

Budget session of Parliament begins today • Sitharaman to present Union Budget on Friday pn ready to put Govt on mat over Maha Kumbh tragedy

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Parliament's Budget session is likely to get off to a stormy start on Friday with Opposition parties demanding a discussion on the alleged mismanagement of the Maha Kumbh festival in Prayagraj where 30 pilgrims were killed in a stampede.

At the all-party meeting chaired by Defence minister Rajnath Singh on the eve of the Parliament session, opposition parties also accused the government of politicising the parliamentary committees and trying to push its agenda by using its majority.

The Budget session starts on Friday with President Droupadi Murmu addressing both the Houses of Parliament assembled together in the Lok Sabha. After the President's address, Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman will table the Economic Survey in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha separately.

Sitharaman will present the Union Budget on Saturday for the eighth consecutive time. At the all party meeting, the opposition accused the BJP-led government of politicisation of the Kumbh congregation and prevalence of VIP culture at the cost of the



The opposition parties also alleged that the government is steam-rolling its agenda in parliamentary panels and having disregard for parliamentary procedure of finalising House business at the meetings of the Business Advisory Committee.

"We expressed our concerns over the bi-

Thanks to the President's address, contending that this was the prerogative of the Business Advisory Committee.

"We have taken note of their concerns." The Business Advisory Committee (BAC) will decide which issues will be taken up for discussion. We hope for a smooth and productive Budget session. Cooperation from all parties is essential for a meaningful and constructive parliamentary session," Parliamentary Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju said.

The government has listed 16 Bills, besides the financial business. for the Budget session which will be held from January 31 to February 13 before breaking for recess to examine the Budget proposals.

The session will reconvene on March 10 and continue till April 4.

The all-party meeting was attended by proceedings," Gaurav Gogoi, Deputy Leader Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh, K Suresh, of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, told re-Gaurav Gogoi and Pramod Tewari. Trinamool Congress leaders Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Derek O'Brien, RSP leader N K tioned the government over the publication Premachandran, BJD leader Sasmit Patra, of a parliamentary bulletin on the number of DMK leader T R Baalu, Samajwadi Party days allotted for discussion on the Motion of leader Ram Gopal (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)



Yaba tablets worth ₹ 9 crore

seized in Assam, one held: CM

GUWAHATI, Jan 30: One person was arrested in Assam's Cachar district after Yaba tablets valued at ₹9 crore were recovered from him, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday. The recovery was made during an operation carried out based on tablets (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

specific information, he said. "YABA tablets worth ₹ 9 cr recovered. In a source based operation carried out by @cacharpolice in Silchar Aizawl Bypass, an auto rickshaw was intercepted and on thorough search, 30,000 YABA

Sensationalism over serious news, newspapers' struggle on Parl panel's agenda

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Issues of "rampant" paid news, fake news, many TV news channels focussing on sensationalism, and traditional newspapers' struggle due to digital disruption and declining readership are likely to figure in a parliamentary committee meeting on Friday, sources said. The standing committee on Communications and Information Technology headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey is scheduled to "review implementation of laws related to all forms of media" in the meeting in which a host of factors related to the media will be discussed

Sources Thursday said the panel may also highlights its concerns over disproportionate coverage given to crime and celebrity news at the cost of important and serious news as some channels turn to sensationalism in chasing TRPs.

Media trials of sensational cases at times shape public opinion and affect their legal course, and the committee cannot overlook it, the sources said.

That TV de

platform for shouting matches and mud-slinging are expected to figure in the meeting as well.

A source said conflict of interests involving media owners, journalists and political entities affects the credibility of news and that ethical boundaries are crossed many a time due to lack of strong regulatory mechanism

Among other key issues that may draw the committee's concerns is the expensive and long-drawn legal battles faced by journalists and media houses that discourage investigative journalism.

Severe financial crunch facing regional and vernacular media, and fake news is playing "havoc" in the country, especially during elections, a source said. Among other items likely to invite the panel's attention is the control of social media by big corporate firm based abroad as it can deliver an irreparable damage to the society, political leaders, political parties and even to the country unless regulated properly.

Information and Broadcasting (CONTD ON PAGE '

BJP chief Nadda slams AAP supremo over 'Yamuna poisoning' claim

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: BJP president JP Nadda on Thursday attacked Delhi's ruling AAP over corruption and asked people to make the national capital "AAPda free" in the February 5 polls.

porters here.

A section of the opposition leaders ques-

Addressing a poll rally in Krishna Nagar, he also slammed AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal for claiming that Haryana was "mixing poison" in the Yamuna.

Calling Kejriwal "anti-national" for making such an allegation, Nadda said, "He is pitting the people of Delhi and Haryana against each other. He is trying to create panic. This man does not deserve to be in politics.'

The BJP chief also alleged that the AAP-led Delhi government had been involved in a ₹ 8,000-crore scam in Yamuna cleaning projects.

"I can see that you have made up your mind to form a BJP government. This is not an ordinary election, it is an election to change Delhi's fate and image," the Union minister said.

"This election is about freeing Delhi from AAP, which has come to be known

Bangladesh minority rights group accuses



about freeing yourselves from all the problems you have faced under its tenure," Nadda added.

ers') relatives," he alleged. of conducting 75,000 fake tests in mo-"As health minister, I am saying that in

had failed in effective administration. "What has the AAPda done in the past

The top priority for the committee will be the dangers posed by China. Adopting its authorisation and oversight plan for the

committed corruption of ₹ 300 crore in medicines and gave tenders to their (lead-He also accused the Delhi government

interim govt of failing to protect minorities parliamentary traditions, farce: Cong

Attacking the ruling party on civic issues, Nadda said the AAP dispensation the mohalla clinics, 75,000 fake tests were

119th Congress, the committee said it will review the in-

to review US policy towards India WASHINGTON, Jan 30: The powerful House Committee on Foreign Affairs will review the US policy to-

wards India and the continued expansion of bilateral cooperation, particularly in the defence sector. India appears on the 11th list of priorities for the

House Foreign Affairs Committee

House Committee on Foreign Affairs for the current Congress.

The committee said it "will review US policy towards India and the continued expansion of bilateral cooperation rooted in shared democratic values while countering the influence of US adversaries in South and Central Asia.

"Particular attention will be paid to the US-India defence relationship, including security and technology cooperation, opportunities for expanded roles, missions, and capabilities, and counterterrorism efforts," it said.

The committee will also focus on efforts to effectively enhance US-India economic relations, including discussions surrounding bilateral efforts in the technology, telecommunications, and pharmaceutical industries.

"The committee will also focus on efforts to bolster India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue efforts and review the implications of India's rapidly growing energy demands," it said.

halla clinics.

RCRS Diphu trains coffee growers HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 30: The Regional Coffee Research Station (RCRS) in Karbi Anglong's Diphu organised a two-day management training program for coffee growers and also distributed coffee seeds to them for the financial year 2024-2025 here on Thursday.

The next training session will be held on February 4, 2025.

