs attractive to customers through a three-pronged strategy. First is to develop a BEV-dedicated platform for optimum performance. Second is to evolve the right product for the target markets, based on customer requirements. The third is to leverage our global economies of scale and concentrate manufacturing at a single location for the world."

"For this purpose, we have chosen India as the global manufacturing base due to its quality products, and scale merit. And this is exactly the vision of Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, to Make in India," he added. Hisashi Takeuchi, managing director & CEO of Maruti Suzuki India Limited, said, "The e VITARA is an SUV built on the all-new platform, called HEARTECT-e, exclusively designed for electric vehicles. It comes with highly efficient battery pack options to deliver more than 500 km for 61kWh on a single charge. We have equipped the e VITARA with several premium and advanced features such as Level 2 ADAS, Integrated Digital Display, and Next-Gen Suzuki Connect."

Elaborating on the steps to increase EV adoption, he said, "Our goal is to create Electric Eco-Solutions for the customers. We call it "e for me". We will offer smart home chargers along with installation support, leverage our vast network to provide fast charging support in the top 100 cities in the first phase, and then expand further.

EPFO members can change personal details without employers' intervention

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Over 7.6 crore members of retirement fund body EPFO can now change personal details like name and date of birth online without any verification by the employer or approval by EPFO with the rollout of a new facility on Saturday.

Besides, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) members with e-KYC EPF accounts (Aadhaar seeded) can file their EPF transfer claims online with Aadhaar OTP (one time password) directly without any need for intervention from the employer.

Union labour & employment minister Mansukh Mandaviya introduced the two new services on Saturday.

The minister said around 27 per cent of grievances filed by members are related to member profile/KYC issues and that would see a significant drop after the rollout of the facility.

He also stated that large employers having a huge workload of such requests will also benefit.

The minister stated that the EPFO has simplified the process of joint declaration on the EPFO portal by allowing employees to self-correct most common errors in personal details like name, date of birth, gender, nationality, father/mother's name, marital status, spouse name, date of joining and date of leaving, without any verification by employer or approval by EPFO.

This facility will be available for members, whose UAN (universal account number) was issued after October 1, 2017 (when Aadhaar matching was made mandatory).

No supporting document is required in such cases, the minister informed.

If the UAN was issued prior to October 1, 2017, the employer can correct details without the EPFO's approval.

The requirement of supporting

documents has also been simplified for such cases.

Only where UAN is not linked with Aadhaar, any correction would have to be submitted physically to the employer and after verification forwarded to EPFO for approval, he explained.

UAN registration is done by the employer for the employee at the time of joining. For many employees, mistakes were committed by employers in recording the father/spouse's name, marital status, nationality, and service details during the registration process or later.

In order to correct these errors, the employee had to make a request online with supporting documents.

The request would have to be verified by the employer and then forwarded to EPFO for approval before any change could be effected. This process was called the Joint Declaration.

Out of the 8 lakh requests that were forwarded to EPFO by employers in FY 24-25, it was seen that only 40 per cent were sent within 5 days, 47 per cent were sent after 10 days and the average time taken by the employer was 28 days.

The simplification would provide relief to employees in 45 per cent of cases through immediate correction through Aadhaar OTP verification and in the balance 50 per cent of cases through the employer itself.

If any member who can self-approve has already filed his request which is pending with the employer, the member can delete the already filed request and self-approve as per the simplified process. This will benefit nearly 3.9 lakh cases pending with employers as of date.

About the simplification of the process of claims for transfer of EPF members, the minister said EPF members with fully compliant e-KYC EPF accounts can file

their Online Transfer Claims with Aadhaar OTP directly with EPFO without any need for intervention of employer.

If a number of claims filed (1.3 Crore) during FY 2024-25 is considered more than 94 per cent of claims (1.2 crore) will instantly reach EPFO.

The turnaround time of EPF transfer claim processing will be considerably reduced since it does not require approval by the employer.

If any member has already filed his transfer claim which is pending with the employer, the member can delete the already filed request and submit a claim directly with EPFO.

The simplification will also greatly reduce the member grievances considerably (presently 17% of the total grievances pertain to transfer-related issues) along with the corresponding rejections.

Large employers who have a large workload of approving such cases will have significant improvement in the ease of doing business.

The internal processes of EPFO are also being simplified for transfer claim processing within this month which will further smoothen this process.

At present, any online request for transfer of PF account in case of any change of job has to be verified by the employer before submitting to EPFO.

In this process, on average, 12 to 13 days are taken by employers before the claim reaches EPFO for verifying transfers.

During the last nine months, almost 20 lakh claims remained pending with employers for more than 15 days.

The minister also said that many initiatives are being taken to improve the delivery of services by the EPFO aiming to bring those at par with the banking system. (PTI)

OPG Mobility launches feature-rich Defy 22

Pre-booking starts at a mere ₹ 499

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 18: The ongoing Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 saw the unveiling of the much-anticipated Ferrato 'DEFY 22' on Saturday. The electric scooter was launched by OPG Mobility, formerly known as Okaya EV.

The pre-bookings for the Defy 22 started from January 17 with the price set at as low as ₹ 499.

Launching the ultimate head turner at the expo, Anshul Gupta, Managing Director at OPG Mobility said, "We are thrilled to launch the stylish yet practical scooter that provides a stellar riding experience for daily commute to Indians. Adapting to the diverse needs of consumers, we at OPG Mobility, believe in introducing innovative products while ensuring safety and durability. The all-new 'DEFY 22' is the perfect blend of extraordinary style, unmatched power and top-tier performance. In times to come, it is certain to revolutionise the two-wheeler electric mobility space in India."

The all-new electric scooter is equipped with a Combi Disc Brake



System, offering an impressive speed of 70 kmph with a range of 80 km, verified by ICAT on a single charge. Its robust structure features a newly designed, highly durable IP67-rated LFP battery and a weatherproof IP65-rated charger, ensuring reliable performance in various conditions.

The 7-inch touch displays speedometer, with a music feature and stylish 12-inch alloy wheels make the design classy and bold. With a motor power of 1200 W and peak power of 2500 W, coupled with a 72 V 30 Ah (2.2 kWh)

LFP battery, the DEFY 22 delivers a powerful and practical ride. Furthermore, it is set to elevate the rider's posture with a dual foot-board level.

Packed with a stylish design, the scooter comes in seven dual-tone colour options, providing customers an ease to pick the one that fits their choice and personality. Focused on innovative features and stringent safety standards, this all-new product is ideal to meet the diverse needs of Indian consumers, in addition to offering reliability, efficiency and eco-friendliness.

Several pressing issues including provision to conduct special Teacher Eligibility Test raised Education minister assures to resolve issues related to Bodo medium

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 18: Assam education minister Ranaj Pegu has assured to resolve the issue and problems of the Bodo medium related grievances within the short span of time in the state.

Minister Pegu on Friday held a significant meeting with representatives of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) at Janata Bhawan, Dispur in Guwahati, to discuss on various issues and problems related to Bodo medium and language of the Bodo community.

The delegation team of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and ABSU, include ABSU president Dipen Boro, general secretary Khanindra Basumatary, Bodo Sahitya Sabha general secretary Nilo Kanta Goyary.

The meeting addressed several pressing issues, which included the provision to conduct special Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) for Bodo medium, provincialisation of schools and colleges in the region, upgrading high schools to higher secondary institutions along with establishment of



new Bodo medium ideal schools in BTR, similar to the Tea Garden Adarsha Schools, recruitment of Bodo medium teachers, setting up a new Udalguri campus of Bodoland University.

During the discussion, minister Pegu emphasised the government's commitment to

implementing these initiatives to improve the education system for the Bodo community.

The dialogue has been seen as a constructive step towards addressing long-standing educational challenges in the region and ensuring the promotion of the

Bodo language and culture through enhanced educational infrastructure.

ABSU president Dipen Boro stated that the meeting with education minister was a milestone achievement for education in Bodo medium as Assam government pledged key reforms in response to ABSU & BSS joint memorandum submitted to the government of Assam.

"Following January 8 dharna programme, a crucial discussion was held with Assam's education minister, Dr. Ranaj Pegu, at Janata Bhawan, where significant commitments were made for the development of Bodo medium education.

He mentioned that the education minister Pegu has given several key assurances to resolve the issues and problems related to Bodo medium and language which include special TET in Assam and BTR in Bodo Medium to address the shortage of qualified teachers, creation and appointment of 54 teaching posts in newly upgraded higher secondary schools, 35 Model High Schools for Bodo medium, similar to Tea Garden Model Schools.

Over 13 illegal rat-hole mines sealed in Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Jan 18: Over 13 illegal rat-hole mines along with two rooms were sealed, 4 illegal coal miners arrested, one kirsloskar generator, and excavators have been seized on Saturday from Bitu Pahar of Namdang colliery under Margherita Co-District, on morning hours where four illegal coal miners were also arrested in this connection.

The executive magistrate of Margherita co-district administration Pritom Gogoi, director general of police G P Singh, Margherita police officials, officials from North Eastern Coalfields, Coal India Ltd Margherita and officials from Assam Power Distribution Company Limited's Margherita sub-divisional engineer office were present during the time of raid and

sealing of the rat-hole mines.

The decision followed a meeting of the Assam Cabinet, held on January 16 in Morigaon, where it was decided that all rat-hole mines in the North Eastern Coalfields of Assam will be permanently closed, and an SOP in this will be issued.

It may be mentioned that the action was taken following a tragic incident at an illegal rat-hole mine in Umrangso, Dima Hasao, where many coal miners tragically lost their lives.

Gogoi said that the operations and arrests were carried out following the instructions from Dispur and all arrested illegal coal miners and seized excavators will be brought to Margherita police station and further investigation will be done under the law.

Pakke Paga festival held at Seijosa



HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 18: The Pakke Paga Festival has been held in Seijosa in Pakke Kessang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The festival is celebrated every year in Seijosa in Pakke Kessang district of Arunachal Pradesh to raise awareness among the tribal people. The Pakke Paga Festival is celebrated every year with various activities among the tribal people. Pakke Paga which was first launched in 2015 enters its 10th year now. The festival aims to create awareness on protection of bats, other animals, birds and butterflies living in the sanctuary. It is seen that this festival has been able to raise awareness among the ethnic people. PCCF N Tam, who was the chief guest at the opening ceremony of the Pakke Paga Festival-2025, said

that the poaching of animals has stopped and many poachers have surrendered and handed over illegal air guns to the administration. "It is our supreme responsibility and duty to protect the animals, birds, etc. living in our naturally created forests. In recent days, the State Government has also taken appropriate measures to conserve valuable resources as well as biodiversity. Therefore, the number of animals in the forests of the state has increased more than ever before," the PCCF said.

The festival was attended by ZPM Tana Naya of Pizirang, Pakke Kessang district superintendent of Police Tachi Damang, additional commissioner of Seijosa Kechang Owangdu and Biyuram Wahge minister of health and planning, Yapu Lishi wahge among others.

Bike riders from Arunachal echo conservation efforts

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 18: The Patron cum spokesperson of Arunachal Super Bike Club, Gomi Bassar along with distinguished bikers of the group from distant Naharlagun arrived at Pakke Paga Festival on Saturday.

A group of members of the club led by Gomi Bassar arrived at the Pakke Paga festival ground after traveling through Itanagar on Sophisticated bikes. The main objective of this bike ride is to create awareness on conservation of natural beauty and biodiversity.

Bassar said it is also an attempt to convey a message to the people of Seijosa to protect the animals of the Pakke Tiger Reserve in Seijosa. The club also presented a package of funds to the DFO of the Pakke Tiger Reserve Satya Prakash Singh for the conservation of biodiversity.



National-level seminar on Orality and Bharatiya Darshan

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Jan 18: The DSK College, Dibrugarh is all set to host the two-day national seminar on Orality and Bharatiya Darshan.

The Folklore Society of Assam, in collaboration with the Research and Development Cell and the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of DSK College, Dibrugarh, is going to organize a two-day national-level seminar on Orality and Bharatiya Darshan from January 24 to 25 at D H S Kanoi College.

This prestigious event will bring together academicians, researchers, and scholars to explore

various aspects of Orality and Bharatiya Darshan, emphasizing their cultural, philosophical and literary significance.

The seminar will be inaugurated by professor (Retd) Madan Sarma from the department of English and Foreign Languages, Tezpur University. The keynote address will be delivered by professor Sujay Kumar Mandal from the department of Folklore, Kalyani University, a renowned expert in the field.

Bhim Kanta Baruah will grace the occasion as the chief guest. The seminar will also witness the inauguration of the peer-reviewed journal Jana Kristi, a significant

platform dedicated to folklore research and scholarship.

The journal will be inaugurated by professor Kandarpa Kumar Deka, former vice-chancellor of Dibrugarh University and Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon on the first day of the seminar. This seminar aims to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and promote innovative approaches to folklore studies.

Researchers from across the nation will present papers, exchange ideas, and contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this field. In addition to the keynote speakers and invited dignitaries, about 20 esteemed delegates from

the Folklore Society of Assam have consented to participate in the seminar as special guests of DSK College.

Their involvement will enrich the discussions and contribute to the exchange of knowledge in the field of folklore studies. All arrangements for the seminar have been meticulously planned and executed by DSK College under the visionary leadership of the college's Principal Sashi Kanta Saikia.

The commitment of the college administration, faculty, and staff has ensured a well-organised event that promises to provide an engaging platform for all participants.

Awareness programme on road safety



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 18: A special awareness programme was organised by Nehru Yuva Kendra, Kamrup (Metro) in association with district administration as well as transport department at Arya Vidyapeeth College in Guwahati on Saturday.

The programme was organised as part of the National Road Safety Week from January 17 to 23 aiming to raise awareness about road safety and reduce accidents.

Pramathesh Chakraborty, deputy director of Nehru Yuva Kendra, explained the purpose of the programme, highlighting the importance of road safety and the need to follow traffic rules.

The programme featured various events, including a quiz competition, essay writing, and painting contests, all focused on road safety.

A street play and a mime show were also performed to convey the importance of road safety.

Additional district commissioner of Kamrup

(Metro), Ajit Kumar Sarma, and other distinguished guests, including Guwahati Municipal Corporation ward councillor Ratna Singh, assistant commissioner of transport department Gautam Das, and associate professor of Arya Vidyapeeth College Dr Papari Devi, Dr Sewabrata Baruah, professor Bholanath Baruah College, addressed the gathering.

They emphasized the need to follow traffic rules, such as wearing helmets and seatbelts, avoiding speeding, and not using mobile phones while driving. They also highlighted the importance of creating awareness about road safety among students, youth, and the general public.

The programme was attended by over 500 students, youth, and volunteers. The Nehru Yuva Kendra's District Youth Officer, Chayan Suklabaidya, thanked the guests and participants, and announced that the awareness program would continue until January 23, 2025, across various locations in Guwahati, a press note added.

Gaurav Gogoi lambasts BJP on panchayat elections schedule

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 18: MP Gaurav Gogoi on Saturday said that he had accurately predicted that the BJP was not interested in holding panchayat elections in the state as it lacked the courage to face the rural folk whom it had dishonoured. Gogoi was referring to the pre-election commitments to give ten thousand to each sapling planted and the money committed to the Lakhpati baideus.

The BJP party is desperately searching for candidates for fielding in the constituencies as the party is running short of new faces, he added.

Awareness prog on Cancer screening held

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Jan 18: An awareness programme on oral, breast and cervical cancer screening was held on Saturday at Dehing Tea Estate Hospital, Margherita which was organised by Indian Red Cross Society Margherita sub district branch in association with Hindustan Oil Corporation supported by Assam Cancer care foundation.

Dr Satabdi Sarmah consultant Assam cancer care foundation from Dibrugarh, Pronamika Konwar executive magistrate Margherita Co-District administration were present among others.



Government of Assam.

The booth, introduced under the Company Owned Franchisee Operated (COFO) model, will enable citizens to procure fresh milk and dairy products, including lassi, flavoured milk, ice-cream, curd, fresh cream, ghee, paneer, etc.

Satya Brata Bose, managing director of NEDFL, said, "Purabi products have always been warmly embraced by the people of Assam. Our newest offering, Purabi Flavoured Milk, was launched towards the end of summer last year as part of a strategic plan to ensure its availability across all our distribution points. While we anticipated positive reception, the overwhelming love and demand for this product have exceeded our expectations. Currently available at over 2,500 sales points, Purabi Flavoured Milk has achieved remarkable

repeat sales, even during the winter months. With its extended shelf life, we are now poised to expand beyond state boundaries, leveraging our robust distribution network to bring this product to a wider audience."

He further added, "We are deeply appreciative of the extensive support from the Government of Assam. The Honourable Chief Minister, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, has approved the establishment of dairies in Jorhat and Dibrugarh, with plans to extend similar facilities to Silchar and Dhemaji. These initiatives will position the Purabi brand to handle 10 lakh litres of milk annually within the next seven years. The Assam Dairy Development Plan, approved by the Government, will play a crucial role in advancing cooperative dairy models. Under the guidance of the Na-

Milk Booth set up near Ganesh Mandir in Ganeshguri Purabi Dairy sells 2 lakh litres of milk per day during Magh Bihu

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 18: Purabi Dairy has recorded sale of over 2 lakh litres of milk and products per day during the current year's Magh Bihu celebrations.

The record achievement marks a significant milestone in the dairy's journey, reflecting growing trust and preference of consumers for Purabi products. This surge in sales during Magh Bihu highlights the brand's strong market presence and its ability to meet the heightened festive demand. The dairy cooperative on Friday said that it achieved 35% higher sales volume as compared to last year's Magh Bihu. The curd sales grew by a whopping 70% this year, underscoring the trust of the people of Assam. In the same period, cream sales also increased by 40% as compared to last year.

"We are happy to note that the people of the state love our products which are in fact made from milk produced by the farmers of Assam. This success reflects our consistent efforts in ensuring quality and expanding distribution networks," said Mr. SM Hussain, Marketing Head, WAMUL.

On Friday, the dairy cooperative further strengthened their sales network by setting up a Purabi Milk Booth near Ganesh Mandir in Ganeshguri, Guwahati. The milk booth was inaugurated by Assamese actors Moloya Goswami, Sagarika Goswami and Debajit Mazumdar, director

Achinta Sankar and director Atulananda Barman in presence of Sameer Kumar Parida, managing director, WAMUL and Satya Brata Bose, managing director, North East Dairy and Foods Limited (NEDFL). Franchisee of the booth Bhabarnab Jyoti Barman was also present on the occasion.

Speaking about the new booth, Sameer Kr Parida, managing director of WAMUL, said, "We are delighted to inaugurate the fifth Purabi Milk Booth in Guwahati today. The growing popularity of Purabi Dairy, not only in Guwahati but across Assam, has encouraged us to expand further. We plan to establish 10 more booths across Guwahati, ensuring our milk and milk products are more accessible to our valued customers."

Parida further added, "What sets us apart is the freshness and quality of our products, sourced directly from farmers across Assam. This commitment to quality has been validated by our consumers, especially during Magh Bihu this year, when our milk and milk product sales reached an unprecedented 2 lakh litres per day. We remain confident in our growth trajectory and are dedicated to contributing to the vision of our Honourable Chief Minister and supporting the aspirations of farmers across Assam."

WAMUL, which owns the cooperative brand Purabi, set up the milk booth under the World Bank funded APART Project of

Gunotsav from Jan 20-22 in Hojai



HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 18: Hojai district commissioner Bidyut Bikash Bhagwati stated on Saturday that Gunotsav will be organised from January 20 to January 22 in the 971 school within Hojai district. He said total 1,27,413 students of the district will be covered in the Gunotsav. He further said around 5,656 plus manpower will be deployed in the process, where noted educationist from Nagaon, Dispur, trained external evaluators will visit schools and evaluate the teaching environment and educational infrastructure of Class 1 to 9 of the schools.

"The evaluation will help us in upgrading the quality of education and infrastructure of schools in the district. He also informed MLA's of three LAC's will also visit the school," the DC said.