A total of 31 individuals have expressed interest in obtaining coffee seeds to start plantations in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

There are no coffee growers in Karbi Anglong. However, after organising a coffee awareness program in October last year, 31 individuals have come forward to start coffee plantations. They have submitted payment for the seeds, and today, we distributed the first batch to them. They have completed nursery training and will now begin coffee nurseries in their respective locations. Planting is scheduled to start in July this year," said Dr Atiqur Rahman Bora, deputy director of Research at RCRS.

Dr Bora also urged the people of Karbi Anglong to take up coffee cultivation, citing its high potential in the region.

Additionally, on January 29, 15 officers and officials from the Soil Conservation Department under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council were deputed to RCRS, Diphu, for training on "Coffee – from Bean to Brew." The training focused on the latest techniques in coffee cultivation, processing, and brewing, aimed at reviving the department's coffee plantations.

It is worth mentioning that the Soil Conservation Department initiated coffee cultivation in Assam in the 1980s, covering over 100 hectares. However, due to a lack of funding and low market prices, these plantations declined over time. Recently, efforts have been made to raise awareness about the current market scenario and the potential for rejuvenating coffee plantations in the region.

DHAKA, Jan 30: Bangladesh's largest minority rights group accused the country's interim government on Thursday of failing to protect religious and ethnic minorities from attacks and harassment, a claim the government has denied. The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist

Christian Unity Council said the government headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus is also using state institutions to suppress minority groups. Yunus took over after a student-led uprising last year in which hundreds of people died forced former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to flee to India on August 5, ending her 15-year rule.

The council earlier said 2,010 incidents of communal violence took place across the Muslim-majority country between August 4 and 20.

বিরাজমান সাম্প্রদায়িক সহিংসতা ও বৈষম্যের বিরুয়ে সংবাদ সম্মেলন

💎 বাংল্যাদেশ হিন্দু ৰৌদ্ধ খ্রিস্টান ঐক্য পরিষদ



The Yunus-led government disputed the claim, saying that most of the incidents were caused by "political reasons" and not by communal issues.

Traditionally, Hindus and other members of minority groups have been seen as supporters of Hasina's Bangladesh Awami League party. In a news conference on Thursday, the council reiterated its claim

of earlier attacks and said 174 new

incidents of communal violence had taken place between August 21 and December 31 last year in which 23 members of minority groups were killed and nine women were raped. It said other incidents involved arson, vandalism, looting and forcible takeover of property and businesses. It said at least 15 members of minority groups were either arrested or tortured for allegedly undermining Islam. Manindra Kumar Nath, the

group's acting general secretary, accused the government of manipulating state institutions to harass people from minority groups. "We have observed that the in-

terim government has begun using various important state institutions to carry out discriminatory actions against (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: The Opposition expressed strong protests at an all-party meeting against the functioning of the joint parliamentary committee on the Waqf Amendment Bill, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said on Thursday, claiming that such panels have been reduced to a "farce"

On Thursday, the government convened a meeting of floor leaders of all political parties ahead of the Budget session of Parliament. "In the traditional pre-session All-Party meeting this morning, all Opposition leaders have expressed their strongest protest on how the JPC on the Wakf Amendment Bill was made to function," Ramesh said in a post on X.

"It has made a complete mockery of all parliamentary traditions



and practices. Such committees used to be a force to be reckoned with -- now they have been reduced to be a farce to be reckoned with," the Congress general secretary in-charge communications

Complete mockery of

Earlier in the day, the joint committee of Parliament examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill submitted its report to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. Panel chairperson Jagdambika Pal met Birla at his Parliament (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

FHASM alleges encroachment on forest land near Assam-Nagaland border

<u>HT Bureau</u>

DIPHU, Jan 30: The Forum for Hills Autonomous State Movement (FHASM) on Thursday alleged that forest department land near the Assam-Nagaland border has been encroached upon by non-Karbis, leading to law and order issues.

"There is a Karbi village near the encroached area called Kramsa Model Village. The encroachers have created a tense situation. Thousands of non-Karbis have also encroached upon land in the Daldali Reserve Forest," FHASM Convenor James Hanse said at a press conference. He further stated that during a visit to the area on Wednesday, two individuals, identified as TK Brahma and Michael Boro, confronted them, claiming ownership of the land.

"We have learned that they have also assaulted a few people. This is unfortunate," Hanse said.

He asserted that the land belongs to the Karbis and criticised All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) president JI for stating that it is "Tribal Land" rather than Karbi land.

"This is not 'Tribal Land'; it belongs to the Karbis. Those coming from outside will not be sheltered," Hanse said. He further alleged that some revenue officials are colluding with encroachers to provide them with land pattas. Demanding immediate eviction, he called for an investigation into the matter.

Medical technology sector in India rapidly growing: Minister

'These are situations which have led to the growth and vibrancy of this sector'

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: India has been able to position itself as a leading player in the global medical technology landscape by addressing challenges of the sector and aligning with the global standards, Minister of State for Health Anupriya Patel said.

Addressing the Medtekon 2025 organised by the Medical Technical Association of India (MTaI), Patel said medical technology in India is a rapidly growing and a very dynamic sector.

There is a scenario where there is an increasing demand for healthcare and there are constant technological advancements and innovations, she said. Everybody wants to have better healthcare outcomes and delivery, she noted

"The government is also providing a lot of support to its policies because we have a focus on growing India's self-re-



liance in the medical technology sector. These are situations which have led to the growth and vibrancy of this sector. The country's medical sector is the fourth largest in Asia after China, Japan

and South Korea. And we are also among the top 20 globally," she said. "The current size of the industry, which is around 14 billion dollars, is expected to reach around 30 billion dollars by 2030. And by the same year, we also expect that the global market share of India will increase from the current 1.65 per cent to around 10-12 per cent," Patel said.

Even in the field of exports, there has been tremendous growth, she highlighted. India's exports in the last financial year stood at around 3.8 billion dollars. And they have been constantly increasing in all the five major segments, she stated.

The government has been making several efforts by way of its policies, schemes and initiatives to ensure that the sector benefits.

"The medical device policy, which was approved by the government in 2023, addresses every need of the sector in a very comprehensive manner. Along with it, the effective implementation of the (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

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BUSINESS

Challenges galore as Sitharaman and her team sit down to frame FY26 Budget

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, set to make history with her eighth consecutive Union Budget, has worked tirelessly with key officials, including Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, to prepare a budget of over ₹ 50 lakh crore for FY26.

The Budget will have to address several challenges, including decelerating economic growth, falling value of Rupee against the US dollar and moderation in consumption demand

The economic growth is estimated to slow to a 4-year low of 6.4 per cent in FY25. This is the lowest growth since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic which hit the world in 2019.

Sitharaman, who had steered the Indian economy through many difficult phases, including once-in-acentury pandemic, is again confronted with economic deceleration, moderation in consumption, stagnant private investment, and an uncertain geopolitical situation.

On account of various factors, the rupee plunged to an all-time low of 86.7 per US dollar earlier this month.

The team, assisting the Finance Minister to frame Budget proposals for 2025-26, includes Revenue Secretary Pandey, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth, Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Arunish Chawla, Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju, and Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran.

The uphill task before the Finance Minister and her team would be to bolster growth without sacrificing fiscal prudence.

The government is also expected

HT Bureau

models offer a synergy with LG TVs, ensuring

LG's S95TR Soundbar has 810W of power

output, and this flagship model contains 17 pre-

cisely arranged speakers, orchestrating an en-

Its acoustic brilliance elevates the three-di-

mensional soundscape, broadening the horizon

of the soundstage while delivering crystal-clear

Commenting on the launch Brian Jung, direc-

tor, Home Entertainment LG Electronics India

an improved cinematic and audio experience,'

an official statement said on Thursday.

veloping surround sound experience.

dialogue.

वित्त पंत्रालय

to stick to the fiscal glide path of reducing the fiscal deficit to below 4.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in FY26 amidst various headwinds.

Finance Secretary and Revenue Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey: The oldest hand at the finance ministry who has been involved with the Budget making process since October 2019 when he joined DIPAM as Secretary.

In September last year, Pandey, a 1987-batch IAS officer from Odisha cadre, was appointed the Finance Secretary

The Finance Ministry has six departments -- Revenue, Economic Affairs, Expenditure, Financial Services, DIPAM and DPE -- and the senior most bureaucrat in the ministry is designated as the Finance Secretary. He has been credited with divest-

ment of Air India and PSU dividend policy among others during his tenure as DIPAM Secretary.

Before serving as Secretary in the DIPAM, Pandey held many significant positions in the Union government and the Odisha government, in addition to serving

a stint in the Regional Office of the United Nations Industrial Develop-

ment Organisation (UNIDO). Economic Affairs Secretary, Ajay Seth: The second oldest hand at the finance ministry who has in past handled four Budgets since 2021. The Budget division under his departments anchors the entire Budget making process. The balance sheet matching be-

tween revenue and expenditure and borrowings are all matched by the Budget division under him.

Seth is credited with heading initiatives such as India's first sovereign green bond issuance, and the creation of the Infrastructure Finance Secretariat.

Ensuring that the economy stays on the fiscal glide path while charting out the new strategy of targeting the debt-to-GDP ratio will be some of the items that will be on top of Seth's agenda in the upcoming Budget.

Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil: A 1991-batch IAS officer of ment in August 2024.

Union Budget making and he will have a tough task in giving projections for subsidy in the Budget at a time when rupee is weakening.

DIPAM and Department of Public Enterprises Secretary Arunish Chawla, a 1992-batch Bihar cadre IAS officer, took charge in DIPAM and DPE in December 2024.

Chawla would have his task cut out to drive privatisation of IDBI Bank, move forward with asset monetisation and streamline the functioning of public sector enterprise

Chawla, a Master's and Doctorate in Economics from the London School of Economics, had served as Joint Secretary in the Department of Expenditure in 2014.

Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju: A 1993-batch Tripura cadre IAS officer, Nagaraju will have to draw up the roadmap for reforms like FDI cap hike in the insurance sector, deal with rising cyber frauds and further improve the health of the banking sector.

This would be the first brush with Union Budget making as Nagaraju joined as the Financial Services Secretary only in August.

CEA V Anantha Nageswaran: He would be presenting his third Economic Survey a day in advance to Budget 2025-26.

Nageswaran was appointed CEA in January 2022 by the government. Nageswaran, an academic and former executive with Credit Suisse Group AG and Julius Baer Group, succeeded K V Subraman-

The Economic Survey prepared by CEA is scheduled to be tabled in Parliament on January 31. The survey will give detailed analysis of the state of economy and some of his suggestions to make India Viksit Bharat by 2047. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Oppn ready to put Govt

Yadav, JMM leader Mahua Maji, and NCP-SP leader Fouzia Khan, among others. The 16 Bills listed for the Budget session include the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, The Railways (Amendment) Bill, The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, The Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, The Protection of Interests in Aircraft Objects Bill, and The Immigration and Foreigners Bill.

Asked about the opposition's demand for a discussion on the stampede at the Maha Kumbh, Rijiju said the decision will be taken by the committee.

'There are many important issues...the Kumbh was also mentioned," he said. Meanwhile, Congress leader Pramod Tiwari said opposition leaders have decided that the INDIA bloc will raise all issues together during the Budget session.

Emerging from the all-party meeting convened by the government on the eve of the session, Tiwari also slammed the "politicisation of the Kumbh", saying VIP movement during the event was creating difficulties for the common man. BJD leader Sasmit Patra accused the BJP of going back on its promise of granting special state to Odisha.

Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) leader E T Mohammed Basheer said he raised the issue of the weakening of the law-making process in the country.

The JPC on Waqf was constituted to have discussion, but members were not given enough opportunity to speak," Basheer said. AIADMK member M Thambi Durai wanted the government to make efforts to regain control over Katchetheevu island. (PTI)

Yaba tablets worth

coming from a neighbouring state was recovered," Sarma said in a post on X. One person was apprehended, he said lauding the police for the job.

Yaba tablets are illegal in India as it contains methamphetamine, a Schedule II substance under the Controlled Substances Act. (PTI)

Sensationalism over serious news

Prasar Bharti CEO, Press Registrar General and Press Council of India chairperson are among the important functionaries who are expected to appear before the committee.

The panel is also expected to traverse the journey of laws and other mechanism related to the media since the enactment of the Press and Registration of Books (PRB) Act, 1867, which was later replaced with the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023.

The functioning of the Press Council of India (PCI), a statutory quasi-judicial body which functions under the Press Council of India Act, 1978 is also likely to come up for discussion, the sources said.

The PCI's main objectives include preserving the freedom of press, and maintaining and improving the standards of newspapers and the news agencies in India.

The committee in its earlier meetings has examined the impact of emergence of Artificial Intelligence, OTT platforms and the mechanism to curb fake news. (PTI)

BJP chief Nadda slams

than blaming the central government and trying to cover up its mistakes? It has misled the people of Delhi and denied them the benefits of Modi ji's welfare schemes. Its only job has been to pit people against each other while sitting in glass palaces.'

AAP leaders sought public support by declaring themselves as "kattar imandar (staunchly honest)" but they turned out to be "kattar bhrashtachar (staunchly corrupt)", Nadda alleged.

AAP ministers were in jail in a liquor scam case worth ₹ 2,800 crore, he noted.

'These people say 'we have come out of jail'. Someone should tell them that they are out on bail. Their true place is behind bars and they will be sent back to jail after the elections," he warned.

Nadda also alleged AAP indulged in corruption amounting to ₹ 28,000 crore in the Delhi Jal Board, Rs 500 crore in panic button installation in public transport, ₹ 5,400 crore in ration distribution, ₹ 5,710 crore in CCTV camera installation, and ₹ 4,500 crore in bus procurement.

"Tell me, have there been water issues under it (AAP government) or not? Were tanker mafia flourishing or not? Kejriwal has turned Delhi into a garbage city. There is garbage outside every home. Dirty water is being supplied to households and drainwater is spilling onto the roads," he added.