The DC emphasised that the education department has always remained foremost priority for them. He said he will try to visit maximum schools.

Gunotsav begins in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 18: The second phase of Gunotsav programme 2025 began in Jorhat district on Friday along with 14 other districts in the state. A district administration official quoting Samagra Shiksha Axom (SSA), Jorhat, sources, informed that in all Government, provincialised, tea garden model schools and tea garden-run schools numbering 1211 in the district, the self-evaluation exercise was conducted on Friday.

The official stated that from January 20 to 22 altogether 492 external evaluators would inspect the schools. Senior Government officials including the district commissioner, ACS officials and forest department and other government department officials, along with faculty members of various colleges have been deputed as external evaluators.

Jorhat DC to review departmental activities

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Jan 18: Jorhat district commissioner Jay Shivani will hold weekly review of activities undertaken by all Government departments and agencies across the district.

Shivani said that during the monthly District Development Committee (DDC) meeting chaired by him at the Conference Hall of the DC office complex on Friday he announced that all departments and agencies would have to submit a weekly progress report of works being done, to him. The DC stated that departments and agencies have been clubbed into five groups with each group having departments and agencies whose work were inter-related.

Hoping that constituting the groups would enable better coordination amongst the departments and agencies and contribute to achieving the targets smoothly, Shivani said that he would be taking stock of the activities carried out in a week groupwise and if there was any issue amongst the constituents of a group then that could be sorted immediately.

Editor's pick

India and Russia at a crossroads

By: Ivan Shchedrov

In Russia, 2024 was perceived as one of the most eventful years in the modern history of bilateral relations. Against considerable odds, the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, made a double visit to Russia. His first visit was in July as a part of the agreements within the 2000 Declaration on Strategic Partnership, followed by a second one in October to participate in the 16th BRICS summit in Kazan. While repeated visits are not rare—former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Russia twice in 2009 and 2013, and Narendra Modi in 2015—this time, however, this gesture holds significance. It indicates India's commitment to secure traditional political ties and is thus considered to have more value than ever before.

From this perspective, India's message to the international community is reminiscent of 2009, when Indian leadership participated in the BRICS meeting and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Ekaterinburg, Russia, for the first time, shortly after the Indo-United States (US) civil nuclear agreement was signed in 2008. By reaffirming its commitment this year, India also placed the onus on Russian leadership, with 2025 slated to be the year of a reciprocal visit from Russia's President, Vladimir Putin. Although the scope of future proposals is still unknown, the early announcements about Putin's upcoming visit, in stark contrast to the unexpected trip of Narendra Modi, may indicate that the Russian side is preparing well in advance for the meeting.

Global aspirations as a backbone of bilateral ties

In 2024, bilateral relations were shaped by India's global posturing on the international stage. In other words, the country's growing aspirations placed the global agenda above certain regional and bilateral issues. In July, during his first visit to Russia, Prime Minister Modi highlighted that India is pursuing important peacekeeping efforts aimed at resolving the Ukrainian conflict. This visit to Russia was also Modi's first after his re-election, breaking the tradition of prioritizing countries in India's immediate neighbourhood. The reasoning behind this decision seems to be quite obvious—relations with the Maldives had been tense, Bangladesh was grappling with an acute social and political crisis, and Sri Lanka was entering a new electoral cycle.

Additional reasoning comes from India's participation in multilateral meetings. The invitation to visit Italy for the G7 Summit in June was perceived as being of top importance, especially since it provided ground to amplify the voice of the Global South, as well as to hold talks with the Ukrainian president. In some regards, it was placed at a higher priority than participating in summits of important regional formats, for example, the SCO Summit in Astana and the second India-Central Asia Summit, which was scheduled in 2024. Participation at the BRICS summit in Kazan in October is another great example. The decision to take part in the meeting of a non-binding organisation with global ambitions counters some observations about the limited benefits that India could get from the format. Despite some disagreements among its members and abstention from India on the issues of de-dollarisation and the extension of memberships, BRICS is still considered the only group actively pushing for a balanced approach, thanks to its focus on promoting global multipolarity.

In bilateral and multilateral relations with Russia, India has effectively highlighted the visibility of fruitful cooperation, yet it has been cautious about making any political commitments. For Russia, this policy may be deemed sufficient today, but shortly, it will require more tangible outcomes.

Economic relations: Nuanced but paramount

In the absence of political commitments tied to financial negotiations, 2024 also gave bilateral economic relations new value, but the prospects for growth are still unknown.

During the 25th session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGEC-TEC), the volume of bilateral trade was said to have reached US\$66 billion, indicating positive growth. Russia has reached the fourth position among India's trade partners and is the second-largest exporter to India after China.

However, challenges become evident when we examine these numbers more closely. Although in January-August 2024, trade broke records, the volume of Russian exports has approached its local maximum. During this period, it constituted US\$43.4 billion (mainly energy resource exports)—a modest increase of 5 percent compared to the previous period. As a result, the next stage of trade and economic cooperation will hinge on Russia's ability to diversify its export basket and expand India's export base. In the mid-term, Russia's key objective is to curb its inflation rate, eliminate the socio-economic imbalances caused by an overheated military-industrial complex, and ultimately facilitate a seamless transition from military to civilian production. For India, it will be necessary to resolve infrastructure and socio-economic problems to maintain its attractiveness to foreign investors and increase production and overall gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

Chronic imbalances remained a key problem in bilateral trade—India's imports from Russia were 12 times greater than its exports to the country between January and August.

The two countries acknowledged the importance of promoting export in India through increased investments in export-oriented production.

This measure is also highly necessary to solve payment-related issues. For instance, Russia's exporters could theoretically use ruble transactions to secure payments with Indian importers and conduct foreign currency transactions with Indian counterparts. However, in practice, such a system is limited by the huge negative trade balance. Nonetheless, 2024 showed some progress in that regard—from January to August, the combined exports of India to Russia constituted US\$4.2 billion, marking a 35 percent increase compared to 2023. Considering the current pace of incremental growth, the target of US\$100 billion trade turnover by 2030 that the countries have set seems to be more indicative than prescriptive.

Conclusion

This year demonstrated that, despite prevailing prejudices, India's commitment to its traditional ties with Russia remains resilient and not prone to sudden shifts. However, it also brought to light the challenges that need to be addressed in the coming years. Many of these, particularly in the military and political spheres, are speculative. In areas like trade and investment, despite record performances, both countries will require structural reforms. To further strengthen their ties, they must address these challenges swiftly and effectively in 2025. However, success will hinge on shifts in Russia's approach to the West, as well as the stability of India's positioning. (Courtesy: ORF)

Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal is a great news but the follow up depends on Netanyahu

Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas have agreed to a ceasefire deal; Israel, Qatar and the United States have said, after more than 460 days of a war that has devastated Gaza. Apparently, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, under intense American pressure had to convince a lot of his coalition partners to seal the deal. Additionally, this deal comes as a win for Donald Trump, even before he starts his next stint as the 47th American President.

The Israeli Prime Minister's office was the last to confirm on early Friday morning (17 January 2025) that a deal has been agreed upon with Hamas. The agreement, which US officials expect to take effect Sunday (19 January), would see a pause in fighting in Gaza and lead to the phased release of hostages and Palestinian prisoners.

Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani had said on Wednesday that the ceasefire deal would come into effect on Sunday, but added that work on implementation steps with Israel and Hamas was continuing. Apparently, the American President-elect Donald Trump wanted the deal to be effective before his inauguration ceremony on Monday.

Trump had repeatedly indicated he would prefer to avoid inheriting the Israel-Hamas war as he prepared to take office on 20 January, and analysts say his impending return to the White House had injected renewed urgency into negotiations on a deal.

Reportedly, Trump and outgoing US President Joe Biden both took full credit following the announcement of the ceasefire deal Wednesday after the two American administrations worked together to mediate the truce.

The cooperation between the two camps was "almost unprecedented," a senior Biden administration official said after the deal was clinched, made possible by a rare intersection of interests between bitter rivals who both saw an opening following Trump's election victory.

The deal includes a temporary ceasefire that will also, finally, allow displaced Palestinians to return to their homes—though after Israel's deliberate destruction campaign, which increased in ferocity, 86 Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks after the announcement of the deal, and which has rendered many homes no longer habitable. But the Palestinians of the occupied territories wanted to return to their homeland as soon as possible and they welcomed the announcement with cheers and tears.

Reportedly, the peace deal consists of three phases. The first phase will last six weeks, and will involve a limited prisoner exchange, the partial withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza and a surge of aid into the enclave.



Israeli forces will reduce their presence in the Philadelphi Corridor, the border area between Egypt and Gaza, and then withdraw completely no later than the 50th day after the deal comes into effect.

Details of the second and third phases, though understood to be agreed to in principle, are to be negotiated further during the first phase, US President Joe Biden has said that the ceasefire will continue even if the negotiations on the second and third phases go beyond the initial six weeks of the first phase.

Critically, Israel has insisted that no written guarantees be given to rule out a resumption of its attacks once the first phase is complete and its civilian captives returned.

However, according to an Egyptian source cited by the Associated Press, the three mediators involved in the talks—Egypt, Qatar and the United States—have given Hamas verbal guarantees that negotiations will continue and that all three would press for a deal that would see the second and third stages implemented before an initial six-week window has elapsed.

If it is determined that the conditions have been met for a second phase, Hamas will release all the remaining living captives, mostly male soldiers, in return for the freeing of more Palestinians held in the Israeli prison system. In addition, Israel would initiate its "complete withdrawal" from Gaza.

However, these conditions, which have yet to be voted upon by the Israeli cabinet, are at odds with the stated positions of many of the far-right wing

members of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet, which he relies upon for support, as well as Netanyahu's own past positions, in which he has repeatedly used the presence of Hamas in Gaza to prolong the conflict.

The details of a third phase remain unclear. Should the conditions of the second stage be met, the third phase will see the bodies of the remaining captives handed over in return for a three- to five-year reconstruction plan to be conducted under international supervision.

Additionally, there is currently no agreement over who will administer Gaza beyond the ceasefire. The United States has pressed for a reformed version of the Palestinian Authority to do so.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday (14 January) said the post-war reconstruction and governance envisions the Palestinian Authority inviting "international partners" to stand up an interim governing authority to run critical services and oversee the territory.

Other partners, notably Arab states, would provide forces to ensure security in the short term, he said in a speech at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank. Israel has yet to suggest an alternative form of governance in Gaza.

There was staunch opposition to the deal from the far-right members of Netanyahu's government, such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich. They have been quite outspoken over the last week about their position on a deal, saying that it is bad for Israel's national

security and that they might not vote for it. They have gone so far as to say that they are willing to topple Netanyahu's government if they do not get their way.

Further, a small number of families of the captives in Gaza are saying "No" to a deal. Many members of the Tikva (Hope) Forum fringe group, including settlers in the occupied West Bank, hold right-wing ideologies. They oppose the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israel as part of the deal, arguing that a partial release of Israeli hostages from Gaza is unacceptable. Instead, they insist that defeating Hamas through strong military action should be the top priority, and is the best strategy to retrieve hostages.

The moot question is if the ceasefire will survive beyond that first phase. It entails even more negotiations meant to begin within weeks. In those talks, Israel, Hamas, and the US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators will have to tackle the tough issue of how Gaza will be governed, with Israel demanding the elimination of Hamas.

Hostage release also is a tricky issue, as not all hostages are held by Hamas, so getting other militant groups to hand them over could be an issue. In exchange for bodies handed over by Hamas, Israel will free all women and children it has detained from Gaza since the war began on 7 October, 2023.

Furthermore, Israel has said it will not agree to a complete withdrawal until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated and it cannot rearm—ensuring Hamas no longer runs Gaza. Hamas says it will not hand over the last hostages until Israel removes all troops from everywhere in Gaza.

Trump had made a big issue of Middle East peace during his campaign and attacked Biden's failure to secure a ceasefire. Steve Witkoff, his surprise appointment as Middle East envoy, was dispatched to Qatar on 22 November—less than three weeks after his election victory.

Witkoff, a close friend of Trump who is also known to Qatari officials through his real estate business, had suddenly become the chief negotiator in an unlikely negotiating team led by Biden's top Middle East adviser Brett McGurk. In directing their envoys to co-ordinate, Biden and Trump both temporarily put aside their fierce personal and political rivalry—a small miracle in its own right.

However, in reality a lot hinges on what Netanyahu is able to deliver, in face of challenges from his coalition partners, if he is indeed able to deliver and the ceasefire lasts, then that too will not be a lesser miracle, given the ever-changing geopolitical dynamics of the middle eastern region. (IPA Service)

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Asad Mirza

Global economy to weaken in 2025, says 56 percent of Chief economists

By Satyaki Chakraborty

The global economy is set to face significant challenges in 2025, with 56% of chief economists surveyed expecting conditions to weaken, according to the latest Chief Economists Outlook from the World Economic Forum. Only 17% foresee an improvement, pointing to heightened uncertainty in key regions and the need for measured policy responses worldwide.

While the United States appears poised for a short-term boost—with 44% of chief economists predicting strong growth in 2025, up from 15% when they were asked in August last year—the outlook for the year ahead remains less optimistic for other major economies. Europe continues to rank as the weakest region for the third consecutive year, with nearly three-quarters (74%) expecting weak or very weak growth. Meanwhile, China's economic momentum is projected to slow amid subdued consumer demand and weaker productivity, further illustrating the uneven and uncertain nature of any global recovery.

"The latest Chief Economists Outlook released by World Economic Forum on January 16 reveals a global economy under considerable strain," said Aengus Collins, Head of Economic Growth and Transformation, World Eco-

nom Forum. "The growth outlook is at its weakest in decades and political developments both domestically and internationally highlight how contested economic policy has become. In this environment, fostering a spirit of collaboration will require more commitment and creativity than ever."

The new report underscores the significance of the recent US presidential election, with 61% of chief economists characterizing the impact for the global economy as a long-term shift rather than a short-term disruption. Major changes are expected in areas such as trade, migration, deregulation, fiscal policy and industrial policy. The chief economists' solid outlook for US growth in 2025 is in line with their expectation of near-term stimulus and of rising wages. However, they remain mindful of risks, with almost all expecting a rise in public debt levels (97%) and higher inflation (94%).

In addition to subdued global growth prospects, the Chief Economists Outlook reveals intensifying pressures on the world's economic interconnectedness. A vast majority of respondents (94%) predict further fragmentation of goods trade over the next three years, while 59% expect services trade to follow a similar path. More than three-quarters also foresee higher barriers to labour mobility, while almost two-

thirds point to rising constraints on technology and data transfers.

The financial sector stands out as an exception, with less than half (48%) expecting an increase in fragmentation, likely reflecting the pivotal role of cross-border financial flows in modern economies. Nevertheless, domestic and international political developments, supply-chain realignments and security concerns loom large. These shifts are likely to push up costs for businesses and consumers alike over the next three years. Business responses to the increasing fragmentation of the global economy are expected to include restructuring supply chains (91%), regionalizing operations (90%) and focusing on core markets (79%).

Nearly half (48%) of chief economists anticipate an increase in global trade volumes in 2025, underscoring the resilience of global commerce. However, a large majority expect intensifying trade tensions, both between major powers and more widely. Protectionism is identified as the primary factor that will drive lasting changes to global trade patterns, with other prominent contributors including conflict, sanctions and national security concerns. Some 82% of respondents predict greater regionalization of trade over the next three years, alongside a continuing gradual shift from goods to services. (IPA Service)

Excessive social media use has detrimental effects on teenagers

By: Shahruk Ahmed Mazumdar

The Australian government passed a law prohibiting teenagers under 16 from having social media (SM) accounts; nevertheless, they are permitted to view SM in a 'logged out state'. SM firms will face fines if they fail to comply with the law. The ban is expected to take effect by the end of the following year.

However, a global debate has erupted about whether a ban on SM is the best way to address the detrimental effects of excessive use in teenagers. Yet, the government has come under criticism for passing the law too soon without considering the results of the trial, which is likely to be held next year to decide how the SM ban will be implemented in Australia. It is being monitored to see if such measures could be taken elsewhere in the world.

Social media is a useful tool for learning and connection, but if not used responsibly, it can have major health consequences. Sleep interruption is a severe issue. Browsing mobile platforms before bedtime can lead to poor sleep quality and quantity, particularly in teenagers. This results in daytime

drowsiness. Sleep deprivation complicates emotional control and raises stress. Another disadvantage of SM for teenagers is their poor attention span.

A recent study, "Accelerating Dynamics of Collective Attention," published in Nature, shows that human attention spans have drastically decreased, going from 2.5 minutes twenty years ago to 45 seconds today. Rapid attention shifting between digital stimuli impairs focus on school-work and other non-digital tasks. Overuse of social media disrupts children's social lives and prevents them from learning essential social skills. The face-to-face interactions, such as reading facial expressions and body language, are crucial for empathy and social cue comprehension. Academic performance suffers as a result of the time spent on social media since it interferes with study and homework time. Aggression is another aspect of the detrimental effects of social media on teens' social lives. These days, video games and social media expose teenagers to violent and provocative content. The World Health Organisation states against exposing newborns under a year old to any electronic de-

vices, including laptops or mobile phones, and against allowing children ages one to five to spend more than an hour a day in front of a screen.

According to studies, youngsters who use social media for more than three hours a day are twice as likely to suffer from mental health conditions like depression and anxiety because they are exposed to pictures of things they lack in their lives. Body dysmorphia is prevalent among young individuals and has grown in recent years. Those in their early teens are frequently resistant to constraints and could rebel against them. They may believe they are entitled to the same technological resources as their peers elsewhere. This resistance may cause confrontations between parents and children, resulting in interpersonal tension and mistrust. Bans, therefore, are ineffective. For example, prohibiting alcohol can often lead to increasing use. As a result, tech-savvy children may find ways to evade it, such as setting up secret accounts, utilising fake identities and VPNs, or accessing dangerous areas of the internet, thus increasing their exposure to hazardous content rather than decreasing it. Social media frequently turns into a tool for

validation since humans are social creatures with an innate need for acceptance and belonging. Many people use the quantity of likes on their posts or photos as an instrument to assess someone's appearance, intelligence, and even personal value.

According to experts, compulsive notification checking can cause addiction-like symptoms in which people struggle to detach, affecting their mental well-being. Online conversations are frequently superficial, missing the emotional depth and nonverbal communication that characterise face-to-face interactions. This leads to an emotional separation. Furthermore, people prefer to present only the positive elements of their lives on social media, resulting in a false depiction of happiness and success that can make others feel even more alienated in their troubles. The way a tool is used determines its potency. The systemic and contemporary issues around social media use regulation must be addressed. A social media ban doesn't help young people learn or manage anything; it just delays their exposure to these platforms. The same algorithms will still be in place when they eventually begin utilising these plat-

forms, influencing users' views and behaviours and keeping both young and old users interested. In theory, algorithms present only contents that a user could find interesting. The content is actually tailored to promote spending more time on the platform.

Digital literacy and education are a better way to help children learn self-discipline when using their devices and to explain the advantages and disadvantages of social media. Establish a family media use plan, ban screens for at least an hour before bed, establish limits on content access, promote family communication and conversations, and refrain from using social media in the mornings, as this wastes teens' productive time and deters them from starting the day with energy. Every week, have a conversation with your teen about social media so they feel comfortable sharing their experiences with you without fear of criticism. Set boundaries for your own social media use and encourage the children to follow your lead by asking them about their experiences on social media, how they perceive what they see there, and how they would react to different scenarios they might come

across online.

Teenagers in India may find that social media detoxification—the practice of distancing oneself from social media apps and preventing them from interfering with daily life—is a necessary lifestyle habit. Bringing life back on track with creativity, productivity, and a healthy dose of enthusiasm for the future is the ultimate goal. The children have an unquenchable desire to follow the latest trends and are impacted by social media influencers for the majority of their decisions. A social media detox can begin with specific hours of the day and then progress to days and weeks.