Listing the BJP's poll promises, Nadda asked the public to vote for the saffron party and benefit from the central government's welfare schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, which is not implemented in Delhi.

"Any development work that has happened in Delhi has been done by Modi ji. Elect our government and we will provide ₹ 5 lakh from Modi ji and ₹ 5 lakh from the Delhi government," he said, referring to the insurance cover promised by the BJP in its manifesto.

Elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly will be held on February 5 and the votes counted on February 8. (PTI)

House Foreign Affairs Committee

treaties China has signed and its violations thereof. This will encompass the human rights agreements China has violated through its genocide of the Uyghurs and persistent abuse of human rights, the violations of its obligations to Hong Kong under the Basic Law, actions inconsistent with its World Trade Organisation and other trade and investment obligations, non-proliferation regimes, cyber agreements, and other bilateral and international agreements.

After China, the second on top of the priority is an examination of the State Department's participation in multilateral forums such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and closely monitor any discussion of trade agreements in the Indo-Pacific region.

It will also conduct regular review and oversight over the State Department and US Agency for International Development resourcing in the Indo-Pacific.

"These soundbars are designed to offer an im-GUWAHATI, Jan 30: LG Electronics India mersive audio experience with features such as Limited announced the launch of its new Soundcenter-up-firing speaker, 3D Spatial Sound Techbars - the LG S95TR and LG S90TY with Wirenology, and wireless connectivity with LG TVs. less Dolby Atmos® and true wireless rear We have combined performance with innovasurround speakers. "Designed to improve home tions to meet the evolving needs of Indian conentertainment with good sound quality, innovasumers," he added. The LG S95TR features 9.1.5 channels with tive features, and a sleek, modern design, these

5 up-firing speakers, upgraded tweeters and integration of passive radiators. With this, the Soundbar pushes the low-frequency response down to an earthy 120Hz for balanced sound, and refined tweeters ensure that the highest frequencies are delivered with clarity for an improved audio experience, the statement added. WOWCAST enables the Soundbar to connect

wirelessly to select LG TVs, making the enjoyment of cinematic technologies like wireless Dolby Atmos and DTS: X[®]2 easier.

LG's WOW Interface provides an intuitive and user- friendly way of navigating through LG TV sound settings and, with the press of a button, utilising LG's WOW Orchestra technology. This alliance between the Soundbar and select LG TV orchestrates a fusion of audio channels,

GLOBALAI RACE

India to build own foundational models;

18,693 GPUs to power compute facility

LG launches premium flagship SOUNDBARS in India expanding the soundstage and adding layers of depth that improves the auditory imagery.

LG's 3D Spatial Sound Technology applies channel analysis through a 3D engine to captivate listeners with lifelike sound and an immersive sense of space.

Additionally, LG AI Room Calibration assesses the room's environment and fine-tunes the settings to enhance the audio in harmony with the room's acoustics

The AI Room Calibration introduces an extended capability to calibrate the audio of rear surround speakers, improving audio immersion and providing flexibility for installation.

The LG S90TY, on the other hand, offers a 5.1.3 channel setup with a 570W output. While it also features the center up-firing speaker, it does not include the wireless rear surround speakers found in the S95TR.

The LG S95TR is priced at ₹ 84,990, while the LG S90TY is available at ₹ 69,990. Features

Madhya Pradesh cadre, Govil took charge of the Expenditure depart-This will be Govil's first stint in

said, "The introduction of our flagship soundbars marks a significant step in our commitment to delivering technology that improves home entertainment for our customers".

may vary from model to model. The Soundbars are available for sale across retail and online platforms, including LG.com, the statement concluded.

Among the top 10 issues for the committee are Taiwan, Europe, Russia and its war against Ukraine, the Middle East and North Africa, Israel, Iran, Africa and Afghanistan. (PTI)

Complete mockery of

House office and handed over the report. The panel on Wednesday adopted by a majority vote its report that contained changes suggested by members of the ruling BJP, prompting the opposition to dub the exercise an attempt to destroy Waqf boards.

The committee adopted the report on the draft legislation by a 15-11 majority vote. Opposition members submitted dissent notes to the report.

BJP members insisted that the Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha in August last year, sought to bring modernity, transparency and accountability in the management of Waqf properties.

On the other hand, the opposition termed it an attack on the constitutional rights of the Muslim community and interference in the functioning of Waqf boards. (PTI)

Bangladesh minority rights group minorities. This is unexpected and undesirable from a government that was established based on the anti-

discrimination student movement," he said.

The council said minority groups were being targeted in a systematic way, and called for the release of a jailed Hindu leader.

Nath said the leader, Chinmoy Das Prabhu, was being deprived of his legal right to bail in a sedition case. He is also known as Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari.

Nath said many minority leaders had gone into hiding because of false charges against them. The interim government has said they face specific charges and were not targeted for any communal reason.

Under Yunus, Bangladesh has been going through a tense period with Hindu-majority India over minority issues, sparking protests and counter-protests. Less than 8 per cent of Bangladesh's 170 million people are Hindu.

Many in the interim government are unhappy that India is sheltering Hasina, and a special tribunal in Bangladesh has sought her arrest. An official request to India for her extradition remains unanswered.

India, which sheltered 10 million refugees and helped Bangladesh gain independence after a nine-month war against Pakistan in 1971, considers Hasina to be a trusted friend. Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was the independence leader of Bangladesh, then the eastern part of Pakistan, India's regional foe. (AP)

Medical technology sector in

regulatory framework where we place a lot of emphasis on transparency and global alignment, that has also led to the growth and progress of the industry that we see today.

"A milestone achievement has been the adoption of the medical device rules in 2017. And also the digitalisation of the regulatory processes which has reduced a lot of paperwork and streamlined the interaction between the stakeholders as well as the regulators," she said.

While the Export Promotion Council, which has been created for medical devices, is opening up new international markets for our products, we also have the reconstitution of the Medical Devices Promotion Council which has stakeholders from both industry and government, the minister said.

To attract investments, the government has allowed 100 per cent FDI through the automatic route and the inflow in this sector under the FDI scheme has registered growth.

"By addressing the sector's challenges and by aligning with the global standard, we have been able to position India as a leading player in the global MedTech landscape...It would not be inappropriate to say that India's MedTech sector today stands as a beacon of hope and possibility," she said.

Patel called for optimally harnessing both the domestic as well as global currents in the industry, strengthening the ties between the government and the industry and all the other stakeholders like healthcare provider to create a future where medical technology is just not helping us to improve the healthcare outcome, but it is promoting the overall societal well-being"

Pavan Choudary, Chairman of the Medical Technology Association of India said, "At MTaI, we believe that sharp advocacy is rooted in thoughtful deliberation, and MedTekon 2025 exemplifies this vision. Our membership growth -- from 42 to 57 companies --- makes us India's largest MedTech association, underscoring the fraternity's commitment to fair, equitable, and constructive industry progress.'

In an era where global cooperation is stagnating, MedTech has emerged as a stabilizing force, uniting nations even in turbulent times, Choudary said.