Parents and educators can initiate discussions regarding the psychological effects of social media, such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and online comparison, to educate children about the risks involved. Schools can take the lead in this area by integrating media literacy and mental health awareness into the curriculum. According to a 2023 survey, 78% of students who received such instruction choose to use social media responsibly. (The author can be reached at shahruktchnical@gmail.com)

Madan Kamdev: The Khajuraho of Assam



By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Madan Kamdev, a magnificent yet lesser-known archaeological site in Assam, is often referred to as "The Khajuraho of Assam." This comparison draws from the site's intricate and sensuous sculptures that bear a striking resemblance to the famed temples of Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh. Nestled amidst the verdant hills of Dewangiri, roughly 40 kilometers from Guwahati, Madan Kamdev's rich history, spiritual significance, and artistic achievements create an enigmatic allure that remains largely underappreciated on the global stage. However, to view Madan Kamdev as a mere reflection of Khajuraho would be to overlook its distinct narrative, cultural identity, and importance within the broader context of India's heritage.

The origins of Madan Kamdev trace back to the 9th and 10th centuries during the rule of the Pala dynasty, a period marked by a flourishing of art, religion, and architecture across the eastern regions of India. The Palas, who were known for their patronage of both Hinduism and Buddhism, established a tradition of temple-building that celebrated intricate design and storytelling. It is believed that the temples at Madan Kamdev were constructed primarily as an homage to Lord Shiva, evident in the numerous lingams and depictions of Shiva found among the ruins. The name "Madan Kamdev" itself invokes the spirit of Kamadeva, the Hindu god of love, adding layers of myth and meaning to the temple complex. According to legend, Kamadeva attempted to awaken Lord Shiva from deep meditation to restore love and passion to the world. Shiva, angered by the disturbance, opened his third eye and reduced Kamadeva to ashes. Some traditions hold that Madan Kamdev represents the spirit and essence of Kamadeva, making the site a symbol of love, passion, and divine wrath.

The architecture and sculptures at Madan Kamdev capture the quintessence of human emotion and divine connection. The carvings at the site are distinguished by their explicit representation of sensuality and love, themes that align with the classical Indian understanding of kama as

an essential aspect of life and spirituality. The intricately carved stone figures depict scenes of divine beings, humans, celestial dancers, and mythical creatures, many of which are portrayed in romantic or erotic poses. These depictions, far from being merely ornamental, reflect a worldview that regarded love and sexuality as sacred, intertwined with devotion and the path to spiritual enlightenment. Such representations align with the tantric traditions that were prevalent in parts of medieval India, where physical intimacy and love were viewed as a means to attain a higher spiritual state.

The artistic brilliance seen in the sculptures of Madan Kamdev speaks volumes about the mastery of Pala-era artisans. These craftsmen achieved a high degree of sophistication in their work, showcasing lifelike figures with detailed expressions and dynamic postures. The fluidity and grace in these carvings suggest advanced knowledge of human anatomy and a deep understanding of movement and balance. One can almost imagine the artisans meticulously shaping each figure, infusing stone with vitality and emotion. The figures of apsaras, gods, and goddesses appear caught in the midst of dance and embrace, while intricate floral and geometric patterns frame the scenes. This level of detail is indicative of an era that valued both the aesthetic and the symbolic, merging artistic beauty with deeper cultural and spiritual meanings.

The ruins of Madan Kamdev, spread over a large area on Dewangiri Hill, invite exploration and reflection. Despite their current state of partial destruction, the surviving structures and fragments convey a powerful sense of what once was. Scholars and archaeologists have long debated the reasons for the site's decline. Some suggest that natural calamities, particularly earthquakes—common in Assam—may have played a role. Others believe that political conflicts, invasions, and the subsequent shift in dynastic power could have led to the temple's abandonment and eventual ruin. Regardless of the cause, the fragmented pillars, scattered stone carvings, and remnants of what once was a grand temple complex evoke a haunting

beauty, a reminder of the impermanence that underscores even the most extraordinary human achievements.

The rediscovery and study of Madan Kamdev in the 20th century reignited interest in its historical and cultural significance. Excavations have unearthed not only the stunning sculptures but also artifacts that suggest a vibrant religious and social life in the area. These findings include stone inscriptions, fragments of other temples, and smaller shrines that provide context to the main temple complex. The site likely served as an important religious center, a place where rituals and celebrations were intertwined with daily life and devotion. Madan Kamdev's sculptures, with their emphasis on love and divine union, point to a society that saw spirituality as deeply connected to human experience, encompassing both the sacred and the sensual.

Visiting Madan Kamdev today is an experience steeped in history and mystery. The journey itself, through the dense forests and rolling hills of Assam, sets the tone for an encounter with the past. The site, surrounded by the sounds of nature and the play of light and shadow on ancient stones, evokes a sense of timelessness. It is easy to stand amidst the ruins and imagine the site as it once was, with worshippers gathered, rituals performed, and stories shared. The air seems charged with the echoes of hymns and the footfalls of dancers who once moved in time to sacred music.

Despite its profound historical and artistic value, Madan Kamdev has not received the same attention as more renowned sites like Khajuraho. This relative obscurity has contributed to challenges in preservation and conservation. The Assam government, along with various cultural heritage organizations, has made efforts to increase awareness and promote the site as a destination for cultural and historical tourism. However, there is much work to be done. Preserving Madan Kamdev requires a concerted effort that balances tourism with the need to protect and maintain the site's delicate carvings and fragile structures. Initiatives

aimed at educating the public about the site's significance, investing in infrastructure, and fostering sustainable tourism are key to ensuring that Madan Kamdev's legacy endures.

Madan Kamdev is more than just an archaeological site; it is a symbol of a cultural ethos that celebrated life in its fullest expression. It serves as a reminder that art and spirituality were once viewed as complementary, with love and desire seen as divine gifts that connected the mortal with the eternal. The narratives carved into the stone at Madan Kamdev invite us to explore not only the artistic mastery of an ancient civilization but also its worldview—a perspective that embraced the complex nature of human existence and found divinity in every aspect of life.

The future of Madan Kamdev hinges on efforts to ensure that this historical treasure is preserved and respected. Initiatives that incorporate community involvement, responsible tourism, and continuous research can help unlock more of the site's secrets while safeguarding it against further degradation. The art and stories of Madan Kamdev have survived centuries of neglect and natural wear, but preserving them for future generations requires commitment and reverence for what this site represents.

In conclusion, Madan Kamdev stands as a compelling chapter in India's cultural and spiritual history. Its sculptures and ruins are a testament to an era when art was used not only for decoration but as a medium to express complex philosophical and religious ideas. Though often overshadowed by more prominent sites, Madan Kamdev is a unique marvel that tells the story of Assam's rich past—a story of divine love, artistic brilliance, and the enduring power of myth. To visit Madan Kamdev is to step into a world where stone speaks, recounting tales of gods, mortals, love, and devotion, frozen in time yet timeless in their appeal. *(The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK who can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*



The historical and cultural legacy of Assam

By: Dipak Kurmi

Nestled in the northeastern frontier of India, Assam stands as a gateway between South Asia and the broader world beyond, its significance amplified by its position bordering Tibet, China, Burma, and erstwhile East Pakistan. This land, once considered a relatively overlooked province during British rule, has emerged as a region of profound historical and cultural importance, deeply rooted in its ancient heritage and the resilient spirit of its people. The legacy of Assam is not merely a chronicle of political transitions but a tapestry of cultural fusion, historical inquiry, and intellectual pursuits that continue to resonate in the present day.

Assam's recorded history dates back to antiquity, when it formed a part of the illustrious kingdom of Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa. Ancient texts, including the Epics, Puranas, and works of luminaries such as Kalidasa, immortalized this mighty kingdom. The visit of the Chinese pilgrim Hsien Tsang in the seventh century provides one of the earliest detailed accounts of the region, highlighting its wealth, governance, and cultural sophistication under Kumar Bhaskar Varman, a ruler tracing his lineage to the mythical Narakasura. Even then, Assam was not an isolated realm; it was a vibrant polity with significant interactions with the rest of India and beyond.

The name "Assam" itself owes its origin to the Ahoms, a Mongoloid race that arrived in the thirteenth century and established a dominion that endured for six centuries. Their rule not only fortified the region against external threats, such as the relentless incursions of Muslim powers from the west, but also left an indelible mark on its political and cultural landscape. The Ahoms were not merely conquerors; they were integrators who absorbed and adapted to the Aryanized culture of the conquered, resulting in a unique fusion that gave rise to the Assamese identity. This synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan elements defined Assamese culture, setting it apart from other parts of India.

Assam's historical narrative is enriched by its unparalleled commitment to chronicling its past. The Ahoms, with their keen sense of history, institutionalized the practice of preserving detailed records in the form of Buranjis—historical chronicles that documented events, governance, and cultural life with remarkable fidelity. Written in both Ahom and Assamese, these manuscripts have preserved a wealth of information about the political machinery, social structures, and interactions with neighboring kingdoms. The Buranjis are not just records of Ahom rule but also repositories of insights into other contemporary entities, including the Kacharis, Jaintias, and even the Mughal court.

This historical literature provides a vivid picture of Assam's evolution. It recounts the foreign incursions repelled by the Ahoms, the rise and fall of neighboring kingdoms, and the socio-religious transformations that shaped the region. The neo-Vaishnavite movement led by Srimanta Sankaradeva in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was a watershed moment that brought about a literary and cultural renaissance. This movement not only revitalized Assamese literature and language but also contributed to the creation of biographical texts, the Charit-Puthis, and accounts of religious institutions that provide invaluable historical insights.

The collapse of Ahom rule under the weight of Burmese invasions in the early nineteenth century and the subsequent annexation of Assam by the British in 1826 marked the beginning of a new chapter. While the British dismantled the royal archives, they inadvertently paved the way for the modern study of Assam's history. British administrators like Edward Gait and Sir Charles Lyall initiated efforts to collect coins, inscriptions, and manuscripts, laying the groundwork for systematic historical research. Gait's History of Assam and the establishment of institutions like the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samity in 1912 signaled a growing recognition of Assam's historical significance.

The preservation and study of historical manuscripts gained momen-

tum with the creation of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam in 1928. Under the stewardship of scholars like Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, the department edited and published numerous Buranjis, bringing Assam's historical treasures to a wider audience. These efforts, though hampered at times by financial and personnel constraints, have ensured that the chronicles of Assam's past continue to illuminate its rich and complex heritage.

Assam's cultural and historical legacy is not confined to the study of its past. Its ruins, architectural remains, and iconography offer invaluable insights into the broader history of India. The fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan traditions, reflected in its religious practices and artistic expressions, exemplifies the dynamic interplay of influences that have shaped the region. The Buranjis, with their detailed accounts of political and social institutions, remain a testament to the intellectual and administrative sophistication of the Ahoms.

The journey of Assam from a land of legendary kings and ancient epics to a modern state within the Indian Union is a story of resilience and adaptation. Its history is a bridge that connects the ancient with the contemporary, the local with the universal. It is a reminder that even in the remotest corners of the subcontinent, the currents of history flow with vigor, shaping identities and destinies. Assam is not merely a geographical entity; it is a repository of experiences, a crucible of cultures, and a beacon of historical inquiry.

As modern scholarship continues to unearth and reinterpret Assam's past, the region stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of history and culture in shaping our understanding of the present. The chronicles of Assam, from the ancient tales of Pragjyotisha to the meticulous records of the Ahoms, serve as a clarion call to cherish and preserve the rich heritage that defines us all. In the echoes of Assam's past, one hears the resonance of a timeless frontier, forever bridging the divides of time, space, and human experience. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)*

Ernest Hemingway: A Literary Icon

By: Satvabrat Borah

Ernest Hemingway was one of the most influential writers of the 20th century, known for his unique style of writing and adventurous life. Born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois, Hemingway grew up in a quiet suburban town. His father, Clarence Edmonds Hemingway, was a doctor, and his mother, Grace Hall Hemingway, was a music teacher. The family environment was strict, shaped by conservative values. From a young age, Ernest showed a deep love for nature, which he often explored during family trips to Michigan. These experiences would later inspire many of his stories.

After graduating from high school in 1917, Hemingway decided against college and began working as a reporter for "The Kansas City Star." It was here that he learned the principles of concise and straightforward writing, which became hallmarks of his style. In 1918, during World War I, he volunteered to serve as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross in Italy. While on duty, he was severely injured by mortar fire. His time in the war and the injuries he suffered had a profound impact on him, both physically and emotionally. These experiences became the foundation for his novel "A Farewell to Arms", a story about love and loss during wartime.

After the war, Hemingway returned to the United States but soon grew restless. In 1921, he married his first wife, Hadley Richardson, and they moved to Paris. In Paris, Hemingway became part of a group of expatriate writers and artists, later known as the "Lost Generation." He was mentored by Gertrude Stein, who introduced him to other prominent figures like F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound. This period in Paris was crucial for Hemingway, as it helped him refine his craft and develop his unique style. His first collection of short stories, "In Our Time", was published in 1925 and received critical acclaim for its sparse, direct prose.

In 1926, Hemingway published his first major novel, "The Sun Also Rises". The book captures the disillusionment and aimlessness of the post-war generation and is considered one of his finest works. The story, set in Spain and France, revolves around a group of expatriates searching for meaning in their lives. Hemingway's depiction of

the running of the bulls in Pamplona and the bullfights became iconic, showcasing his fascination with Spanish culture and traditions.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Hemingway continued to travel extensively. He visited Spain, Africa, and Cuba, drawing inspiration from these experiences for his writing. His novel "A Farewell to Arms", published in 1929, was another major success, solidifying his reputation as a leading American author. The book tells the story of an American ambulance driver and a British nurse who fall in love during World War I. The novel's tragic ending and realistic portrayal of war left a lasting impression on readers.

Hemingway's love for adventure often influenced his writing. He was an avid hunter, fisherman, and bullfighting enthusiast. In the 1930s, he went on several safaris in Africa, where he hunted big game and marveled at the beauty of the wilderness. These experiences inspired his nonfiction work "Green Hills of Africa" and short stories like "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." His vivid descriptions of nature and the struggles of man against the elements captivated readers.

In 1940, Hemingway published "For Whom the Bell Tolls", a novel set during the Spanish Civil War. The story follows an American dynamiter working with Spanish guerrilla fighters. The book was a critical and commercial success, earning Hemingway a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize. It showcased his ability to blend historical events with deeply personal narratives, creating a powerful and moving story.

Hemingway's personal life was as dramatic as his fiction. He married four times and had three sons. His relationships were often tumultuous, marked by infidelity and emotional strain. Despite his fame, he struggled with depression and alcoholism. These challenges did not stop him from writing, though, and his works continued to receive widespread acclaim.

During World War II, Hemingway served as a journalist and war correspondent, covering significant events like the D-Day invasion and the liberation of Paris. His bravery and willingness to put himself in danger earned him respect and admiration. After the war, Hemingway settled in Cuba, where he wrote some of his most memorable works.

One of Hemingway's greatest

Poem

Why Would Trees Not Be Afraid of People?

By: Mowsam Hazarika

By the banks of the river,
In my grandfather's time,
The trees swayed with the wind,

Echoed the songs of birds,
Drenched themselves in rain,
And offered shelter from the sun.

But now—
They stand no more.

People cut them down,
To build a bridge.

Why do you need the bridge?
To reach nature?
Or to escape from it?

In the heart of the forest,
Young trees dreamed of touching the sky.

But before they could grow,
They were felled—
To make way for industries.

Roots severed, branches broken,
Their dreams lay scattered on the ground.

And the birds—
Where did they go?

Even their shadows
Have vanished from the earth.

Now they say we need bridges
To take people away from nature.

Because 'development' demands

That trees must fall.
Why would trees not be afraid of people?

Pebbles of Sand

By: Shahnaz Islam

In the grains of pebbles,
The sun and stars meet sand and stone—
Her scar, an aesthetic mark,
Etched in the white sand's embrace.
Voyaging toward dawn,
Leaving behind a dusky tale,
The fisherman's net ensnares her pearl—
A treasure beyond life's larger catches.

Each day, every day,
The ocean gives more than fish.
At evenfall, the fisherman rests,
Straining with the roaring waves,
His heart rhyming with the moonlight.
Delight, hope, romance, and greed—
All weave through the tides like
Lust, wealth, and beauty,
A kingdom of desires to reign.

achievements came in 1952 with the publication of "The Old Man and the Sea". The novella tells the story of an aging fisherman named Santiago and his epic struggle to catch a giant marlin. The story is a profound exploration of perseverance, pride, and human resilience. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953 and played a significant role in Hemingway receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. The Nobel Committee praised his "powerful, style-forming mastery of the art of narration." Despite his success, Hemingway's later years were marked by declining health and mental instability. He suffered from various ailments, including high blood pressure, liver disease, and depression. These issues were compounded by a series of accidents, including two plane crashes during a trip to Africa. Hemingway's physical and emotional pain became overwhelming, and he struggled to write.

In 1960, Hemingway moved to Idaho with his fourth wife, Mary Welsh Hemingway. His condition worsened, and he was hospitalized for severe depression. Tragically, on July 2, 1961, Hemingway took his own life at the age of 61. His death shocked the literary world and marked the end of an era.

Ernest Hemingway's legacy endures through his works, which continue to be studied and admired worldwide. His writing style, characterized by simplicity, clarity, and precision, revolutionized modern literature. Hemingway's ability to convey deep emotions with minimal words remains unmatched. His stories, often centered around themes of courage, love, and the human struggle, resonate with readers of all generations. Hemingway's adventurous life also adds to his mystique. He lived boldly, embracing the joys and dangers of the world. Whether on the battlefields of Europe, the plains of Africa, or the waters of the Gulf Stream, Hemingway sought experiences that would fuel his imagination and enrich his writing.

Today, Hemingway is remembered not only as a great writer but also as a cultural icon. His life and works have inspired countless writers, filmmakers, and artists. From his early days in Oak Park to his final years in Idaho, Hemingway's journey was one of passion, creativity, and relentless pursuit of excellence. His influence on literature and popular culture is immeasurable, ensuring that his name will be remembered for generations to come.

Gunman fatally shoots 2 judges in Tehran tied to 1988 mass executions, state media reports

DUBAI, Jan 18: In a rare attack targeting the judiciary, a man fatally shot two prominent hard-line judges in Iran's capital Tehran on Saturday, state media reported.

Both the deceased judges allegedly took part in the mass execution of dissidents in 1988.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the fatal shootings of the judges -- clerics Mohammad Moghiseh and Ali Razini.

However, Razini's involvement in the 1988 executions had likely made him a target in the past, including a failed assassination attempt in 1999.

Their killings also come as Iran faces economic turmoil, the mauling of its Mideast allies by Israel, and the return of Donald Trump to the White House on Monday.

Both clerics served on Iran's Supreme Court, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

A bodyguard for one of the judges was also wounded. The gunman later killed himself, IRNA said.

"According to initial investigations, the person in question did not have a case in the Supreme Court, nor was he a client of the branches of the court," the judiciary's Mizan news agency said.

"Currently, investigations have been launched to identify and arrest the perpetrators of this terrorist act." In January 1999, attackers on motorcycles hurled an explosive at Razini's vehicle, wounding him as he left work as the head of the judiciary in Tehran. (AP)

'Spirit of Cinema & Sports' mini-festival celebrates films as driver of India-UK ties

LONDON, Jan 18: The High Commission of India in London is celebrating the "Spirit of Indian Cinema and Sports" this weekend with a mini-festival of iconic films that showcase the country's sporting achievements and spotlight the film industry as one of the drivers of closer India-UK ties.

The festival, inaugurated by Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami on Friday evening, opened with a packed screening of Kabir Khan directed '83' -- which stars Ranveer Singh in the role of the 1983 cricket World Cup-winning captain Kapil Dev.

This is being followed up on Saturday by screenings of the 2016 box-office hit 'Dangal', starring Aamir Khan as wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat, and the 2007 hit 'Chak De! India' with Shah Rukh Khan in the role of a hockey coach inspired by the life of Mir Ranjan Negi.

"We're doing this because one of the things that seems to have passed us by is the idea of how much film connects India and the UK; you need only to look at the range of offerings of some of our most successful movies to recognise how many of our movies have actually been shot in the UK," Doraiswami said in his opening address.

"The film industry is essentially one of the big potential drivers of future partnership between India and the UK," he said.

"If you look at the utilisation of studios in the UK, the creative industry in the UK, animation, gaming -- the convergence between all of these sectors that constitute the new entertainment industry -- the UK has a lot of what India looks for, and India has the scale and the

Blinken tells AP he's worried Trump regime may abandon Biden's key foreign policy initiatives

WASHINGTON, Jan 18: Outgoing Secretary of State Antony Blinken told The Associated Press that he hopes the incoming Trump administration will press forward with key points in President Joe Biden's foreign policy, including on the Middle East and Ukraine.

But in an wide-ranging interview Friday on his last workday as America's top diplomat, he expressed concern that the Trump team might abandon all or some of those policies.

Blinken said "if past is prologue," there is reason to be concerned that the new administration might not follow through on initiatives that Biden's national security team put into place to end the war in Gaza, keep Ukraine free of Russian interference and maintain strengthened alliances with key partners.

"I don't know, can't know, how they approach things," he said. "I do think that there is, there could and I believe should, be some real continuity in a couple of places."

"The best laid plans. There's, of course, no guarantee that our successors will look to them, rely on them," Blinken said. "But at least there's that option. At least they

Qatar says Israel-Hamas ceasefire to go into effect at 8:30 am on Sunday

CAIRO, Jan 18: The ceasefire between Hamas and Israel will go into effect in less than 24 hours, Qatar's foreign ministry said on Saturday.

In a post on X, foreign minister Majid al-Ansari said the ceasefire will start at 8:30 am (6:30 GMT) on Sunday, and advised people to exercise caution and wait for directions from officials.

Early Saturday morning, Israel's Cabinet approved the deal for a ceasefire in Gaza that would release dozens of hostages and pause the 15-month war with Hamas, bringing the sides a step closer to ending their deadliest and most destructive fighting ever. Despite the ceasefire news, sirens sounded across central Israel on Saturday, with the army saying it intercepted projectiles launched from Yemen.

The Iran-backed Houthis have stepped up their missile attacks in recent weeks. The group says the attacks are part of its campaign aimed at pressuring Israel and the West over the war in Gaza.

There were also continued Israeli strikes into Gaza. The Palestinian health ministry said at least 23 people were killed the previous day.

Under the first phase of the ceasefire, 33 hostages are set to be released over the next six weeks, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

The remainder, including male soldiers, are to be released in a second phase that will be negotiated during the first.



Hamas has said it will not release the remaining captives without a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal.

According to the ceasefire plan, approved by the Cabinet and signed by Israel's national security advisor, the exchange will begin Sunday at 4 pm (14:00 GMT). During each exchange, prisoners will be released by Israel after the hostages have arrived safely.

The plan says that during phase one, some 1,900 Palestinian prisoners will be released, in exchange for 33 Israeli hostages, both alive and dead.

Among the prisoners, 1,167 are residents of Gaza who were held by Israel but were not involved in the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas.

All women and children under 19 from Gaza held by Israel will be freed during this phase.

All Palestinian prisoners who were convicted of deadly attacks

will be exiled, either to Gaza or abroad, and barred from returning to Israel or the West Bank.

Some will be exiled for three years and others permanently, according to the plan.

However, key questions remain about the ceasefire, -- the second achieved during the war -- including the names of the 33 hostages who are to be released and who among them is still alive.

Hamas has agreed to free three female hostages on Day 1 of the deal, four on Day 7, and the remaining 26 over the following five weeks.

Palestinian detainees are to be released as well.

Israel's justice ministry has published a list of more than 700 people who are to be freed in the deal's first phase, saying the release will not begin before 4 pm local time on Sunday.

All people on the list are younger or female. Also during the

first phase, Israeli troops are to pull back into a buffer zone about a kilometre wide inside Gaza, along its borders with Israel.

The move will allow displaced Palestinians to return to their homes, including in Gaza City and northern Gaza.

With most of Gaza's population driven into massive, squalid tent camps, Palestinians are desperate to get back to their homes, even though many were destroyed or heavily damaged by Israel's campaign.

The largely-devastated territory is expected to see a surge in humanitarian aid.

Trucks carrying aid lined up on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing into Gaza on Friday.

On Saturday, two Egyptian government ministers arrived in the northern Sinai Peninsula to oversee the preparations for the delivery of aid and to receive the evacuation of wounded patients, the health ministry said.

Hamas triggered the war with its October 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people and left some 250 others captive.

Nearly 100 hostages remain in Gaza.

Israel responded with a devastating offensive that has killed more than 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half the dead. (AP)

For TikTok users, mourning, frustration, clinging to hope as TikTok ban looms

NEW YORK, Jan 18: The US is inching closer and closer to a potential TikTok ban -- with the nation's highest court upholding a law that's set to halt new downloads of the app starting Sunday.

But many questions around what exactly this ban will look like, and whether it will actually be enforced, remain.

That puts millions of users and content creators in limbo -- particularly influencers and small business owners who have come to rely on the mega-popular social media platform as a source of income.

Among those individuals is Terrell Wade, a comedian, actor and content creator with 1.5 million followers on TikTok under the handle @TheWadeEmpire. Wade, who has turned his TikTok presence into a full-time job, said he expects "two days of chaos" as the Sunday deadline nears.

"At this point, I really don't know what to believe," Wade told The Associated Press.

Israel's Cabinet approves deal for ceasefire in Gaza and release of dozens of hostages

JERUSALEM, Jan 18: Israel's Cabinet approved a deal early Saturday for a ceasefire in Gaza that would release dozens of hostages held there and pause the 15-month war with Hamas, bringing the sides a step closer to ending their deadliest and most destructive fighting ever.

Mediators Qatar and the US announced the ceasefire Wednesday, but the deal was in limbo for more than a day as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted there were last-minute complications that he blamed on the Hamas militant group.

The ceasefire -- just the second achieved during the war -- will go into effect Sunday, though key questions remain, including the names of the 33 hostages

to be released during the six-week first phase of the ceasefire and who among them is still alive.

The Cabinet met well past the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, in a reflection of the moment's importance. In line with Jewish law, the Israeli government usually halts all business for the Sabbath except in emergency cases of life or death.

Netanyahu instructed a special task force to prepare to receive the hostages returning from Gaza and said that their families were informed a deal had been reached.

Hundreds of Palestinian detainees are to be released as well, and the largely devastated Gaza should see a surge in humanitarian aid. (AP)

Climate misinformation is rife on social media -- and poised to get worse

CHICAGO, Jan 18: The decision by Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, to end its fact-checking programme and otherwise reduce content moderation raises the question of what content on those social media platforms will look like going forward.

One worrisome possibility is that the change could open the floodgates to more climate misinformation on Meta's apps, including misleading or out-of-context claims during disasters.

In 2020, Meta rolled out its Climate Science Information Centre on Facebook to respond to climate misinformation. Currently, third-party fact-checkers working with Meta flag false and misleading posts. Meta then decides whether to attach a warning label to them and reduce how much the company's algorithms promote them.

Meta's policies have fact-checkers prioritising "viral false information," hoaxes and "provably false claims that are timely, trending and consequential." Meta explicitly states that this excludes opinion content that does not include false claims.

The company will end its agreements with US-based third-party fact-checking organisations in



March 2025. The planned changes slated to roll out to US users won't affect fact-checking content viewed by users outside the US. The tech industry faces greater regulations on combating misinformation in other regions, such as the European Union.

Fact-checking curbs climate misinformation

I study climate change communication. Fact-checks can help correct political misinformation, including on climate change. People's beliefs, ideology and prior knowledge affect how well fact-checks work. Finding messages that align with the target audi-

ence's values, along with using trusted messengers -- like climate-friendly conservative groups when speaking to political conservatives -- can help. So, too, does appealing to shared social norms, like limiting harm to future generations.

Heat waves, flooding and fire conditions are becoming more common and catastrophic as the world warms. Extreme weather events often lead to a spike in social media attention to climate change. Social media posting peaks during a crisis but drops off quickly.

Low-quality fake images created using generative artificial in-

Impeached South Korean Prez argues for his release as court reviews his formal arrest

SEOUL, Jan 18: South Korea's impeached president on Saturday argued for his release before a Seoul judge as the court reviewed whether to grant a law enforcement request for his formal arrest.

Yoon, who has been in detention since he was apprehended on Wednesday in a massive law enforcement operation at his residence, faces potential rebellion charges linked to his declaration of martial law on December 3, which set off the country's most serious political crisis since its democratisation in the late 1980s.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and the military, requested the Seoul Western District Court to grant a warrant for Yoon's formal arrest.

Yoon's lawyers said he spoke for about 40 minutes to the judge during the nearly five-hour closed-door hearing. His legal team and anti-corruption agencies presented opposing arguments about whether he should be held in custody. The lawyers did not share his specific comments.

The judge is expected to make a decision by late Saturday or early Sunday. Yoon's motorcade was seen leaving the court Saturday evening for the detention centre, where Yoon will await the decision.

If Yoon is arrested, investigators can extend his detention to 20 days, during which they will transfer the case to public prosecutors for indictment. If the court rejects the investigators' request, Yoon will be released and return to his residence.

Yoon was transported to the court from a detention centre in Uiwang, near Seoul, in a blue Justice Ministry van escorted by police and the presidential security service. The motorcade entered the court's basement parking space as thousands of Yoon's supporters rallied in nearby streets amid a heavy police presence, waving banners and shouting slogans calling for his

Appeals court rules against Obama-era policy to shield immigrants who came to US as young children

NEW ORLEANS, Jan 18: A federal appeals court on Friday ruled against an Obama-era policy to shield immigrants who came to the country illegally as young children, only three days before Donald Trump takes office with pledges of mass deportations.

The unanimous decision by a panel of the 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans -- two judges appointed by Republican presidents, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, and one by Democrat Barack Obama -- is the latest blow for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme, whose beneficiaries have lived in legal limbo for more than a decade.

It signals no immediate change for its more than 500,000 beneficiaries, who can renew temporary permits to live and work in the United States. But the federal government cannot take new applications, leaving an aging and thinning pool of recipients.

The decision may tee up the policy for a third visit to the Supreme Court. Trump sought to end DACA during his first term, but he also

released.

Some protesters temporarily broke through the police lines and tapped on the windows of his van as the motorcade slowed while approaching the court. Yoon did not speak to reporters before heading to the hearing.

It hadn't been clear until Saturday morning whether Yoon would choose to attend the hearing.

Defence lawyers met Yoon at the detention centre and he accepted his legal team's advice to appear personally before the judge, said Yoon Kab-keun, one of the president's lawyers.

The lawyer said the president was to argue that his decree was a legitimate exercise of his powers and that accusations of rebellion would not hold up before a criminal court or the Constitutional Court, which is reviewing whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him.

Nine people, including Yoon's defence minister, police chief, and several top military commanders, have already been arrested and indicted for their roles in the enforcement of martial law.

The crisis began when Yoon, in an attempt to break through legislative gridlock, imposed military rule and sent troops to the National Assembly and election offices.

The standoff lasted only hours after lawmakers who managed to get through a blockade voted to lift the measure. The opposition-dominated assembly voted to impeach him on December 14.

If Yoon is formally arrested, it could mark the beginning of an extended period in custody for him, lasting months or more.

If prosecutors indict Yoon on rebellion and abuse of power charges, which are the allegations now being examined by investigators, they could keep him in custody for up to six months before trial.

Under South Korean law, orchestrating a rebellion is punishable by life imprisonment or the death penalty. (AP)

occasionally expressed wishes that beneficiaries be allowed to stay.

Obama introduced DACA in 2012, citing inaction by Congress on legislation aimed at giving those brought to the U.S. as children a path to legal status. Legal battles followed, including two trips to the Supreme Court.

This latest case involves a new version of the rule issued by President Joe Biden in 2022. It represented little substantive change from the 2012 memo that created DACA, but it was subject to public comment as part of a formal rule-making process intended to improve its chances of surviving legal muster.

US District Judge Andrew Hanen in Houston said the executive branch had overstepped its authority and barred the government from approving new applications. He left it intact for current beneficiaries while appeals played out in court.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who led the challenge on behalf of Republican-led states, called Friday's ruling "a major victory." (AP)

telligence software, so-called AI slop, is adding to confusion online during crises. For example, in the aftermath of back-to-back hurricanes Helene and Milton last fall, fake AI-generated images of a young girl, shivering and holding a puppy in a boat, went viral on the social media platform X. The spread of rumours and misinformation hindered the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster response.

What distinguishes misinformation from disinformation is the intent of the person or group doing the sharing. Misinformation is false or misleading content shared without active intention to mislead. On the other hand, disinformation is misleading or false information shared with the intent to deceive.

Disinformation campaigns are already happening. In the wake of the 2023 Hawaii wildfires, researchers at Recorded Future, Microsoft, NewsGuard and the University of Maryland independently documented an organised propaganda campaign by Chinese operatives targeting US social media users.

To be sure, the spread of misleading information and rumours on social media is not a new prob-

lem. However, not all content moderation approaches have the same effect, and platforms are changing how they address misinformation. For example, X replaced its rumour controls that had helped debunk false claims during fast-moving disasters with user-generated labels, Community Notes.

False claims can go viral rapidly. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg specifically cited X's Community Notes as an inspiration for his company's planned changes in content moderation. The trouble is false claims go viral quickly. Recent research has found that the response time of crowd-sourced Community Notes is too slow to stop the diffusion of viral misinformation early in its online life cycle -- the point when posts are most widely viewed.

In the case of climate change, misinformation is "sticky". It is especially hard to dislodge falsehoods from people's minds once they encounter them repeatedly. Furthermore, climate misinformation undermines public acceptance of established science. Just sharing more facts does not work to combat the spread of false claims about climate change. (AP)

Manipur NPP MLA N Kayisii dies at 58

IMPHAL, Jan 18: Former Manipur minister and National People's Party (NPP) MLA N Kayisii died here on Saturday after a prolonged illness. He was 58.

Kayisii, a Naga, is the MLA from Tadubi constituency in Senapati district and also the NPP state president.

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh condoled the death of Kayisii and said his service to the people of Manipur will always be remembered. The CM visited the residence of Kayisii and offered his condolences.

Singh said, "Kayisii was soft-spoken, a very good man and a good leader. I had contacted him twice while he was ill. Very sorry over the loss."

Later in a post on X, the CM said "I am deeply saddened by the passing of N Kayisii, the respected MLA of Tadubi assembly constituency. His service to the people of Manipur and his commitment to the well-being of our state will always be remembered." "At this moment of grief, my heartfelt condolences go out to his family, loved ones, and all who held him in high regard. May his soul rest in peace, and may we honour his memory by continuing the work he was so passionate about," he added. (PTI)

Kaling Moyong elected Arunachal BJP president

ITANAGAR, Jan 18: Former MLA Kaling Moyong was on Saturday unanimously elected as the new president of the BJP Arunachal Pradesh unit.

Moyong, who was a two-time MLA representing the Pasighat East assembly seat since 2014, lost his seat in the April 2024 elections. He was the only candidate to submit nomination papers for the post. He will replace Biyuram Wahge as the state BJP president.

Union Ports, Shipping, and Waterways minister Sarbananda Sonowal, the returning officer, announced Moyong's election as well as the appointment of three national council members from Arunachal Pradesh.

The three national council members include former party vice presidents Tagin Siga and Yelam Taga Borang, and former Tirap district president Kamrang Tesia.

Sonowal said the BJP's national election committee had tasked him with selecting the state party president and national council members after consulting party leaders and workers.

"Honouring this responsibility, I convened meetings with party workers and leaders and selected Kaling Moyong as the new president along with three national council members," Sonowal said, adding that the election process concluded successfully.

He praised the dedication of BJP workers, saying, "Because of the commitment of our party workers, India has become a strong nation under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

Sonowal highlighted the significant progress made by Arunachal Pradesh and the northeast under Modi's leadership.

He also praised Chief Minister Pema Khandu, noting that Arunachal Pradesh had become one of the top ten developing states in India under his leadership. Khandu in his address, congratulated Moyong on his new role and urged party workers to work together to meet the expectations of the people.

He assured government support for the party's policies and programmes and emphasised the importance of public outreach to raise awareness about development schemes. "To understand the issues faced by people, the government has decided to hold cabinet meetings in every district. The first meeting will be held in Kurung Kumey district," Khandu said.

The chief minister also mentioned that guardian ministers and mentor secretaries had been assigned to every district to identify problems and suggest solutions.

"The feedback from guardian ministers will be incorporated into the planning process, ensuring schemes address real needs and minimise wasteful expenditure," he added.

Khandu further announced that the BJP plans to field 20 women candidates in the 2029 assembly elections in line with the Women Reservation Bill. He urged district presidents to start preparing women candidates for the elections.

In his address, Moyong expressed his gratitude to the party for entrusting him with this responsibility. (PTI)

Woman found dead in Agartala suburbs, one held

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 18: A gruesome murder in Maheshkhala, West Tripura District, has shocked the local community. On Saturday, a married woman, Kalpana Debnath, was found dead in what police believe to be a premeditated crime stemming from an alleged extramarital affair. According to police sources, Kalpana, originally from Jogendra Nagar, had been living with Shankar Sutradhar as a tenant in Maheshkhala. Kalpana reportedly left her children behind several months ago to move in with Shankar, with whom she was allegedly in a relationship. The tragic incident came to light on Saturday morning when Kalpana's daughter received word of her mother's death. Rushing to the scene, she discovered her mother's lifeless body lying on the ground, while Shankar sat nearby on a bed, seemingly indifferent. The daughter's anguished cries attracted the attention of neighbors, who quickly gathered at the residence.

Tripura BJP District President Elections on January 20, nominations today

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 18: The elections for the District Presidents of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Tripura are scheduled to be held on January 20. Nominations and scrutiny will take place on January 19, as per an official order issued by the State Returning Officer, Samarendra Chandra Deb.

According to the notification, the elections will be conducted in the respective BJP District Offices across the state. All concerned party members have been urged to actively participate in the Sangathan Parv election process to elect their District Presidents.

The schedule outlined in the notification states that nominations can be submitted on January 19 from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM at the designated District Offices. The scrutiny of nominations will commence immediately afterward at 1:00 PM. The voting and declaration of results are slated for January 20.

Nomination forms can be collected from the designated officers at the district offices and must be submitted in the prescribed format within the given timeframe. The decision of the designated officer regarding the scrutiny process and election results will be considered final.

No. CHD/UDD/2/15th FC/Tied/ 1st Inst./2024/NIT-CS/3367 Dated Kokrajhar the 27th 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 (1st Installment) for the year 2023-24 during 2024-25.

Group No.	Name of Schemes	Bid cost(Rs.)	Tender Value (Rs.)
Group-I	Supply of Cesspool for collection of sludge from Septic Tank (4000 Ltrs.Capacity) at Kokrajhar Municipal Board.	600.00	18,88,850.00

Last date of submission of completed tender is 20.01.2025 (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 19.01.2025.

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/2024-25/1323

GOVT. OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS::
KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT CIRCLE,
D I P H U
No. E-1/Grade-III/Apptt./Sec./2024/2786
Dated Diphu the 17/01/2025.

NOTICE

It is for information of all candidates who have applied for the post of L.D.A. (Grade-III) and Grade-IV under Secondary Education Department in the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle, Diphu in response to the advertisement issued from the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle, Diphu vide memo no. E-1/Grade-III/Apptt./Sec./2024/02-10 Dated 18-06-2024 that the Written Test Examination for the said post is scheduled to be held on 09th February, 2025.