"The pandemic showcased this collaborative strength, with open-source ventilator designs, technology transfers, and supply chain resilience ensuring medical access across borders. However, MedTech is not just about healthcare -- it is a keystone sector, integral to national security, as compromised medical devices could be weaponized by hostile actors," he said. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: India on Thursday outlined global AI ambitions with plans to build its own 'foundational model' that could take on the might of Chat-GPT, Deepseek R1 and others, as it lined up "most affordable" common compute facility powered by 18,693 GPUs to be used by startups and researchers.

India's bold move comes at a time when Chinese company DeepSeek has turned heads after its AI model overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's appstore, challenging the AI dominance concentrated so far with the US firms, particularly Silicon Valley frontrunner Open AI.

IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw exuded confidence that India will build a foundational model that is world-class, and that it will be able to compete with best models across the globe.

On Thursday, New Delhi announced the next steps in its AI blueprint, among them, 18,693 Graphics Processing Unit or GPUs on offer by the empanelled bidders (a list that includes Jio Platforms, CMS Computers, Tata Communications, E2E Networks, Yotta Data Services, and others), and start of AI safety institution, with 8 projects approved under it.

The government is also calling for proposals to develop India's own foundational models that would be aligned to Indian context, Indian languages, culture, basically where datasets are "for our country, of our country and for our citizens" and "biases are removed"

Put simply, foundation models



in generative AI are large, pretrained models that form the base for a variety of AI applications. The common compute facility (powered by 18,693 GPUs) would be made available at a fraction of global cost benchmarks, Vaishnaw assured. The compute facility will be "most affordable" coming significantly less than one dollar (per GPU hour) after 40 per cent cost borne

by the government. "Making modern technology accessible to everyone, that is the economic thinking of our PM... Ours is the most affordable compute facility, at this point of time." Vaishnaw said.

The Minister said there are at least six major developers/startups who would be able to build foundational models in the next 8-10 months at the outer limit. and 4-6 months at a more optimistic estimate.

"Algorithmic efficiency matters a lot, it can deliver a model at much lower cost and less time

than the world has seen today,' the Minister said, expressing optimism that India will have a "world class foundational model" in the coming few months.

The government, under the IndiaAI Mission, had approved Rs 10,372 crore outlay to strengthen India's AI ecosystem - a key pillar for that was enabling 10,000 GPUs for AI Compute Infrastructure. The 18,693 GPUs would offer large compute power considering that Deepseek was

trained on 2,000 GPUs and Chat-GPT version 4 on 25,000 GPUs. On the applications under India AI mission, India's focus

has been about utilising the power of Artificial Intelligence for solving population-scale problems, in areas such as healthcare, education, agri, logistics, weather forecasting and oth-

"We launched an application proposal and I am happy to say that 18 applications have been

The projects approved for AI safety include areas of machine unlearning (IIT Jodhpur), synthetic Data Generation (IIT Roorkee), AI bias mitigation strategy, explainable AI framework (Defence Institute of Advanced Technology Pune), privacy enhancing strategy (IIT

selected for the first round of

funding. These are in themes of

agriculture, learning disability

and climate change," the Minis-

ter said. AI safety is in the spot-

light across the world, and India

AI Mission too emphasises safe

Vaishnaw announced that AI

safety institutions will be collab-

orative and will act on a hub-and-

spoke type model, where

multiple institutions can partner

to provide and develop tools,

frameworks and processes

and trusted models.

needed for AI safety.

Delhi, IIIT Delhi, TEC), AI Ethical certification framework, AI algorithm auditing tool, and AI governance testing framework.

Asked about the issue of GPU and AI chip export curbs that the US had been talking about and whether or not it would impact India's AI mission, the Minister said India is seen as a trusted country across the world.

"We respect IP rights and considerations in technology and that is why we have signed MoUs on very important technologies. We believe that the trust that has developed will be important in every consideration and regulation that any country brings," he said, expressing confidence that the India AI Mission will flourish because of the trust the country enjoys. (PTI)

REGION

NCC is contributing to strengthening the edifice of Atmanirbhar Bharat' Governor inaugurates Project Yuva Bhagidari

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 30: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharva inaugurated Project Yuva Bhagidari, organised by the National Cadet Corps (NCC) North Eastern Region, at the K.B.R. Auditorium in Cotton University here on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, Acharya said, "India is a country, which is a symbol of unity in diversity, and the National Cadet Corps (NCC) further strengthens this bond of unity. Established in 1948, NCC has built its identity as a vast organization upholding the values of discipline, service, and patriotism.

Acharya also said that the journey of NCC has given a new direction to the lives of millions of young Indians. "I believe that NCC is not just an organisation but a mission dedicated to the service of the nation. Today, as we speak of strengthening the foundation of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and New India, the role of NCC becomes even more significant," added the Governor.

Acharya expressed his happiness at the large number of cadets associated with NCC in Assam. He also shared happiness over the good number of cadets, nearly 18,000 female and 29,000 male who are giving NCC



a fresh outlook. He highlighted the importance of Project Yuva Bhagidari in empowering youth and promoting nation-building.

The Governor said that the project aims to expand the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and encouraged NCC cadets to become ambassadors of cleanliness. He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to make India clean and healthy, citing the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan as a people's movement.

The Governor further urged the cadets to participate with full enthusiasm and dedication in the campaign, emphasising the importance of youth power in shaping India's future. He congratulated the cadets for being part of this meaningful initiative and called for collective efforts to build a clean, healthy, and developed India.

It may be mentioned that Project Yuva Bhagidari has been conceptualised and designed to create a mass movement on specific community development issues like Swachh Bharat. The aim of the project is to carry out Social Service and Community Development engagement by NCC Cadets as educators and monitors to create a mass movement on Swachh Bharat Mission.

The programme was attended by minister of sports and youth welfare Nandita Garlosa, additional director general, NCC directorate, North Eastern Region, Major General Gagan Deep, vice-chancellor Cotton University, Prof Ramesh Chandra Deka, NCC group commander Brigadier A.K. Bora along with a host of other dignitaries.

Congress against development of Assam: Subhash Dutta

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 30: On Thursday, in the BJP Assam Pradesh's

main office, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhavan, senior spokesperson Subhash Dutta, the BJP Assam Pradesh spokesperson, addressed the media and criticised Congress. He said that the Congress party, under the leadership of Lok Sabha deputy leader Gaurav Gogoi, has planned a conspiracy against the Advantage Assam 2.0 program. Congress leaders are intentionally creating a negative image of this significant program, which has long been awaited by the people of

Assam, and are spreading misinformation both nationally and internationally. He said, "We have seen a

planned conspiracy by Congress regarding the Advantage Assam 2.0 program. Recently, Congress leader Priyank Kharge in Karnataka attempted to malign Assam's image with false statements about the Semiconductor industries being set up in Assam.

"The Congress party's actions are against the interests of Assam and its development," he added. The spokesperson further stated that the Congress leaders are frustrated due to the success of the Advantage Assam 2.0 program and

are launching such smear campaigns because they fear the BJP's growth and progress.

"This reflects their anti-Assam mindset," he reiterated.