Therefore, all candidates are informed to collect their calling letters for appearing the said Written Test Examination for the post of L.D.A. (Grade-III) and Grade-IV under Secondary Education Department from the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle, Diphu during office hours w.e.f., 28th January, 2025 to 07th February, 2025.

Sd/-
Inspector of Schools,
Karbi Anglong District Circle,
Diphu.

GOVT. OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS::
KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT CIRCLE,
D I P H U
No. E-1/Apptt./IS/2024/
Dated Diphu the /_/2025.

ADVERTISEMENT

In pursuance of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu's letter no. KAAC/Esstt-679/P(B)/Ele.Edn./Prior Approval of Post/2023-24/14 Dated Diphu the 30th July, 2024, applications are invited from the intending candidates who are citizens of India as defined under Article 5-8 of the Constitution of India and permanent residents of the administrative jurisdiction of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council for filling up of 01 (One) no. of post of Planning Assistant in Education Department of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, in the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle Diphu as per details given below:

Sl. No.	Name of post	Pay Band	Grade Pay	No. of posts	Education Qualification
1.	Planning Assistant	Rs. 22,000/- Rs. 97,000/-	Rs. 9,400/-	01 (One)	A Post Graduate Degree with at-least 55% Marks for General/OBC/Others and 50% Marks for ST/SC Candidates who are having atleast 1 (One) Year Diploma/Degree in Computer Application are allowed to apply for the said post from any Recognized University with the following subjects:- 1. Sociology. 2. Economics. 3. Geography. 4. Psychology. 5. International Relations. 6. Anthropology 7. Archaeology. 8. Linguistics 9. Political Science. 10. Social Work 11. Education. 12. History. 13. Management and Business Studies.

Terms and conditions:

- Age-Candidate should not be less than 18 years and not more than 40 years for General, 43 years for OBC/MOBC and 45 years for ST/SC candidates, 42 years for Ex-Servicemen and 50 years for Person with Disabilities as on 01/01/2025.
- The ST/SC/OBC and MOBC candidates should submit caste certificate along with the application.
- Incomplete applications shall be summarily rejected on the spot
- The last date of receipt of application is 30th January, 2025 upto 04.00 PM. If the last date of submission of application is holiday, then the next working day will be considered as the last date.
- Application received either by post or by hand after the last date of submission of application will not be accepted under any circumstances.
- The Candidate of General/OBC/MOBC/ST/SC must submit Voter ID for residential proof
- Upto date Employment Exchange Registration Certificate should be enclosed along with the application.

How to apply:

- The candidate should apply in duly filled up prescribed standard form application along with all self-attested certificates, testimonials and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Councils' Fee Stamp of Rs. 10/- (Rupees Ten) to the office of the undersigned on or before 30th January, 2025. In service candidate should apply through proper channel along with NOC from their employer otherwise their application shall be rejected.
- 02 (Two) Copies of Passport size Photograph.
- Contact number of the applicant along with full signature on the application form.
- The Undersigned retains the right to correct any inadvertent of typological error to cancel, alter any terms and condition of advertisement at any stage if the need arises.
- Canvassing in any form will be disqualification of the part of the candidate.

Sd/-
Inspector of Schools,
Karbi Anglong District Circle,
Diphu.

GOVT. OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS::
KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT CIRCLE,
D I P H U
No. E-1/Grade-III/Apptt./Sec./2024/2784
Dated Diphu the 17/01/2025.

NOTICE

It is for information of all candidates who have applied for the post of Grade-IV under Elementary Education Department in the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle, Diphu in response to the advertisement issued from the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle, Diphu vide memo no. E-1/Grade-IV/Apptt./Ele./2024/01 Dated 18-06-2024, that the Written Test Examination for the said post is scheduled to be held on 09th February, 2025.

Therefore, all candidates are informed to collect their calling letters for appearing the said Written Test Examination for the post of Grade-IV under Elementary Education Department from the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle, Diphu during office hours w.e.f., 28th January, 2025 to 07th February, 2025.

Sd/-
Inspector of Schools,
Karbi Anglong District Circle,
Diphu.

3.17 lakh villages covered through technology under Svamitva Scheme: Nadda



AHMEDABAD, Jan 18: Union minister JP Nadda said on Saturday that the distribution of Svamitva property cards and other initiatives underscore the Narendra Modi government's resolve to empower the people.

He said 3.17 lakh villages were covered with the help of technology under the Svamitva Scheme, and 1.53 lakh farmers will be given property rights today.

Nadda virtually attended the distribution of Svamitva cards by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Ahmedabad with Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Governor Acharya Devvrat.

"Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, the empowerment of the common man has been given great importance. The Modi government always prioritised people and ensured how we should work to empower the common man," Nadda said while addressing a state-level programme.

PM Modi distributed around 65 lakh Svamitva property cards, which he said would bolster economic activities and alleviate poverty.

These property cards are being distributed to beneficiaries across more than 50,000 villages in 10 states -- Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and two Union Territories off Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh.

"When I talk about empowerment, the focus is on villages, the poor, deprived, oppressed, exploited, Dalit, youths, and farmers. All programmes were planned to bring these sections into the mainstream," the Union Health Minister said.

He said stakeholders should join the process to strengthen the empowerment of the common man and talk to beneficiaries to understand how these people were given the privilege of joining the main-

Kejriwal says Delhi Police prevented documentary screening, officials cite MCC

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday alleged the Delhi Police prevented the screening of a documentary exposing the "secrets" and "conspiracies" behind the arrest of his party leaders.

A senior Delhi police officer said no permission was sought for the screening event despite the Model Code of Conduct being in force in Delhi in view of the assembly polls on February 5.

But Kejriwal questioned why was permission needed for a private screening event. He told a press conference here the documentary -- Unbreakable -- was to be shown to the media at the private event, and it was not any political programme. "No votes were going to be sought at the event neither anything was to be said against any party," Kejriwal said.

The AAP convener shared a picture of the venue of the screening at the Pyarelal Bhawan at ITO, showing a heavy police presence. He charged the police did not allow the screening at the behest of the BJP.

"The BJP is completely scared of the documentary because it uncovers the secrets and conspiracies behind the arrest of AAP leaders in the past two years. It exposes the illegal and unconstitutional activities of the BJP," he alleged.

At a separate press conference later in the day, senior AAP leader Saurabh Bhardwaj screened the trailer of the documentary to the media.

He said the Aam Aadmi Party will not deter from showing the documentary and will ensure it reached the public.

"The AAP is now determined to ensure this film reaches the public. Whether I invite you to my home and show it to you in a room on a mobile phone or send it to you via WhatsApp, I will make sure you watch this film. One way or another, this film will reach everyone," he said.

Prominent AAP leaders including Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and Satyendar Jain were arrested by central agencies in corruption cases during 2023-24. (PTI)

Delhi polls: AIMIM, BSP step up campaign with street plays, wall paintings, cricket matches

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: As Delhi Assembly elections approach, political activity had intensified with smaller parties like AIMIM, BSP and others in the city engaging voters through grassroots campaigns including street plays, wall paintings, and cricket matches with children.

Delhi will go to polls on February 5, with the ruling AAP, BJP, and Congress dominating the political landscape.

However, parties with significant influence in other states, such as Asaduddin Owaisi's All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and Munish Kumar Raizada's Bharatiya Liberal Party (BLP), are working to expand their presence in the national capital.

The AIMIM has launched an intensive door-to-door campaign, particularly in Okhla, where its candidate Shafa-ur-Rehman and his wife are leading outreach efforts, along with student activists from Jamia Millia Islamia and former Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens



AIMIM and BSP leaders speaking at a campaign event.

(NRC) protester. "Family members, the student wing from Jamia, activists from the CAA-NRC protests, and party leaders are conducting a robust door-to-door campaign. Shafa-ur-Rehman, our candidate from Okhla, and his wife, along with party members, are effectively leading the outreach," AIMIM Delhi party president Shoaib Jamai told PTI.

Nukkad Sabhas (street meetings) are also being held regularly and the party has prioritised social media as part of its strategy, he said. "We have a dedicated social media team highlighting past state-

ments and actions of AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan while also showcasing videos of areas lacking development to present a real picture to the voters," Jamai said. BLP chief and candidate from New Delhi constituency, who was once a friend of Kejriwal, Munish Kumar Raizada, has focused on a grassroots-level campaign. His team has been actively visiting JJ clusters, all 16 Dhobi Ghats, Muslim colonies, and Valmiki Sadan, conducting door-to-door outreach. Additionally, the party is using wall paintings, distributing pamphlets, billboards, and stickers, and

leveraging their Facebook and Instagram handles to reach a wider audience.

"We are not relying on AI-generated content, movies, or songs like other parties. Our creative slogans and campaign songs are connecting with the people," Raizada said, emphasizing on the authenticity of their campaign.

Among the slogans, "Samaya nahi, Samadhan chuniye: Delhi mein Khuda chuniye" is one that has resonated strongly with locals, calling for change and action in the face of a stagnant political climate.

When not engaging with voters, Raizada and his team play cricket with children in the JJ clusters, which has earned him the affectionate title of "Doctor Uncle."

"It's not just about politics, it's about being with the people, listening to their issues, and helping in any way I can," he said, noting that he has used his medical expertise to assist locals in need of health support.

Raizada's team conducts 8-9 Nukkad Nataks (street plays) weekly, addressing key issues like corruption, unemployment, and de-

velopment. "I will always be among the people. I won't just appear during election time like other politicians," Raizada said, highlighting his commitment to represent the community genuinely.

The BSP, which plans to contest all 70 seats in the Delhi Assembly elections, has adopted a traditional approach to connect with the voters.

The party is focusing on door-to-door campaigning, supported by senior party leaders and conducting Nukkad meetings, Central Coordinator of the BSP Nitin Singh told PTI.

Along with posters and pamphlets, the party is utilizing media to reach out to people.

Singh said, "We are not engaging in the social media game like other parties. Instead, we are taking the traditional approach, connecting with people on a personal level and promoting our campaign in a raw, grassroots manner."

The final deadline for candidates to submit their nomination papers to the respective returning officers was January 17. (PTI)

Nitish Kumar gov't's caste survey was to befool Bihar people, alleges Rahul Gandhi



PATNA, Jan 18: Alleging that the caste survey conducted by the Nitish Kumar government in Bihar was an exercise to befool the people, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said his party will stick to its demand for caste census as such an initiative is essential to plan development work in the country.

Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, also accused the BJP and the RSS of "undermining the Constitution and neglecting marginalised communities" in the country.

He also alleged that RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's "true independence" remark was "against the country's Constitution".

Addressing 'Samvidhan Suraksha Sammelan' at Babu Sabhagar here, Gandhi said, "Dalits, minorities and socially marginalised people comprise 90 per cent population of this country but they are not part of the system... This is the reason that we have been demanding caste census."

He also claimed, "I have categorically told leaders in Parliament, in front of Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji, that our party will get this passed at any cost."

Gandhi said a caste census across the country is "important to find out how much participation OBCs, Dalits and workers have in the bureaucracy and other sectors".

"The aim of the caste census is not just to know about the count of various castes but their participation in the country's wealth as well... We don't want a caste survey like the Bihar government did. The exercise which the Bihar government had done was just to befool people," the Congress leader alleged.

He also claimed that the 50 per cent cap on reservations for people belonging to SCs, STs and OBCs is "not enough".

"We will increase the cap for the benefit of the majority of the people. A few select organisations, including RSS and its people, industrial houses are running the country," he claimed.

The country's Constitution is "not just a book" but "talks about atrocities and difficulties faced by Dalits", he said. Speaking on RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's "true independence" remark, Gandhi alleged, "His remark about India's true independence after the Ram temple consecration is against the Constitution. The BJP and the RSS are undermining the Constitution and neglecting marginalised communities."

He also said the political fight is on between "those who want to save the Constitution and ones who are spreading hatred". (PTI)

Simultaneous poll is 'unconstitutional', being brought with political motive: TN Minister Ponnudiy

CHENNAI, Jan 18: The Centre's initiative of 'one nation, one election' was 'unconstitutional' and was being brought with a political motive, DMK senior and Tamil Nadu Forests Minister K Ponnudiy said on Saturday.

Speaking at the DMK legal wing's third state conference that began here, he said "the move is unconstitutional and is being brought with a political motive."

Terming the move to enforce simultaneous poll as an attempt to dispense with the five-year term of assemblies and downsizing the states to union territories, senior advocate Kapil Sibal said states will not be in the picture at all if one nation, one election law was enforced.

"It will destroy the very federal structure of our country. The preamble of the Constitution says that India is a union of states. You have diminished the states... you are destroying the basic structure of the state, and trying for one nation, one poll, one language, political party, one religion," Sibal said during a discussion on the topic.

"The move amounts to destroying the essence of democratic functioning of our republic. Cronies support the idea without a national debate on it. I don't think the people of India and Tamil Nadu will tolerate it," Sibal said and claimed that it would also affect the education, health and other state specific issues.

Replying to a question from T K S Elangovan, former MP, he said if this became a law, then the five-year term of 17 states will be truncated. But five-year term was the basic feature of the Constitution, he added.

Former CEC S Y Quraishi pointed "with great anxiety" that what happened in Kashmir could happen anywhere. "With one stroke, Kashmir became a union territory. Can they not do it to Tamil Nadu tomorrow?" he asked.

Senior journalist N Ram said the Centre's attempt should be seen in a wider context of 'Hindutva authoritarianism' and what the BJP government has done and was doing to institutions and to citizens' freedom.

"It is an assault on the diversity and pluralism of India and India's civilisation because we are multi-

cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-everything. It is an assault on federalism. It is to impoverish the diversity and pluralism of India that this plan is being worked out," Ram said during the panel discussion on the 'one nation, one election' initiative of the Centre.

The simultaneous elections proposes aligning the election cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. This would allow voters to cast their ballots for both tiers of government on the same day in their constituencies, though voting could still occur in phases across the country, the Centre had said.

By synchronising these electoral timelines, the approach aims to address logistical challenges, reduce costs, and minimise disruptions caused by frequent elections, it had said.

Earlier, Ponnudiy said he had faced several cases in the past including those filed with political motive during the erstwhile AIADMK regime under late Chief Minister Jayalalithaa. "They filed a case against me for visiting a civil supplies godown and on then opposition leader and now Chief Minister M K Stalin and myself for visiting the Queen Mary's College," Ponnudiy said at the conference. But these cases were successfully won by meticulous presentation and sound arguments by the DMK advocates in the courts. "The DMK's legal wing, especially senior advocate N R Elango, who has been handling my cases, should be appreciated for the good work," he said.

Party General Secretary and Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan who inaugurated the conference at the St George's Anglo Indian School, said he studied law and began practise in his younger days but took to full-time politics.

"Like me Ponnudiy and S Regupathy (state Law Minister) are advocates but they seldom go to courts. But, Ponnudiy goes to the court to appear in his cases," Duraimurugan said in a lighter vein.

He however, pointed out that there were dedicated advocates in the party who devoted their time and efforts in successfully handling the legal cases. Senior advocate and Rajya Sabha MP, N R Elango, spoke. (PTI)

Simultaneous polls not against federal structure: Meghwal

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Holding Lok Sabha and assembly elections simultaneously is not against the federal structure, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal has said, asserting that synchronised polls will improve governance.

He also said those opposing "one nation, one election" are doing it due to political reasons.

In an interview to PTI Videos, Meghwal said the first few Lok Sabha and legislative assembly elections were held together from 1952.

If that was not against the federal structure, "how will it be bad (for federalism) now," he asked.

Meghwal said the bills on simultaneous polls were referred to a joint committee of Parliament as Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also keen that a House panel should examine the draft laws.

In the first meeting of the joint committee, Legislative Department Secretary Rajiv Mani explained to the members various aspects of simultaneous polls as well as the history of synchronised elections.

"Now the biggest allegation they (those who are opposed to one nation, one election)



make is that it is against the federal structure. I want to say that the 1952 elections were held, the elections of all the assemblies were also held simultaneously. "The 1957 elections were held; the 1962 elections were held simultaneously. The 1967 elections were held simultaneously... Now how will it be bad (for federal structure)?" he said.

Meghwal said simultaneous polls will lead to good governance and expeditious development.

The difficulties that arise from time to time due to the Model Code of Conduct will be ad-

ressed, he asserted.

He said that the opposition members in the joint parliamentary committee have been explained what the synchronised system is and they have understood. "What is the 'appointed date' of the Lok Sabha, this has also been told to them, they have understood everything."

"... if someone is opposing it, then they are doing it for political reasons," he claimed.

Responding to a question on the Waqf amendment bill, he said a joint committee of the two Houses is examining the draft laws and holding consultations.

"But how can it be that when there is some property of a village and one day you will come and say that it is the property of waqf and it will become the property of waqf?" Meghwal questioned.

He said a system should be there in place in case of an encroachment.

After the committee submits report, it will come to Parliament for consideration and passing.

On the issue of Places of Worship Act, the Union minister said when the matter is in the Supreme Court, any comment on the issue should be avoided. (PTI)

Lack of jobs, unsettled borders are issues India has to fix for Viksit Bharat: Army vice chief

SURAT, Jan 18: Lack of adequate employment opportunities, unsettled borders, and its position in the human development index are some of the weaknesses India needs to address to realise the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, Vice Chief of the Army Staff Lt General N S Raja Subramani has said.

Speaking on the topic of "National Security and Bharat @ 2047" at Surat LitFest 2025 on Friday, Lt Gen Subramani said the India of 2047 should have integrated its response mechanism, resolved its internal problems in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast, as well as left-wing extremism (LWE) to ensure social and communal harmony.

"Our strengths are our geographical location, youth, stable economic growth, and service sectors -- Pharma and IT -- which are progressing. What are our weaknesses? First, environmental change; second, our manufacturing sector is not strong; third, we do not have that many employ-

ment opportunities. Our border, whether with China or Pakistan, is not yet developed. We need to improve the human development index," he said.

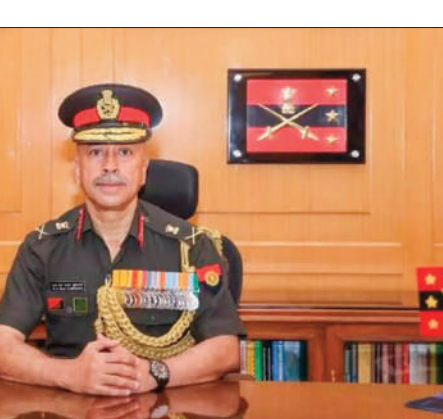
Lt Gen Subramani said, "It is our responsibility to work on the internal conflicts in the society, reduce tensions, and move forward towards development. Only then will internal security also improve."

He said that by 2047, India's response mechanism should be integrated, and internal problems would have to be solved.

Issues related to J&K, Manipur, Nepal, and the LWE would have to be resolved so that there is social and communal harmony and India becomes developed by 2047, he said.

Lt Gen Subramani said economic security is also vital, and India can never progress if national and economic security are not in unison.

He said external and internal security cannot be achieved without



and hybrid, economic and cyber warfare -- the war of narrative through social media -- are affecting everyone.

"When we form a strategy, superpowers such as the US and China and Russia are important for us," he said.

As far as external security is concerned, India shares a long, unsettled border with China, which has given rise to tension between the two countries, he said.

"You must have heard about our discussions with China in October-November 2024, due to which the tension between us after the 2020 Galwan war has reduced a bit, and China has left the region. Currently, the situation is nearly normal but also sensitive," Lt Gen Subramani said.

He said China will try to increase its influence on India's strategic space -- neighbours like Bangladesh and Myanmar.

As far as external security is concerned, India's border areas need to be fully developed by 2047, he said.

"Our relations with Pakistan and China are good, J&K and Northeast are integrated, we maintain our dominance over the Indian Ocean region, and we manage our security using tech-oriented solutions," he said.

As far as internal security is concerned, Lt Gen Subramani said the situation in J&K has become normal after Article 370 and recent elections with more than 60

per cent voter turnout.

"Now, we have an elected government there. Even when we have sporadic terrorist incidents, the Army, CAPF, police and state administration have controlled the situation. As far as the Northeast is concerned, you know about the violence in Manipur. Right now, the situation is under control. And we hope that it will take time, but we will control the situation as soon as possible," he said.

The CRPF and internal security forces have controlled LWE well, and we have seen maximum development in the red corridor, he said.

Lt Gen Subramani said that in 2047, India should be the kind of country people from all over the world would want to live in, and the economy should be more than \$30 trillion.

"We should have internal peace in every way and should be a leader in the sphere of environmental, energy, human and technological security," he said. (PTI)

Adhikari welcomes court's verdict on RG Kar doctor's murder

KOLKATA, Jan 18: Senior BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari on Saturday welcomed the court's verdict declaring Sanjay Roy "guilty" of raping and murdering an on-duty doctor at the state-run RG Kar hospital, but called for further investigation into the larger conspiracy allegations raised by the victim's parents.

The Sealadh court, where Roy's trial was held, will announce the sentence on Monday. Anirban Das, the additional district and sessions' judge, said.

"We welcome the judgment. But we would have been happier if the former principal of R G Kar hospital, Sandip Ghosh, and former Kolkata police commissioner Vineet Goyal were also punished today. The allegations of a bigger conspiracy leveled by the parents and junior doctors must be looked into. It must be seen whether anyone else was also involved in the crime or not," Adhikari told reporters.

Roy was found guilty under Sections 64 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita related to rape, and Sections 66 and 103(1) of the Act, dealing with punishments for death and murder. Section 103(1) provides for a possible punishment of death or life imprisonment.

The verdict came nearly two months after the in-camera trial began in November 2024 and 162 days after the brutal crime was committed on August 9, 2024.

The judge said Roy was convicted for sexually assaulting the doctor and strangling her to death, with the CBI successfully proving all the charges against him. Roy, who maintained his innocence throughout the trial, claimed he was framed. His statement will be recorded at 12:30 pm on Monday, followed by the sentencing. (PTI)

ISKCON, Adani Group provide meals to nearly one lakh people daily at Maha Kumbh

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR (UP), Jan 18: The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), in partnership with the Adani Group, is providing meals to nearly one lakh people daily at the ongoing Maha Kumbh, a spiritual organisation's official said.

At a camp on Harshvardhan Marg here, ISKCON's one kitchen prepares food for 30,000 - 35,000 people in one session, and more than one lakh people are served food in three sessions a day, its Director (CSR) Madhukant Das told PTI.

ISKCON's food -- which includes dal, chole or rajma, vegetables and rot and rice, and halwa or boondi laddu in sweets-- is completely balanced. These meals are prepared on a clay stove over a fire of wood and cow dung cakes, which makes them taste amazing, he added.

Das said meals are being distributed at 40 centres across Prayagraj, including bus stands, railway stations and several holding areas, where the crowd of devotees are halted on the main bathing days.

He also informed that the food is also being distributed to 15,000 employees engaged in cleaning at the fair and surrounding areas. ISKCON has set up three kitchens across Prayagraj, which are located at Khusrabagh near the Prayagraj junction, Netra Kumbh in Sector 6 and ISKCON temple premises in Sector 19 and food prasad is being prepared and distributed from here.

ISKCON comes to every Kumbh, so cow dung cakes are being made six months before the commencement of the fair. Das also said that 100 vehicles have been deployed for the distribution of food, which have been provided by the Adani Group. (PTI)

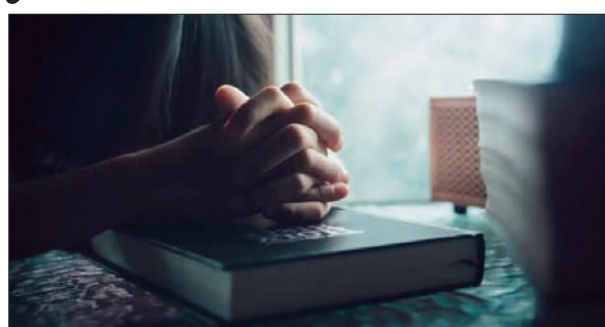
Christian council urges heritage panel to apprise missionary schools before conferring heritage tag

KOLKATA, Jan 18: The Bengal Christian Council has urged the West Bengal government to inform the authorities of Christian Missionary educational institutions before giving heritage tag to any of their buildings in future.

The council in a statement on Friday said it will make a formal appeal to the appropriate authorities "to do away with such a cosmetic tag."

It also wondered if giving a heritage tag to buildings serves any practical purpose.

Council president Paritosh Canning said it had been noticed that many such organisations had been declared as 'heritage structures' by the state 'Heritage Commission' though the respective authorities of schools are never in-



formed about such a declaration.

"In hindsight, while such declarations may seem to add a touch of importance and glamour to such old buildings, in practical terms they serve no purpose. While regular maintenance and renovation costs are huge, receiving grants from the Heritage Commis-

India joins mega naval wargame 'La Perouse'

Indigenously designed missile destroyer INS Mumbai is part of the exercise

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: The Indian Navy is participating in a mega wargame along with naval forces from eight nations including the US and France against the backdrop of increasingly fractious geopolitical environment and China's military muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific.

The naval exercise 'La Perouse' is underway in the straits between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean as well as Malacca, Sunda and Lombok.

These straits are largely considered as very crucial for global maritime trade.

The nine-day exercise that began on January 16 aims to enhance cooperation among the participating nations in areas of maritime surveillance, interdiction operations, air operations and information sharing.

French Carrier Strike Group (CSG), led by nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle, is the mainstay of the mega exercise.

India's indigenously designed and built guided missile destroyer INS Mumbai is part of the exer-



cise, according to the Indian Navy.

Besides, India, the US and France, naval forces from Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada and the UK are participating in the exercise.

"The exercise provides an opportunity for like-minded navies to develop closer links in planning, coordination and information sharing for enhanced tactical interoperability," the Indian Navy said on Saturday.

"The exercise will witness complex and advanced multi-domain

exercises including surface warfare, anti-air warfare, air-defence, cross deck landings and tactical manoeuvres, as also the constabulary missions such as VBSS (Visit, Board, Search and Seizure) operations," it said in a statement.

The Indian Navy's participation in the exercise showcases the high levels of synergy, coordination and interoperability between the like-minded navies and their commitment to a rules-based international order in the maritime domain, it added.

Escaped undertrial killed in encounter in Bengal

KOLKATA, Jan 18: An undertrial, who shot at policemen while escaping from custody three days ago, was killed in an encounter in West Bengal's Uttar Dinajpur district early on Saturday, a senior officer said.

The police action came after West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar said, "If someone fires at police, we will respond with four times the force."

Sajjak Alam was gunned down by a specialised police team during the encounter at Kichaktala in Goalpokhar, Additional Director General (Law and Order) Jawed Shamim said.

"Several teams led by senior officers were on the lookout for him since Wednesday, when he escaped near Panjipara in Goalpokhar. He and another undertrial overpowered the policemen escorting them, snatched their service revolvers, and fired shots before fleeing. Early this morning, one of our teams tracked him down near Kichaktala bridge while he was trying to cross over to Bangladesh," Shamim told reporters.

The police team asked Alam to surrender but he started running and fired at the police, the officer said. "In retaliatory firing, he sustained injuries. He was taken to a hospital where he succumbed to his injuries. Reports indicate the man had bullet wounds on the left shoulder, back and leg," Shamim added.

Two policemen in Uttar Dinajpur's Raiganj were injured on Wednesday when Alam and another undertrial allegedly overpowered them, snatched their service revolvers, and shot at them before fleeing.

The incident happened when the prisoners were being taken from a court in Islampur to the central cor-

rectional home in Raiganj in a prison van escorted by policemen.

The two injured policemen, ASI Deben Baishya and constable Nilkanta Sarkar, are undergoing treatment at a private nursing home in Siliguri's Matigara area.

The DGP had earlier issued a stern warning after the attack on the police officers, stating, "If someone fires at police, we will respond with four times the force."

Speaking to reporters, Kumar said, "The investigation into the attack had begun, and we were committed to nabbing the culprits. The police force is trained to handle such situations and protect the common people." The state police had announced a reward of Rs 2 lakh for information leading to Alam's capture.

The Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) has demanded a judicial probe into Alam's death, alleging it was a "staged encounter".

In a statement, the APDR said, "There is sufficient reason to believe that Alam was a victim of a fake encounter. A neutral judicial investigation is essential to dispel these doubts. We urge West Bengal's Home Minister Mamata Banerjee to immediately order a judicial inquiry."

The BJP welcomed the police action, stating it would boost public confidence in law enforcement.

"Earlier, the TMC government used to say encounters happen only in BJP-ruled states. We are happy the police acted tough in this instance, as it will boost the morale of the police force and reassure the public," BJP leader Dilip Ghosh said. (PTI)

Christian man unable to bury father: SC raps Chhattisgarh govt, issues notice

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: The Supreme Court has rapped the Chhattisgarh government and sought its response on a plea filed by a Christian man who said he is unable to bury his pastor father in Chhindawada village as people have aggressively objected to it and police have threatened him with legal action.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma expressed surprise that the body was lying in a mortuary in the district hospital and medical college, Jagdalpur since January 7, when the man died and the police have not taken any action since then.

It rapped the Chhattisgarh government while seeking its response on the plea filed by the son.

"Leave the village panchayat, even the high court has passed a strange order. What is the state government doing," the bench said while issuing notice to the Chhattisgarh government.

The matter will be heard on January 20.

The apex court was hearing the appeal filed by Ramesh Baghel, belonging to the Mahra caste, challenging an order of the Chhattisgarh High Court which disposed of his

plea seeking burial of his father who was a pastor in the area specified for Christian persons in the village graveyard.

Relying on a certificate issued by the gram panchayat's sarpanch that there are no separate burial grounds for Christians, the high court denied him permission saying it may cause unrest and disharmony in the public at large.

The pastor died due to prolonged old age illness.

According to Baghel, Chhindawada village has a graveyard orally allotted by the gram panchayat for burial and cremation of bodies. In this village graveyard, separate areas are earmarked for burial of tribals, for burial or cremation of people belonging to Hindu religion and for persons belonging to Christian community.

In the area specified for Christians, the petitioner's aunt and grandfather have been buried in this village graveyard.

"After the death of his father, the petitioner and his family wanted to hold last rites of his father and wanted to bury his mortal remains in the area specified for Christian persons in the above mentioned village graveyard. (PTI)

Jharkhand rolls out enhanced take-home ration for severely malnourished kids

RANCHI, Jan 18: The Jharkhand government on Saturday started the distribution of 'Shishu Shakti' packets, an enhanced version of the take-home ration (THR) for severely malnourished children, with the aim of making the state malnutrition-free, an official said.

Shishu Shakti, a food packet, is richer in energy, protein, and micronutrients compared to the THR currently provided by the government, the official added.

Minister Deepak Birua and Singhbhum MP Joba Majhi launched the initiative as a pilot project in Chakradharpur block of West Singhbhum district.

"Shishu Shakti is made from locally available grains, pulses, nuts and millet. It is designed to provide better results when given in age-appropriate quantities to severely malnourished children between six months and six years," according to an official release.

Sameera S, director of women, child development and social security department, said the pilot project would run for the next four months, along with ongoing monitoring of its feasibility.

"We have identified 397 severely malnourished children in the block. These children will receive Shishu Shakti alongside normal home-cooked meals. It's a feasibility test, and we will observe the children's improvement over the target period of four months," Sameera told PTI. She added that if successful, the initiative would be expanded to all districts of the state. (PTI)

Serial killer Chanderkant Jha apprehended by Delhi Police after months-long manhunt

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Delhi Police Crime Branch has apprehended Chanderkant Jha, a "serial killer" who had terrorised the national capital between 2006 and 2007 and evaded arrest for more than a year, an official said on Saturday.

"Jha was on the run after jumping parole in October 2023. The 57-year-old was arrested from Old Delhi Railway Station on Friday following an intensive operation," Additional Commissioner of Police (crime branch) Sanjay Kumar Sain said.

Jha, who had been serving a life sentence for three murders, carried a bounty of ₹ 50,000 for his capture, he said.

The officer further said that the Crime Branch formed a team which included senior police officers to locate Jha.

"Over six months, the team traced Jha's network of family, friends, and associates. They conducted reconnaissance at his previous crime spots and interrogated individuals in fruit and vegetable mandis across Delhi-NCR, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where Jha had once worked," said the Additional CP.

Analysing voluminous call data records, the team identified a suspicious mobile number that ultimately led them to Jha's location.

Acting on a lead, the team arrested Jha on January 17 as he attempted to flee to Bihar from Old Delhi Railway Station, he said.

Police said that a history of gruesome crimes between 2006 and 2007, Jha's modus operandi left Delhi shaken.

Originally from Bihar, Jha resided near Azadpur Mandi in Delhi and befriended young men, often migrants, by helping them find jobs and offering them meals.

However, minor disagreements or perceived infractions would trigger his homicidal rage.

"Jha would tie his victims hands, claiming he would punish them, and then strangle them with a locally made nunchaku. He would dismember the bodies meticulously, ensuring minimal blood splatter. The remains were then packed in plastic bags and transported using his modified cycle-rickshaw before being dumped at pre-determined locations, often near Tihar Jail," Sain added.

He said that adding to the horror, Jha would leave handwritten notes

with the dismembered bodies, taunting the police and challenging them to catch him.

Jha's first recorded murder dates back to 1998 when he killed Mangal alias Aurangzeb in Adarsh Nagar, Delhi, dismembering the body and scattering its parts.

Arrested in 1998, he was released in 2002. After his release, he resumed killing, police said.

In June 2003, Jha murdered his associate Shekhar in Haiderpur for being a drunkard and liar, disposing of the body in Alipur.

In November 2003, Umesh, a migrant from Bihar, was killed for alleged betrayal, and his body was dumped near Tihar Jail. In November 2005, Jha killed Guddu for his habits, including smoking marijuana and disposed of his body in Mangolpuri, police said.

In October 2006, Amit, accused of womanizing, met a similar fate, with his body left outside Tihar Jail.

In another case Upender was murdered in April 2007 for a love affair deemed inappropriate, his remains left near Tihar's Gate No 3.

In May 2007, Dilip, who ate non-vegetarian food, was killed and dumped near Tihar's Gate No. 1.

Jha was convicted of three murders, earning two death sentences in 2013.

These were commuted to life imprisonment without remission in 2016.

In October 2023, Jha was granted parole for 90 days but failed to surrender, choosing instead to go underground.

"His evasion prompted the Delhi Police to issue a reward for his capture. Despite his efforts to remain hidden, including staying in various parts of Bihar and Delhi and maintaining minimal contact with known associates, Jha was apprehended as he attempted to flee Delhi," said the officer.

Jha, who studied up to the eighth grade, migrated to Delhi in 1990 and worked in various low-income jobs. He was married twice and fathered five daughters. Jha's seemingly kind demeanour masked a savage killer, who viewed minor infractions by his victims as justification for extreme punishment, police added.

His case received a significant media attention and was the subject of an OTT platform documentary "Indian Predator: The Butcher of Delhi". (PTI)

Two Chhattisgarh PWD officials suspended for corruption in road work highlighted by murdered scribe

RAIPUR, Jan 18: Two Chhattisgarh Public Works Department (PWD) officials have been suspended for alleged irregularities and corruption in a road construction work in Bijapur district.

The probe into these alleged irregularities and corruption started after journalist Mukesh Chandrakar, who was murdered earlier this month, highlighted them in his news report. The contractor of this project, Suresh Chandrakar, and his three associates were arrested for allegedly murdering the journalist.

"The probe into the ongoing construction of 52.40 kilometre Nelsnar-Kodoli-Mirtur-Gangaloor road in Bijapur district found serious irregularities in execution of the work. Due to alleged connivance of officials, there is prima facie evidence regarding wastage of government money, embezzlement, submission of faulty evaluation report and corruption in nexus with the contractor / construction agency," Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao, who also holds the PWD portfolio, said in a statement.

Based on the findings, the department has directed the Chief Engineer, PWD of Bastar Circle (Jagdalpur) to immediately lodge an FIR under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Prevention of Corruption Act against then Executive Engineer (now retired) BL Dhruv, Sub-Divisional Officer RK Sinha, Sub Engineer GS Kodopi and other concerned officials for allegedly committing irregularities in the road construction work in a Naxal-affected area, Sao said.

"The department has placed Sinha and Kodopi under suspension with immediate effect. It has issued show cause notice to Dhruv seeking his reply within 15 days," the deputy CM said in the statement.

"The orders were issued on Friday. The probe team inspected Nelsnar-Kodoli-Mirtur-Gangaloor road work on January 8-9 and pointed towards various deficiencies, including potholes, peeled off surface layer at many places and inadequate thickness. The reports indicate the work was done without adhering to prescribed standards and norms," an official said. (PTI)

No.FEB.593579/32			
NOTICE			
The document verification of the candidates recommended by the Assam Public Service Commission through Combined Competitive Examination, 2023 for appointment to the Assam Finance Service, Assam Accounts Service (Assistant Accounts Officer) will be carried out as per schedule below in the office of Director of Accounts and Treasuries (DoAT), Assam, Kar Bhawan, Dispur, Guwahati-781006.			
Date	Name of Post/Services	Serial No. of Selection List	
		From 10.30 AM	From 1.30 PM
20/01/2025	Assam Finance Service	All Candidates	
20/01/2025	Assistant Accounts Officer	SI. No. 1-30 (Board I) SI. No. 31-60 (Board II)	SI. No. 61-90 (Board I) SI. No. 91-107 (Board II) (Except Serial No. 105 and 106)
21/01/2025	All above Services (Reserved Day)	(For candidates who could not attend document verification process on their stipulated date on valid ground)	
Document verification of Musaddik Ahmed, Roll No. 3800010 and Muzahidul Islam Bhuyan, Roll No. 4100080 are kept in abeyance.			
The recommended candidates are requested to bring original and one set of self-attested photocopies of the following documents along with them:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> HSLC Admit Card. All relevant educational qualification documents. Caste certificate. (if applicable) Copy of online application of APSC CCE 2023 (Prelims and Mains) APSC CCE 2023 Admit Card (Prelims, Mains and Interview call letter). Aadhar Card/ PAN card/ Voter ID. Two passport size photographs. 			
The recommended candidates are requested to be present accordingly.			
Sd/- Secretary to the Govt. of Assam Finance (Establishment -B) Department			
Janasanyog /D/11717/24/19-Jan-25			

Saif Ali Khan, in recovery after knife attack, has 'Jewel Thief', 'Kartavya' and 'Race 4' in pipeline

MUMBAI, Jan 18: Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan, currently recuperating at a Mumbai hospital after suffering injuries in a knife attack at home, had recently wrapped up filming for his next movie "Jewel Thief - The Red Sun Chapter" and has few other projects lined up. The 54-year-old actor suffered multiple stab wounds, including on his neck and near the spine, in a brutal attack at his house in Bandra in the early hours of Thursday. He was rushed to Lilavati Hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery.

Khan was most recently seen in Jr NTR's "Devara: Part 1", which was released in theatres across the country in September 2024. The Koratala Siva-directed movie, which featured Khan in the role of the antagonist, marked his debut in Telugu cinema. It also starred Jahnvi Kapoor. The actor is expected to return for the film's follow-up as well. Though the makers are yet to officially announce the second part. Khan's upcoming movie is "Jewel Thief - The Red Sun Chapter", a heist drama. The film, directed by Robbie Grewal, also stars Jaideep Ahlawat. "Pathaan" fame filmmaker Siddharth Anand is producing the upcoming feature with his wife, Mamta Anand, under their banner Marfix Pictures. It reunites Anand and Khan after 17 years. The duo previously collaborated on "Salaam Namaste" and "Ta Ra Rum Pum". According to a source, the actor had completed filming for the movie, which is set to release in March 2025. Besides "Jewel Thief", Khan will be seen in "Kartavya", an upcoming drama from filmmaker Pulkit of "Bhakshak" fame. "The film with Saif is ready, we are dealing with the release. The producers are the best to comment on the release date," the director told PTI. In October 2024, veteran film producer Ramesh Taurani had announced that Khan will be returning for the fourth chapter of the "Race" franchise.