Senior Spokesperson Subhash Dutta emphasised that everyone, irrespective of party affiliations, should support the Advantage Assam 2.0 program positively. He further added that Congress should focus on issues that truly concern the people of Assam rather than engaging in political games.

He mentioned that the economic progress of Assam is evident, as the state's GDP has grown from \$21.4 billion in 2013-14 to \$68.7 billion in 2023-24, and it is expected to cross Rs 6 lakh crores in the current financial year. Under the leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Assam government is making continuous efforts to position Assam among the top five states of India.

Senior spokesperson Subhash Dutta expressed confidence that the Advantage Assam 2.0 program will lead to accelerated industrial development and strengthen the state's economy. He thanked the Assam government led by chief minister Sarma for initiating this large-scale program, which will further boost Assam's growth trajectory.

Sarpanch gets Smart SITA signs MoA for project on 'Scientific Goat Farming' Meter installed at HT Bureau

services on June 18, 2024.

now halts at Rangiya (RNY) from April 18, 2024.

The 13174/13173 Sabroom-Sealdah- Sabroom

Kanchenjunga Express has an additional stoppage at

Bihara (BHZ) from April 18, 2024, while the

15665/15666 Guwahati-Mariani-Guwahati BG Ex-

Furthermore, the 15613/15614 Guwahati-

Murkongselek - Guwahati Lachit Express now halts

at New Misamari from July 19, 2024. Additionally,

the 15817/15818 Shokhuvi-Naharlagun-Shokhuvi

Donyi Polo Express and the 22412/22411 Anand

Vihar Terminal-Naharlagun-Anand Vihar Terminal

Arunachal Express have additional stoppages at New

Misamari from 19th April, 2024, and 21st July, 2024,

respectively. These new train services and additional

stoppages reflect NFR's continuous efforts to enhance

passenger convenience, improve accessibility, and en-

sure a more seamless travel experience. The Northeast

Frontier Railway remains committed to further

strengthening rail connectivity in the region while

catering to the growing needs of travellers.

press stops at Bokajan from 17th April, 2024.

his residence

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 30: In a significant step toward modernising energy consumption and promoting smart meters, Moinul Haque, Sarpanch of Dolaitola in Kamrup Rural district, has installed a smart meter at his residence.

and

Thursday

Borkataky's office chamber at

Janata Bhawan, Dispur to execute

the project on "Scientific Goat

Farming". The MoA was signed

by Chief Executive Officer P Vi-

jaya Bhaskar Reddy, IAS on be-

half of SITA and Dr Bishnu

Prasad Upadhaya, Principal of

This initiative sets a strong precedent for the community, encouraging wider adoption of advanced metering technology for improved energy efficiency and transparency.

The installation was carried out under the ongoing smart meter initiative in Assam, which aims to enhance power distribution, ensure accurate billing, and empower consumers with real-time energy mon-By embracing this itoring. innovation, Haque has reinforced the importance of digital transformation in rural governance and energy management.

Speaking on the occasion, Haque said, "Smart meters are a step forward in making our electricity consumption more efficient and transparent. I urge all residents of Hajo and beyond to adopt this technology for better energy management and to contribute to the development of our community."

Pioneer Arts College hosts special drama workshop

HT Correspondent NAGAON, Jan 30: Pioneer of GB College, Morigaon

GUWAHATI, Jan 30: A Memo-The project aims to empower randum of Agreement (MoA) was individuals with practical skills signed between State Innovation and provide practical training for Transformation Aavog empowering skills in goat farm-(SITA), Assam and Ghanakanta ing. It also aims to establish a village-level knowledge-sharing Baruah College, Morigaon in collaboration with Jarabari Agro Procentre for the dissemination of ducers Co-operative Society Ltd. technology and capacity building in the presence of Vice Chairman of women farmers for undertaking Narayan Chandra Borkataky on goat farming as a profitable business enterprise. The MoA was signed at

The scheme is prepared in four clusters each with a unit of 20 women beneficiaries. Each cluster will be provided financial aid prior to which training of the beneficiaries shall be mandated before the commencement of farms. In the meeting, vice chairman

GB College, Morigaon on behalf Borkataky stated that the project



would upscale the economy of the farming community.

agriculture and hoped that the

The meeting was also attended by Dr Panchi Devi, Nodal & Coordinating Officer, Dr Jintu Deka, Assistant Professor of GB College, beneficiaries from Jarabari Agro Producers Co-operative So-

> vears ago in Mumbai, Cakeology has grown into India's most successful baking expo, hosting multiple successful editions. Now, for the first time, it is expanding to Guwahati, offering an

unparalleled platform for cake artists, home bakers, industry professionals, and food entrepreneurs to connect, learn, and showcase their talents. The event is tailored for a di-

verse audience, including baking professionals, industry buyers, cake artists, home bakers, bakery

cafés, pastry chefs, restaurant owners, caterers, hotel purchase managers, F&B managers, sweet and snack shop owners, hotel management institutes among others.

"Attendees can look forward to an array of exciting activities, including stalls and exhibits where top brands are showcasing ingredients, tools, and baking equipment. Also, there will be free hands-on workshops led by expert bakers and chefs and live theatre demonstrations," said Khushi Malani, the Founder of Cakeology.

in pigs in Assam and the local virtually deprive thousands of local pig rearers of their daily bread.

The KMSS, CMSS and the members of the pig rearers union raised slogans against the government and demanded protection for indigenous

Thai company gets green

signal to trade, protest erupts

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 30: Krishak Mukti Sangram Samity (KMSS) and

Chatra Mukti Sangram Samity (CMSS), two major components of Raijor

Dal on Thursday staged a protest against the BJP-led state government

stock and poultry and at the same ciety Ltd and officials of SITA. farmers time upgrade the skills of women **Cakeology 2025 comes to Guwahati** New train services and stoppages at NFR during FY 2024-25

state, especially in the field of

project which is sponsored by

SITA would be successful in en-

hancing the productivity of live-

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 30: Cake enthusiasts, baking professionals, (14012/14011) was launched on 6th October 2024 and the Balurghat-Bathinda-Balurghat Express and industry buyers are in for a (15733/15734) began its services on 15th April 2024. treat as Cakeology 2025, India's premier Cake & Bake Expo, is set Another significant addition to short-distance rail to make its debut in Guwahati. connectivity is the Tinsukia-Lumding-Tinsukia DEMU Passenger (75602/75603) which started its

Scheduled to take place from January 31 to February 2, 2025, at In addition to the introduction of new trains at NFR, the Maniram Dewan Trade Centre, this much-anticipated event promadditional stoppages at various stations to benefit railway passengers are also provided. The 12423/12424 ises to be a game-changer for the Dibrugarh-New Delhi-Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express baking and hospitality industries in Northeast India

Having begun its journey eight

for rolling out the red carpet to a Thai company to trade in The government allowed Thailand's CP Group to trade

farmers have raised their concern believing that it would

College, a premier private educational institution in Nagaon, organised a week-long drama workshop as part of its curriculum.

The workshop, which concluded on Thursday, was attended by graduate students and first-year higher secondary students of the college.

Noted theatre artist Susmita Saikia, trained at the National School of Drama (Sikkim), provided training on drama and acting and offered constructive advice to all participants.

The valedictory function was presided over by college principal Kamakhya Prasad Choudhury. Trained students showcased their talents in group and solo performances, demonstrating their mastery of drama and acting skills.

According to Uma Ram Das, senior lecturer of the Assamese department and workshop director, a full-fledged drama performance by the trained students, under Susmita Saikia's guidance, is planned for the coming days.

The valedictory function also included an award distribution ceremony, where students who excelled in the quiz competition on "Assamese Language: Past, Present, and Future" during the Classical Assamese Language Pride Week were felicitated.

The event was attended by college vice-principal Prashanta Kumar Barua, owner Taasmeema Haque, and faculty members.

Me-Dam-Me-Phi celebration begins in Margherita HT Correspondent MARGHERITA, Jan 30: The

43rd Me-Dam-Me-Phi festival has begun in Margherita, with a twoday program scheduled on January 30 and 31. The Me-Dam-Me-Phi festival is a traditional religious celebration of the Tai Ahom community, where they honour their ancestors and pray for the wellbeing of the community, state, and country

The event held at the Chow Chang Ron located in New Colony, Margherita, featured various cultural programs, including a quiz competition, traditional games, and a cultural procession.

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 30: As part of its commitment towards expanding railway services, NFR has introduced several new trains during the FY 2024 -2025. NFR has approximately introduced about six pairs

of trains that started rendering its services during the current financial year.

The Guwahati - North Lakhimpur - Guwahati Jan Shatabdi Express (12047/12048) commenced operations on January 3, 2025, providing a faster travel option. The Guwahati-New Bongaigaon-Guwahati Passenger (55818/55817) started on January 4, 2025, catering to short-distance travellers, while the Tinsukia-Naharlagun-Tinsukia Express (15911/15912) was introduced on January 3, 2025, strengthening connectivity in Arunachal Pradesh.

Additionally, the Anand Vihar Terminal-Radhika-Anand Vihar Terminal Weekly Express pur-IOCA enters Guinness Book with 80,243 units of blood donation in a single day

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 30: The All India Organisation of Chemists and Drugs Association (AIOCA) entered the Guinness Book of Records by donating 80,243 units of blood in a single day to mark its 50th anniversary on December 25. The AIOCA organised blood donation camps across India on the day. In Sivasagar, the camp was inaugurated by social activist Pradeep Khemka by lighting a lamp at Jaydayal Khemka Matra Seva Sadan in Doulmukh Chariali. In his speech, Khemka said that blood donation is a great deed to save the lives of others. He appreciated the great initiative of the District Pharmaceutical Traders Association in association with AIOCA. The blood donation camp was at-

tended by all the office bearers and workers as well as the people of the pharmaceutical establishments. The

blood donation camp was attended by noted doctor Dr Aminur Rahman, secretary of Sivsagar Press Club, Himanshu Neog, journalists Ratu Kumar Das, Munna Agarwal, Parikshit Gogoi, Shariful Ahmed, Prashant Das, Mukul Gogoi, Basanta Saikia, Prabal Sharma, Vijay Sharma, Ashok Gattani, Bishal Damani, Jayant Bora, Malchand Gattani, Shankarlal Agarwal, and about a hundred blood donors

4-day training prog for Jhumur dance commenced in Jorhat

HT Correspondent JORHAT, Jan 30: A four-day training for the programme began in four Assembly constituencies of Jorhat district on Wednesday as part of the state-wide preparations for the performance of Jhumur dance by about 8000 dancers and artists from tea estates across the state.

The participants are set to perform at a mega cultural event scheduled to be held during the inaugural ceremony of the second edition of 'Advantage Assam 2.0 investment and infrastructure conclave' in Guwahati on February 24-25.

The conclave is to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A district administration official informed that the training programme titled 'Jhumur Binandia' organised by the State Cultural Affairs department formally began at an inaugural ceremony which was attended by the Jorhat MLA Hitendra Nath Goswami.

Workshop on issues for protection of environment held in Tezpur

<u>HT Correspondent</u>

TEZPUR, Jan 30: With the help of the District Nodal Agency under EEP (Environment Education Programme) implemented by Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC), Tezpur Academy Higher Secondary School Eco Club organised a workshop on vermicomposting, solid waste management, and rainwater harvesting on Wednesday.

The programme was held under the guidance of the inspector of schools, Sonitpur District Circle Prabhat Chandra Das.

The programme was inaugurated by noted retired science teacher Hiranya Kumar Nath. In his inaugural speech, Nath emphasised on the need and importance of rainwater conservation, discussed different types of solid waste management, the complete process of collecting, treating, and disposing of solid wastes along with the process and need of vermicomposting. He urged the student community to come forward to act for the protection of the environment

Attending the workshop as a resource person,



Science teacher of Tezpur Academy Rhitushmita Saikia and Abul Islam of Thelamara Higher Secondary School thoroughly analysed the process of vermicomposting, its usefulness, importance of solid waste management, its impact on environment, and the need of rainwater harvesting

As participants, the workshop was attended by a number of students and teachers from more than ten schools in the district.

The inaugural programme chaired by the Principal in charge of Tezpur Academy Anjana Borah was graced by the presence of Vice Principal Mridul Kumar Sarma, Sonitpur District Coordinator of National Children Science Congress Nipjyoti Saikia, noted teacher Pankaj Barua and Subhrajyoti Sarma among several others.

Workshop on artistic heritage of Tezpur held



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Jan 30: Under the initiative of the Tezpur District Museum and the River Project, a two-day workshop titled "Timeless Expressions: Mapping Tezpur's Artistic Heritage" was held on January 28 and 29, 2025, at the Tezpur District Museum.

This workshop sought to unravel the stories etched in stone-tracing the artistic heritage of Tezpur through its magnificent sculptures and archaeological wonders.

Bringing together students, researchers, and scholars from across Assam, the workshop offered a unique opportunity to explore the region's stone sculptures through a scientific and historical lens. It delved into the intricate process of sculpture identification, documentation, and heritage mapping, bridging the past with the present.

The journey began amidst the timeless charm of Chitralekha Udyan and the ancient ruins of the Da Parbatiya temple complex on Tuesday. Participants learned to decipher the artistry of stone sculptures, capturing their details through photographic documentation.

On Wednesday, the exploration deepened at Bamuni Hills, where the participants engaged in an immersive discussion on its remarkable sculptures. Later, at the Tezpur District Museum, they were introduced to heritage mapping, learning how to trace and preserve the narratives embedded in these historical relics.

The workshop was enriched by the insights of Dr. Preeti Sharma, associate professor from the Department of History, Cotton University, Jayanta Roy, a research scholar from North Eastern Hill University, who guided participants through the layers of history embedded in Tezpur's artistic legacy.