Taurani, the founder of production house Tips Films, said "Race 4" will see Khan leading an ensemble cast. The film will go on floors in September, he added.

"Saif will be back in the 'Race' franchise, and we are excited to have him on board. He did a great job in the first two films. The film will boast an ensemble cast, and we are finalizing the script and cast. We haven't finalised the director either. We will announce the film officially before we go on floors, most likely next year," Taurani had told PTI in an earlier interview.

Known for its high-octane action, glamorous settings, and intricate plots, the franchise began with the 2008 movie "Race", featuring Khan and Akshay Khanna as two brothers, Ranvir and Rajiv, embroiled in a complex web of betrayal and deceit. Khan returned for the movie's 2013 sequel, "Race 2", which starred John Abraham as the villain. Both films were commercially successful and received positive reviews from critics.

However, the franchise's third part "Race 3" featured an entirely new cast led by superstar Salman Khan. The film performed poorly at the box office. Khan was also in negotiations for various other projects with filmmakers like Priyadarshan, and "Animal" director Sandeep Reddy Vanga for his next movie "Spirit", which features Prabhas in the lead role. (PTI)



Diljit Dosanjh's 'Punjab '95' to release internationally on February 7

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Punjabi star-singer Diljit Dosanjh has announced that his much-awaited film "Punjab '95", based on the life of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khrala, will be released globally on February 7 without any cuts.

"Punjab '95", directed by Honey Trehan and produced by Ronnie Screwvala's banner RSVP Movies, will not be releasing in India for now. The movie was delayed after running into trouble with the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

It also stars Arjun Rampal and Suvinder Vicky of "Kohraa" fame.

On Friday evening, Diljit shared a trailer of the movie, in which he portrays Khrala. The film sheds light on his relentless pursuit of justice during Punjab's tumultuous militancy period, highlighting his investigations into human rights violations and the disappearances of Sikhs.

"Punjab '95' releases in Cinemas Internationally only on 7th February. P.S. Full Movie, No Cuts #ChallengeTheDarkness," he wrote.

In 2023, "Punjab '95" was scheduled to have its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) but was removed from the line-up without any official statement from the organisers.

Khrala investigated the mass cremation of thousands of unidentified bodies in Punjab between 1984 and 1994. In 1995, he mysteriously disappeared, and a decade later, in 2005, four police officers were arrested for his alleged abduction and murder. In 2007, the Punjab and Haryana High Court extended their initial seven-year sentence to life imprisonment. (PTI)



'Deva' most complex character I've ever played, says Shahid Kapoor

MUMBAI, Jan 18: Shahid Kapoor is no stranger to complex characters and yet he considers his portrayal of a cop in "Deva" the most challenging performance of his career. The action thriller revolves around a rebellious police officer (Kapoor) tasked with solving a high-profile case that unravels layers of deceit, betrayal, and a dangerous conspiracy. The movie is helmed by noted Malayalam director Rosshan Andrews, known for blockbusters such as "Salute" and "Kayamkulam Kochunni".

"This is the most complex character I've played having said that, I've played a few. But if there's any character that has challenged me yet again, to ask myself whether I'm capable of doing this or not, then that is Deva. "Roshan created this character and we both developed this year for a year and then shot for it," said Kapoor, known for films such as "Haider", "Kabir Singh", "Jersey", and "Jab We Met".

The 43-year-old actor was speaking at the trailer launch of "Deva", which also stars Pooja Hegde as an investigative journalist and Pavail Gulati as a fellow cop.

Kapoor said he is always looking forward to doing roles that will help him grow as an artist, and "Deva" seemed like a perfect opportunity.

"As an actor, you always want to do something that lets you grow and takes you to another level as an artist. I can't do just anything, I've to do things as per the requirement of the story and character, and I know I would hopefully do well.

"After a while, I got an opportunity as an actor to do something that would make me happy. There's an overwhelming personality that Deva has which gives him that charisma and star quality, so it needed to be a combination of both those elements," he added.

Andrews said the action sequences in "Deva" are designed in such a way that they don't feel like they have added for the sake of it.

"I always believe in myself, in my instinct, and I don't get bothered about what's happening in other (action) films. I wrote all the action sequences in "Deva" myself. Action is part of the screenplay and story structure, it's not that we've added action sequences just for the sake of it," the director said. (PTI)

'SQUID GAME 2' STAR WI HA-JOON ON GLOBAL POPULARITY: MY RESPONSIBILITY INCREASES

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: With great popularity comes more responsibility as an actor and person, says "Squid Game" star Wi Ha-joon, who is motivated by the global success of the Netflix series to deliver his best.

Ha-joon, already a popular name for K-drama lovers with his roles in hit shows such as "Something in the Rain", "Romance is a Bonus Book", "Little Women" and "The Worst of Evil", became a known face world over when the series became one of the most watched shows ever on the streamer after its premiere on 2021.

The 33-year-old actor plays Hwang Jun-ho, a detective whose search for his missing brother leads him to an island where he gets to know about a secret organisation that hosts deadly games involving poor and debt-ridden people for a prize money of 45.6 billion won.

Because the first season of "Squid Game" became such a big success, I did feel a lot of pressure. Jun ho is featured a lot in episode one and two (of the second season), so I thought Jun ho is responsible for opening the show and I have to perform well. Jun

Ho is a character I love, so I was happy to be back as him," Ha-joon told PTI in an interview from Seoul.

"As I become more and more known to the global audiences, I believe my responsibility as a person and actor increases and this is a great motivation for me," he added.

In Hwang Dong-hyuk's "Squid Game 2", Seong Gi-hun (Lee Jung-jae), who won the prize money in the previous season, returns to the games to uncover the secrets behind it and warn participants about its deadly nature.

Ha-joon's character learned at the end of the first season that the brother that he was searching for is actually at the front of the organisation. In the second part, he has been demoted and works as a traffic cop but reunites with Gi-hun in his mission.

South Korean creators have successfully explored the rich-poor through their stories, whether it is Bong Joon-ho's Oscar-winning film "Parasite", Netflix's period zombie series "Kingdom" or "Squid Game".

Ha-joon believes it has to do with the historical and social

background of Korea.

"Korea had to go through a lot of painful experiences like losing independence to Japan, Korean (civil) war, industrialisation and democratisation. And the social and economic injustices and unfairness that people had to go through, led to the pain in their daily lives and that became the background for the success of (such) Korean stories," he said.

If he were to win the prize money of 45.6 billion won that's offered in the series, Ha-joon said, he would simply donate it.

"Honestly, in Korea and around the globe, there are many heart-wrenching stories I am hearing so I would love to help those in need with the money," he added.

Ha-joon also said he would be happy if he gets to "do an international collaboration".

Is a collaboration with Indian creators also a possibility? "Of course, I would love to visit India if there is an opportunity," he added.

"Squid Game 2" also features Lee Byung-Hun, Yim Si-Wan, Kang Ha-Neul, Park Gyu-Young, Park Sung-Hoon and Jo Yu-Ri. (PTI)



New 'Anaconda' movie adds Thandiwe Newton, Steve Zahn

LOS ANGELES, Jan 18: British star Thandiwe Newton and "Silo" actor Steve Zahn are set to feature in Columbia's comedic reimagining of the 1997 horror movie "Anaconda".

According to entertainment news outlet The Hollywood Reporter, the two actors will star alongside Paul Rudd and Jack Black.

Selton Mello, who appears in the critically-acclaimed Brazilian movie "I'm Still Here", has also boarded the film, which will mark his English-language debut, along with actor Ione Skye.

Tom Gormican, director of the Nicolas Cage meta-film "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent", is co-writing the script with his collaborator Kevin Etten and will also direct the feature.

The story will reportedly follow a group of friends facing mid-life crises who are remaking their favourite movie from their youth. They head to the rainforest, only to find themselves in a fight for their lives against natural disasters, giant snakes and violent criminals. (PTI)

Australian Open: Iga Swiatek is in total control during a 6-1, 6-0 rout of Emma Raducanu

MELBOURNE, Jan 18: Everything came so easily for Iga Swiatek during a 6-1, 6-0 victory over Emma Raducanu on Saturday in the only Australian Open women's third-round match between two past Grand Slam champions — if you thought that meant it would be close, you'd have been rather wrong — that this was how she described it:

"I felt like the ball," Swiatek said, "is listening to me."

Loud and clear. Asked to explain that sensation, Swiatek put her two index fingers a few inches apart and said, "It's just being able to aim for this kind of space." Then she spread her

palms more than a foot apart to show that's the margin for error on other days.

The difference, she said, comes down to "being more precise and actually knowing where the ball is going to go, seeing the effects that you want it to." When the five-time major champion and former long-time No. 1-ranked woman — now No. 2, behind Aryna Sabalenka — is at the height of her powers, as she sure has seemed to be in Week 1 at Melbourne Park, it is hard for anyone to slow Swiatek down. The heavy-spinning, high-bouncing forehands. The squeaky-sneaker scrambling to get to every shot. The terrific re-

turning. And so on.

Later Saturday, No. 4 Taylor Fritz, the runner-up at last year's U.S. Open, became the highest-seeded man to leave the bracket, defeated by 38-year-old Gael Monfils 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (1), 6-4. Monfils joined Roger Federer as the only men 38 or older to get to the fourth round in Melbourne since the field expanded to 128 players in 1988.

At the other end of the age spectrum, a pair of young Californians who have been pals for a while and trained together in the offseason — Learner Tien, 19, and Alex Michelsen, 20 — earned debuts in the fourth round at a major. Ben Shelton,

who is 22, won, too, while another American, Marcos Giron, was facing No. 1 Jannik Sinner at night.

Tien, a qualifier ranked 121st, followed up his surprising win against No. 5 Daniil Medvedev in a five-setter that ended at 3 a.m. on Friday with a 7-6 (10), 6-3, 6-3 victory over Corentin Moutet of France. Michelsen, who is ranked 42nd, overwhelmed No. 19 seed Karen Khachanov of Russia 6-3, 7-6 (5), 6-2. It was the second time Michelsen knocked off a top-20 seed this week after beating No. 11 Stefanos Tsitsipas, the 2023 Australian Open runner-up, in the first round.

Shelton, the 21st seed and a U.S. Open semifinalist in 2023, defeated No. 16 Lorenzo Musetti of Italy 6-3, 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (5) and will take on Monfils on Monday.

Michelsen will try to send another high seed packing when he plays No. 8 Alex de Minaur, an Australian who beat No. 31 Francisco Cerundolo 5-7, 7-6 (3), 6-3, 6-3. Tien faces 55th-ranked Lorenzo Sonego of Italy, a 6-7 (3), 7-6 (6), 6-1, 6-2 winner over Fabian Marozsan.

Against Raducanu, who won the 2021 U.S. Open as a teenage qualifier, Swiatek played at a level she called "perfect."

Indeed, Swiatek mounted a

24-9 edge in winners, made only 12 unforced errors — roughly half of Raducanu's 22 — and claimed 59 points to 29. That caused one spectator to yell out, "No mercy!" in the second set as Swiatek was reeling off the last 11 games after the match was tied at 1-all early with not a cloud in the sky and the temperature approaching 80 degrees Fahrenheit (above 25 Celsius).

"I think it was a little bit of her playing well, and me not playing so well," Raducanu said. "That combination is probably not good." Fair. Swiatek, who agreed to accept a one-month suspension in a doping case late last year, owns four trophies

from the French Open and one from the U.S. Open. But she's never been beyond the semifinals in Australia; she lost in that round to Danielle Collins in 2022. A year ago, Swiatek was upset in the third round by teenager Linda Noskova.

Swiatek, who said she dedicated Saturday's win to her grandfather, has ceded a total of only 10 games through three matches with new coach Wim Fissette sitting court-side. Next up will be 128th-ranked Eva Lys of Germany, who lost in qualifying but was given a spot in the main draw when someone withdrew about 10 minutes before her first-round match. (AP)

FC Goa aim to reclaim second spot against struggling East Bengal



MARGAO, Jan 18: FC Goa will look to bounce back into second place on the Indian Super League table when they host East Bengal, who will be looking to get back to winning ways here on Sunday.

The Gaurs, currently third with 27 points from 15 matches, are coming off three draws in their last five outings.

East Bengal, sitting 11th with 14 points from an equal number of games, on the other hand are searching for consistency after two consecutive defeats.

FC Goa's five-match winning streak against East Bengal FC gives them a psychological edge.

However, they recently dropped to third after Jamshedpur FC's 1-1 draw against Mohun Bagan.

A victory will not only see Goa reclaim second place but also keep their hopes alive for a top-of-the-table finish.

East Bengal, on the other hand, have struggled up front this season, creating the fewest goal-scoring chances in the league (126). Their tally of 16 goals is among the lowest, with only bottom-placed Hyderabad FC (11) and debutants Mohammedan Sporting (8) scoring fewer.

For FC Goa, Armando Sadiku has been a standout performer, scoring nine goals this season. One more strike would make him the 11th player in club history to reach double digits in ISL goals.

Brison Fernandes has also shone, with five goals, eight successful dribbles, and 16 goal-scoring chances as the duo will hold key to their return to winning ways.

East Bengal will rely on Hijazi Maher's defensive solidity, with the player averaging 1.36 interceptions per game.

Forward Naorem Mahesh Singh, who leads the team in goal contributions (three goals and two assists), will aim to break his scoring drought against FC Goa this season.

In nine ISL meetings, FC Goa have dominated with six wins and two draws. East Bengal FC have managed just one victory, highlighting the Gaurs' upper hand in this rivalry.

FC Goa head coach Manolo Marquez acknowledged the challenges of the season's final stretch, saying, "Every game is very tough. We are in a moment where collecting points is difficult. But, this is football. We need to be focused on ourselves."

East Bengal FC head coach Oscar Bruzon said his team is gradually improving themselves and laying the groundwork for their success ahead.

"The team is slowly getting better. We need to find the foundation that allows us to have an idea of what East Bengal FC has always been and what we need to do moving forward," he said. (PTI)

Denis Law, the Manchester United and Scotland soccer great, dies at 84

MANCHESTER, Jan 18: Denis Law, the Manchester United and Scotland great, has died. He was 84.

The death of Law, the only Scottish player to win the Ballon d'Or, was announced by his family through United on Friday. In 2021 he was diagnosed with dementia.

"It is with a heavy heart that we tell you our father Denis Law has sadly passed away. He fought a tough battle but finally he is now at peace," the statement read.

"We would like to thank everyone who contributed to his wellbeing and care, past and much more recently. We know how much people supported and loved him and that love was always appreciated and made the difference."

Law is forever linked with Bobby Charlton and George Best, the three-pronged strike force that led United to English league titles in 1965 and '67 and the European Cup in 1968 — a first for an English club.

"Everyone at Manchester United is mourning the loss of Denis Law, the King of the Stretford End," United said in a statement. "With 237 goals in 404 appearances, he will always be celebrated as one of the club's greatest and most beloved players. The ultimate goalscorer, his flair, spirit and love for the game made him the hero of a generation."

Law, Charlton and Best would be voted as European footballer of the year and win the Ballon d'Or in a five-season period from 1964-68. They are united in a statue at Old Trafford. Law is the only player with two statues at the stadium: He stands solo on the Stretford End concourse, naturally.

Law's 46 goals in the 1963-64 season remains a single-season record for United. His 237 goals for the club are bettered by only Charlton and Wayne Rooney, though his goals-per-game ratio is higher.

However, a goal he scored against United is arguably his most famous. In one of the last games of his career, Law was playing for Manchester City — where he had two spells — at Old Trafford in United's next-to-last game of the

1973-74 season.

His late goal, with an audacious back-heel flick he insisted was "a fluke," meant United lost 1-0 and helped to ensure its relegation to the second division just six years after being European champion.

Law did not celebrate his goal and was substituted with head bowed as United fans invaded the pitch before the game restarted.

His 30 goals for Scotland are matched by only Kenny Dalglish, though was achieved in just 55 games compared to Dalglish's 102.

UEFA was one of many to react to Law's death. On X it wrote, "On behalf of European football we are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Denis Law. One of Scottish football's true greats."

A player who would become fondly referred to as "The Lawman," Law left his northern Scotland hometown of Aberdeen as a skinny 15-year-old with poor eyesight. He became a feared penalty-area predator and a pioneer in a modernizing world of European soccer.

By the age of 22, both United and City paid English-record transfer fees to sign Law, and he had played one season in Italy — an exotic change of culture at that time, though he disliked the defensive nature of Serie A.

He returned from Torino in 1962 to begin an 11-year stint at Old Trafford that helped re-establish United as an international power under manager Matt Busby.

Law joined a club that was still rebuilding from the airplane crash at Munich four years earlier. It took the lives of most of Busby's then-dominant team returning from a European Cup game.

Law's prolific scoring helped United win the FA Cup in 1963 for its first trophy since the Munich disaster, and then two league titles in three seasons.

Redemption for Busby's United was becoming European champion a decade after the tragedy.

Though Best and Charlton scored in the final, a 4-1 extra-time win over Benfica, Law missed the game at London's Wembley Stadium due to a knee injury that persisted in his career. (AP)

India, England arrive in Kolkata for T20I opener at Eden Gardens

KOLKATA, Jan 18: The world champions, Team India, and the visiting England squad arrived in batches on Saturday evening ahead of their series-opening T20I here on Wednesday.

With a slight nip in the air, cricket fever is set to grip Kolkata once again as the iconic Eden Gardens prepares to host its first T20 International in nearly three years. Beginning with the Eden T20I, the two teams will fight it out in a full white ball series, consisting five T20Is and three ODIs, which will serve as a crucial

warm-up for the Champions Trophy, slated to begin on February 19 in Pakistan and Dubai.

English all-rounder Liam Livingstone, fresh from his stint with Pretoria Capitals in the ongoing SA20, was the first to check in, flying directly from South Africa. The Jos Buttler-led rest of the England squad, which had been training in Dubai, arrived later in the evening.

Being a fresh series, Team India players also trickled in from their respective hometowns.

Rising stars Nitish Kumar Reddy and Rinku Singh were among the first to arrive in Kolkata at 4:30 pm.

Later in the evening, captain Suryakumar Yadav landed along with Tilak Varma, who shared a photo of the duo sitting together on the flight in his Instagram story.

Head coach Gautam Gambhir and rest of the players checked in later in the evening.

Making his international comeback after more than 14 months, pacer Mo-

ammed Shami and all-rounder Hardik Pandya are slated to land around midnight, said the local team manager.

Both teams will have three training sessions ahead of the opening T20I.

The England squad is scheduled for an afternoon practice session on Sunday, while Team India will take the field in the evening.

From here the teams will travel to Chennai for the second T20I (January 25) and the five-match series will conclude in Mumbai on February 2. (PTI)

Hyderabad Toofans end Tamil Nadu Dragons' unbeaten streak in HIL

RANCHI, Jan 18: Gonzalo Peillat scored a brace as Hyderabad Toofans ended Tamil Nadu Dragons' unbeaten run with a 4-0 win in the men's Hockey India League here on Saturday.

Peillat (21st, 48th minutes), Arthur de Sloover (31st), and Tim Brand (33rd) scored for the Toofans, lifting their team to second place in the standings with 13 points from seven matches, just behind the Dragons, who remain on top with 15 points.

The match started evenly, with both the teams creating a few chances in the first quarter. The Dragons came close to scoring through a penalty corner, but Hyderabad goalkeeper Vikas Dahiya made a fine save to deny Blake Govers.

The Toofans nearly broke the deadlock at the end of the quarter when Arthur de Sloover set up Maico Casella, but Tamil Nadu's David Harte made a crucial save.

The Toofans took the lead in the 21st minute after winning a penalty corner. Peillat capitalised on the op-

portunity, firing a powerful dragflick into the top corner of the net. Hyderabad continued their momentum after halftime, doubling their lead within a minute of the restart. De Sloover recovered from a missed trap to slam the ball into the back of the net.

Two minutes later, Brand added a third, deflecting Jacob Anderson's pass into the net.

The Dragons struggled to find their rhythm as Hyderabad's solid defense kept them at bay.

Peillat struck again in the fourth quarter, converting the Toofans' 17th penalty corner with a precise flick between the goalkeeper and the defender. The Dragons' attack faltered throughout the match, with Blake Govers unable to find his usual scoring touch.

Despite having an extra player in the final minutes after Talwinder Singh's yellow card, the Tamil Nadu side couldn't break through.

Hyderabad closed the match with 18 penalty corners, dominating possession and applying relentless pressure. (PTI)

Coaching Overhaul: French duo aims for World Championships and World Tour Finals

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Bolstered by the hope fuelled by the Paris Olympics, French badminton players are turning a new page, a revolution led by mixed doubles pair of Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue.

The French duo are on the rise again after achieving their career-best ranking of fifth at the start of 2023.

Since the Olympics, Thom and Delphine reached the quarterfinals at the Denmark Open, the semifinals at the Hylo Open, before finishing runners-up at the Japan Masters, steadily climbing to world number 12 from a mid-2024 dip to 23rd.

The two made a strong start to the new season with a quarterfinal finish at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 and reached the semifinals at the ongoing India Open Super 750.

"The secret is to have the shield of fire in our head and the body if we want to reach the top level. And for that, you need to have goals to improve and also

goals for tournaments. And our big goal for this season is the World Championship in Paris," Thom said.

"That's one of the best things. If you play well there, it can be fantastic. So that's the main goal."

Delphine added: "I think we have a goal to be back in the top 10 and to be in the top 8. So yeah, we also want to qualify for the World Tour Finals. So we have a lot of goals."

With Paris hosting the Olympics last year, there were high expectations from the home players. Even though it didn't turn out as the French players had hoped for, it brought significant change and hope for a better future.

While Thom and Delphine are the top-ranked shuttlers from the country, Alex Lanier and Toma Junior Popov are climbing up the world rankings in men's singles, currently ranked 17th and 18th, respectively. Alex had stunned reigning



world champion and Olympic silver medalist Kunlavut Vitidsarn in the opening round of the India Open. The Popov brothers — Toma and Christo — are also knocking on the top 20, with Christo ranked 22nd.

Margot Lambert and Anne Tran have also broken into the top 20 in women's doubles.

"I think we felt the last two years that it was tough because we didn't have the best staff.

And now, since six months, it's really nice. I think our mind is free, and we can play badminton," Delphine said.

"We have a lot of new staff right now. So we changed everything in September. Now, we are working with one Danish coach, one Icelandic coach, and one French coach. We have an all-new team, and it's working pretty well, I think. We are improving, and it's always nice

when you have the feeling, at 26, that you are still improving," Thom said.

"Badminton is becoming increasingly ingrained in French sports culture, I believe. More and more players are taking up the sport, and there is a growing number of players who aspire to reach the top."

"I think the federation is now striving to become a high-performance organization, which wasn't the case before. So, I believe we are on the right path."

The French pair said while they missed the opportunity in Paris, the Los Angeles Games remained their main target.

"The next target is not just qualifying for the Olympics, but doing well and competing for medals. Yes, I think we haven't achieved what we want yet. We still have big motivation for the next four years, for the Los Angeles Olympics. And also, to have a stable environment is really nice," Delphine said. (PTI)

Bumrah picked for CT; Shami returns, Jaiswal gets maiden ODI call-up

MUMBAI, Jan 18: Premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah was on Saturday named in India's squad for the Champions Trophy with his availability depending on fitness, and talented opener Yashasvi Jaiswal expectedly received the nod from the selectors, who also brought back Mohammed Shami in the national fold.

Bumrah had suffered back spasms during the recent Sydney Test against Australia and did not bowl on the final day at SCG.

But the Ajit Agarkar-led selection panel went ahead and included the 31-year-old in the squads that will do duty in the home ODIs against England and in the marquee ICC event, starting February 19.

Top-order batter Shubman Gill has been appointed as the vice-captain of the squad that had did not have place for pacer Mohammed Siraj.

Rohit Sharma, who will lead the side against England in the CT, explained the rationale behind selecting Bumrah with an asterisk against his name.

"Experience, it's only Siraj who's not there. But that's purely because we thought of it. We're not sure about Bumrah, whether he's going to play or not. We wanted to pick a squad where we have options of both, somebody to bowl with the new ball and somebody to bowl at the back end," said Rohit in the press meet to announce the squads.

Rohit hoped that seasoned pacer Shami and left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh will support Bumrah, or step in the eventuality of him missing the tournament.

"Obviously, with Bumrah missing, we're not sure. We wanted Arshdeep to come and play that role of bowling at the back end and Shami, obviously we saw what he did with the new ball (in the World Cup 2023 and during the recent domestic matches)."

Shami is returning to the ODI set up for the first time since the 2023 World Cup, and



the pacer has done well in the domestic matches (Ranji Trophy, SMAT and VHT), even though he is yet to hit the peak rhythm.

"Arshdeep hasn't played a lot of ODIs but he's been around the white-ball circuit for a long time. I don't feel so uncomfortable saying that he's not experienced.

"He has bowled some tough overs in white-ball cricket. I definitely think he can handle that pressure and Shami is a stalwart of white-ball cricket and what he did recently in the (ODI) World Cup was superb to watch," he added.

Rohit termed Siraj unfortunate to miss out on the selection and said his reduced effect with the old ball played a part in it.

"Siraj's effectiveness comes down a little bit if he's not going to take the new ball. We discussed it at length and we are only taking three seamers there (CT) because we wanted all the all-rounders with us.

"It's an unfortunate thing that he (Siraj) has to miss out but we had no option but to get the guys who can perform a certain role," he said.

The selection of Jaiswal was a no-brainer after his fine run Down Under albeit in Tests, and the variety he offers at the top as a left-hander.

"Sometimes, I know it's very hard to ignore numbers but look at Jaiswal. We picked Jaiswal based on clearly what he's shown in the last 6-8 months. He's not played a single ODI but we still picked him because of the potential that he's got," he said.

All-rounder Harshit Rana, who made his Test debut in Australia, has been picked to play only the three-match ODI series against England.

Wrist-spinner Kuldeep, who was recuperating from a long-standing groin injury, has also been selected after sitting out of the Test series against Australia.

India have relied on a clutch of all-rounders to make an impact in the blue-riband event that they had won in 2013 under MS Dhoni.

Hardik Pandya will lead that list and the pace-bowling all-rounder will be back to ODIs for the first time after the 2023 World

Cup when he limped out during the match against Bangladesh with an ankle injury.

Others are experienced Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, the two left-arm spinners, and off-spinner Washington Sundar.

Rishabh Pant has played a lone one-day match in the last two years, against Sri Lanka last year, after coming back from the accident, but the selectors have decided to give him the mantle of the first-choice wicketkeeper batter.

The left-handed variety that he offers down the line too might have played a part, with KL Rahul supporting him as the back-up wicketkeeper batter.

However, as expected, Sanju Samson did not feature in any of the squads despite doing well against South Africa recently. He had made a hundred against the Proteas at Paarl late last year.

But Samson not attending Kerala's Vijay Hazare Trophy camp and the subsequent non-selection for the domestic tournament went against him.

Karun Nair, despite 752 runs in the ongoing Hazare Trophy, missed out, as there was no slot to accommodate him.

"Some players will miss out and it's very, very unlucky and unfortunate. But again, if you talk about everyone you can't please everyone.

"At the end of the day you try and make the best team and best possible squad to win games under different situations and I feel with these guys you can have that," Rohit explained.

India Squad for Champions Trophy and England ODIs: Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill (vc), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja, Harshit Rana (only for England series). (PTI)

Rohit confirms availability for Mumbai's next Ranji game, says 'you also need time off cricket'



MUMBAI, Jan 18: India captain Rohit Sharma on Saturday confirmed his availability for Mumbai's next Ranji Trophy match against Jammu and Kashmir while also stressing on the need to take time off from a busy calendar amid the clamour for star players' participation in domestic cricket.

Rohit also said that no player takes premier domestic red-ball tournament "for granted".

Mumbai will play Jammu and Kashmir at the MCA-BKC Ground when the Ranji Trophy resumes on January 23.

Asked about his availability for the game during a press conference at the Wankhede Stadium press box here, Rohit responded in the positive.

Days after the BCCI conducted a review meeting to assess the debacle Down Under, the Board has come out with 10 guidelines for India's centrally-contracted players, including making participation in domestic tournaments mandatory for selection in the national team.

The focus since then has been on the likes of Rohit and his long-time India teammate Virat Kohli.

The India skipper said, "Last 6-7 years, if you go back and look at our calendar, there hasn't been a time where we were sitting at home for 45 days and there is (domestic) cricket going on. You do get that time when you finish IPL and if there's nothing happening (in domestic cricket) right after that..." Rohit said.

"But if you see our domestic season, it starts in October, maybe September, and it gets over by February-March and that is the time India plays a lot of cricket as well. So, guys who are not playing certain formats and have time, and then there is domestic cricket happening, then they will play.

"But (in) the last 6-7 years, I can at least tell about what has happened with me since I've started playing Test cricket regularly, which is from 2019, you hardly have any time in hand and then, when you play so much international cricket through the year, you need some time off as well as a cricketer just to refresh, get your mind right, just to be ready for the upcoming season."

The 37-year-old, who endured a horror run with the bat in the national team's tour of Australia recently, trained with the Mumbai squad at the Wankhede Stadium on Tuesday ahead of the second phase of the Ranji Trophy.

Rohit's last Ranji appearance was in November 2015 against Uttar Pradesh.

He added, "We have addressed it now and nobody takes it (domestic red-ball cricket) for granted or anything like that. It is just based on looking at how one has gone through the season, how much rest he needs," he said.

"Based on all of that, we decide what is going to happen with certain players. Now it's been made mandatory that if there is time, you have to play domestic cricket."

The past few weeks have been tumultuous for Rohit. He managed just 31 runs across three Tests during his time Down Under and was forced to drop himself from the series-deciding fifth and final Test in Sydney due to his poor form.

Rohit handed over the leadership duties to Jasprit Bumrah in that game, sparking widespread speculations about his future. However, in an interview to the host broadcaster of the series, Rohit asserted that he was not going anywhere. (PTI)

'Spirit of Cinema & Sports' mini-festival celebrates films as driver of India-UK ties

LONDON, Jan 18: The High Commission of India in London is celebrating the 'Spirit of Indian Cinema and Sports' this weekend with a mini-festival of iconic films that showcase the country's sporting achievements and spotlight the film industry as one of the drivers of closer India-UK ties.

The festival, inaugurated by Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami on Friday evening, opened with a packed screening of Kabir Khan directed '83' - which stars Ranveer Singh in the role of the 1983 cricket World Cup-winning captain Kapil Dev.

This is being followed up on Saturday by screenings of the 2016 box-office hit 'Dangal', starring Aamir Khan as wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat, and the 2007 hit 'Chak De! India' with Shah Rukh Khan in the role of a hockey coach inspired by the life of Mir Ranjan Negi.

"We're doing this because one of the things that seems to have passed us by is the idea of how much film connects India and the UK; you need only to look at the range of offerings of some of our most successful movies to recognise how many of our movies have actually been shot in the UK," Doraiswami said in his opening address.

"The film industry is essentially one of the big potential drivers of future partnership between India and the UK," he said. (PTI)

KL Rahul likely to miss Ranji Trophy match against Punjab



BENGALURU, Jan 18: KL Rahul is likely to miss Karnataka's Ranji Trophy match against Punjab, beginning here on Thursday, to continue his recovery from an elbow niggle.

The PTI has learnt that the India batter has conveyed to the BCCI medical staff his concern about the issue, and they are monitoring him currently.

However, Rahul has a chance to play against Haryana in the season's last league match, starting on January 30.

The Karnataka State Cricket Association is set to announce the squad for the match against Punjab in a day or two.

However, other India players

from the state -- Prasadh Krishna and Devdutt Padikkal -- will be available for selection as both of them are currently playing in the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Devdutt has been in good touch, striking a hundred and fifty in the two games he played after returning from Australia.

Punjab will have the services of India batter Shubman Gill against Karnataka.

The BCCI has made it mandatory for top players to appear in domestic matches as part of a 10-point diktat which was issued on Thursday. Players will need permission of the chairman of selectors to avail an exemption from this stipulation. (PTI)

Renowned badminton coach Arun Vishnu quits national setup, to start academy in Nagpur

NEW DELHI, Jan 18: Arun Vishnu, the coach who played a pivotal role in the rise of women's doubles badminton in India, has quit the national setup and will be starting an academy in Nagpur in March.

The 36-year-old from Kozhikode, who has been instrumental in the development of players like Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, and also played a crucial role in pairing Ashwini Ponnappa with Tanisha Crasto, is shifting to Nagpur to be with his aging father-in-law.

Arun will also open an academy with his wife, Arundhati Pantawane, a former international player.

"I have resigned from the post in December after the World Tour Finals. I have been with the national setup for eight and a half years as a coach, and I have made some great memories. Now, I am moving to Nagpur and starting an academy there in March," Arun told PTI. Gayatri and Treasa had played at the season-ending BWF World Tour Finals in December.

Arun, a former India international, has worked with

chief national coach Pullela Gopichand ever since winning the 2016 mixed doubles national title alongside Aparna Balan.

"I worked with juniors for the first four years and spent the last four years focusing on women's doubles," Arun explained.

"There have been many great achievements and memories during this time. It was incredibly satisfying to see the girls win the BAC gold and to watch Gayatri and Treasa reach World No. 9."

"I truly believe they have the potential to break into the top five. I'm also proud to have helped Ashwini and Tanisha qualify for the Olympics when no one expected it."

Arun was a part of the support staff that helped the Indian team win a silver medal at the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games and also played a vital role in the country's campaigns at the 2018 and 2022 Asian Games. (PTI)

LA's Olympic venues were spared by wildfires, but the city's rebuild could impact the Games' run-up

LOS ANGELES, Jan 18: The devastation wrought by the deadly wildfires that ravaged sections of Los Angeles have left an indelible imprint on the region's landscape and psyche.

The runup to the city hosting the 2028 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, in addition to World Cup matches in 2026 and a Super Bowl in '27, will coincide with massive rebuilding of housing and infrastructure. That seems cruelly ironic after Los Angeles organizers sold the Games as a no-build event.

None of the Olympic venues have been damaged by the still-burning fires that tore through Pacific Palisades on the city's westside and Altadena, an unincorporated community above Pasadena in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains.

The Palisades fire came close to Riviera Country Club, which will host Olympic golf and was inside the evacuation zone. UCLA, which will house athletes, was just outside the zone.

"While our focus remains on healing and rebuilding, there is no reason to believe that the fires will adversely impact or delay preparations for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games, which are already well underway," Paul Kerkerian, executive director of the city's new Office of Major Events, said in a state-

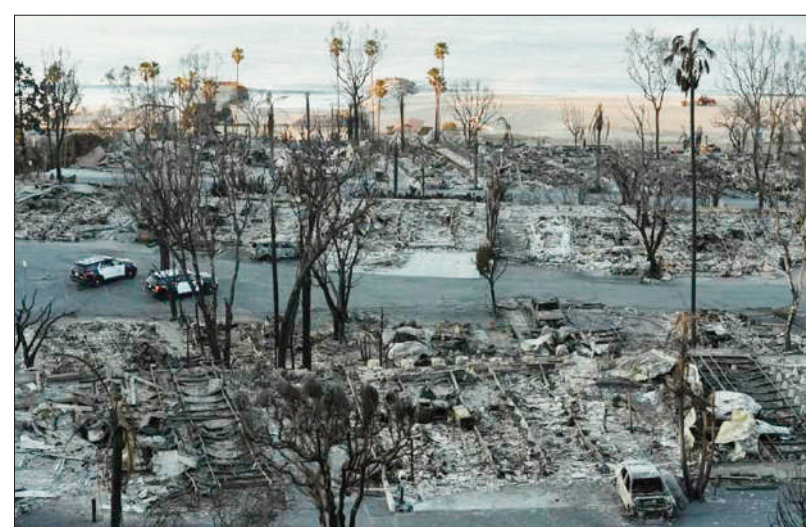
ment. The NFL, NBA and college basketball relocated or postponed games in the days after the fires began on Jan. 7.

Neither of the two major fires has been contained and thousands remain evacuated.

"We are in full solidarity with the citizens of Los Angeles and full of admiration for the tireless work of the firefighters and the security forces," the International Olympic Committee said in a statement. "Currently the full focus must be on the fight against the fires and the protection of the people and property."

Los Angeles was awarded the 2028 Olympics for a third time in 2017, with the IOC praising organizers' bid for using existing and temporary venues rather than constructing new stadiums and sports facilities specifically for the Games, as well as its commitment to sustainability and fiscal responsibility.

Yet the Games were still expected to cost roughly \$6.9 billion for investments like upgraded transportation, revamped facilities and improvements to the city's infrastructure with a goal of benefiting residents long after the Olympic flame is extinguished. Three major projects involve renovating the city's airport and expanding the Metro transportation sys-



tem and downtown convention center. No one counted on a large-scale disaster occurring in the nation's second-largest city when those projects were approved.

"What's happened in a number of recent Olympics is something else comes along that entirely changes what the Games are all about," said Dr. Matthew Brown, a University of Utah political science professor who has written extensively about the Olympics.

Tokyo postponed the 2020 Summer Games until 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and then held them without fans in attendance. Beijing went ahead with the 2022 Winter Games under strict pandemic restrictions with limited spectators allowed.

"Something like wildfires can really change the priorities of lots of cities in that region and potentially the state and federal government and what they fund and when they want to fund it," Brown

said. LA28 president and chairman Casey Wasserman met with President-elect Donald Trump in Florida on Wednesday night to shore up backing.

"As a lifelong Angeleno, I shared our sentiments for President-elect Trump's continued support in Los Angeles amid the devastation in our region," Wasserman said in a statement.

Trump, a major sports fan, was serving his first term when Los Angeles won the Games.

"We also addressed the 2028 Games, and we are grateful for his unwavering commitment to LA28 and his leadership in bringing the Summer Games back to the United States for the first time in more than 30 years. We look forward to partnering with him and his administration to deliver a safe and successful Games our nation can be proud of," Wasserman said.

Los Angeles is not immune to disasters — real or imagined. Wildfires, earthquakes, mudslides, flooding, drought and rioting have left their marks on the nation's most populous county of nearly 10 million people. And on the screen, Hollywood has dreamed up mass destruction.

The ongoing wildfires have killed over 20 people, destroyed over 12,000

structures and fouled the sprawling region's air quality, which affects public health.

"The reality is what this is going to do is put a big strain on availability of resources from the city of LA, surrounding cities and the state of California," Brown said.

"What happens then is those resources have to come from somewhere and that means other things are not going to have resources."

Brown points out that while the Olympics are primarily funded through the local organizing committee, Games held in the U.S. depend heavily on state and local governments for police, fire, first responders and traffic control.

"Those are all local resources," he said. "They're not going to be controlled by the local organizing committee."

It's unclear how the recovery could impact LA's notorious traffic congestion. Mayor Karen Bass has promised a "car free" Olympics, but no detailed transportation plans have been announced for the Games, which are expected to attract thousands of people daily.

The region's ability to recover will be tested as it prepares to host the World Cup, Super Bowl and the 17-day Olympics followed by the Paralympics in a span of three years. (AP)