In the valedictory session, district commissioner of Sonitpur, Ankur Bharali lauded the initiative, emphasising the importance of heritage conservation and academic inquiry in the region. As a gesture of encouragement, he presented certificates to the participants, marking the completion of a journey that not only explored the past but also inspired a deeper appreciation for Tezpur's artistic and cultural heritage.

4

THE HILLS TIMES VOL.XXVI, ISSUE 020, DIPHU, FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2025

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Either you run the day or the day runs you. - Jim Rohn

Steep climbing fees

epal has decided to hike the permit fees to climb Mount Ever-est. It will certainly boost Nepal's revenues. Yet it raises the question about the ethics of commercialisation of scaling one of the world's most revered natural wonders. Issues pertaining to sustainability and overcrowding come up in the wake of the decision of increasing the permit fees. It has been upped from \$11,000 to \$15,000 during peak season. For Nepal, the economic stakes are significant. In all, 4 per cent of the national GDP is contributed from the permit fees of mountaineering and trekking. It is a crucial pillar of Nepalese economy. Infrastructure, local livelihood and development of remote regions of this Himalayan country are supported by revenue from climbing permits. One must not lose sight of the fact that the climbing fee has been hiked the first time in nearly a decade. Everest faces mounting challenges. The increase in climbing permits fees must be paired with addressing them. A look at the scenario reveals that hundreds of climbing permits are issued every year. Needless to say overcrowding has become an alarming issue. Its fallout is Everest facing a high altitude traffic jam with the high influx of climbers. Dangerous bottlenecks develop at critical points on the mountain.

The situation affects lives during rescue operations for mountaineers cut off from oxygen and supplies. And one cannot overlook the environmental toll exacerbated by the mountaineers footfall. The famous mountain peak is often referred to as the world's highest garbage dump. Owing to mismanagement it has earned such a title which is neither in keeping with its great height nor the pristine snow covering it. The climbers leave behind tonnes of waste and even human remains. Despite periodic drives the clean-up task remains daunting. A steep climbing fees would deter less serious climbers. Thus it has a potential to reduce congestion. On the other hand, it is unlikely to curb aspirations of wealthy adventurers. Nor would it discourage commercial expedition companies. A more comprehensive regulatory framework is needed. It would cap the number of permits issued every year. Nepal Supreme Court have recently ordered to respect the carrying capacity of the peaks of the country. It is indeed a step in the right direction but has ethical considerations too. The implementation of the top court order remains uncertain. Mountaineering has long been a feat of passion and endurance.

But the hike in climbing permit fees can turn it into a luxury experience only a few can afford. This exclusivity being biased in the favour of the elite undermine the spirit of exploration. One wonders whether Nepal's iconic peak is being reduced to a mere commodity. The situation poses a dual challenge. The sanctity of Everest has to be preserved. Its economic potential has to be maximised. A balance has to be struck. The hiked permit fees has to be looked upon as necessary to protect the mountain's fragile eco system. Countless mountaineers have risked their lives to climb Everest and stand on top of the world. Their legacy has to be honoured by ensuring climber safety. Revenue has to match responsibility. Surely Nepal can set an example of sustainable tourism after having made a start.

Me-Dam-Me-Phi: A testament to Tai Ahom cultural heritage and ancestral worship in Assam

ssam, a land steeped in Acultural diversity and rich historical significultural diversity and cance, serves as a vibrant melting pot of traditions, festivals. and communities. Among the many illustrious chapters of Assam's history, the legacy of the Tai Ahom dynasty stands unparalleled. The Tai Ahoms ruled Assam for an impressive 600 years, leaving behind a legacy of cultural preservation, spiritual devotion, and socio-political influence. One of the most profound contributions of this dynasty is the continuation of the festival Me-Dam-Me-Phi, a celebration deeply entrenched in the ethos of the Ahom civilization, symbolizing their reverence for ancestors and their gods.

The Origins and Historical Significance of Me-Dam-Me-

The roots of Me-Dam-Me-Phi can be traced back to the ancient Tai traditions of ancestor worship. This festival, integral to the Ahom religion and culture, was introduced to Assam by the first Ahom king, Chaolung Sukapha, who brought the practice as part of the Tai people's spiritual framework. The term itself carries profound meaning: "Me" signifies offerings, "Dam" represents ancestors, and "Phi" denotes gods and goddesses. This tradition emphasizes that the departed ancestors are revered as deities, reinforcing the spiritual bond between the living and the deceased

The Ahom rulers elevated this ancestral worship into a grand societal event. Historical accounts mention the royal splendor with which the festival was celebrated during the Ahom reign. For instance, King Suhungmung, following his victory over the Kacharis in 1563,



commemorated the triumph by organizing Me-Dam-Me-Phi at his capital, a gesture to seek blessings and longevity for his kingdom and subjects. Similarly, King Pratap Singh performed the festival thrice to celebrate his military victories over the Mughals. The festival not only served as a religious observance but also as a unifying cultural event that fostered solidarity among the people.

However, the festival was not solely limited to royal patronage. It became a cornerstone of Tai Ahom social and spiritual life, observed as both a religious and social festival. The Ahoms believed in maintaining harmony with the cosmic forces, as reflected in their worship of natural energy sources, represented by deities such as Khaokham (water power), I Ledin (earth power), and Fa-Nubdha (sky power). This intricate belief system formed the spiritual backbone of Me-Dam-Me-Phi.

Rituals and Practices Associrealm. ated with Me-Dam-Me-Phi

The rituals of Me-Dam-Me-Phi are deeply symbolic and meticulously detailed, reflecting the profound spiritual worldview



and sky.

2.

of the Ahoms. At the heart of the ceremony is the offering of prayers and tarpan (homage) to ancestors to ensure their blessings and goodwill. The Ahoms believed that misfortunes and illnesses in the family could be alleviated by performing these rituals, which were meant to appease the spirits of the deceased. The worship involved elabo-

rate offerings, including sacred rice (abai)



mixture of milk, yogurt, ghee, Dam-Me-Phi across Assam, though its scale honey, and sugar). The offerings and nature have undergone sigwere divided into two catenificant changes. gories-raw and ripe. Raw offerings included uncooked rice and

Dam-Me-Phi reflect both contieggs, while ripe offerings involved cooked meat and other nuity and adaptation. While the food items. Sacrificial animals. such as chickens, were offered in to serve as a platform for cultural a specific manner, emphasizing revival and identity preservation the connection between the natamong the Tai Ahoms. The fesural world and the spiritual cate younger generations about The rituals also highlighted a their rich heritage, ensuring that complex hierarchy of deities and the cultural fabric of Assam respirits, divided into three cate-

Dam-Chao-Phi: Gods

Sanatan become vocal in Mahakumbh,

elevating Yogi's political stature

associated with natural energy sources, such as the earth, water, Dam-Chang-Phi: Spirits of ancestors worshipped by

families from the sixth to the fourteenth generation. Hom-Dam: Spirits of 3. more recent ancestors, worshipped within four generations

of a family. The priests, or Ahom scholars, played a vital role in orchestrating these rituals. They ensured the strict adherence to prescribed practices and invoked the deities through specific mantras, such as the invocation of Fanubdha Langdon, the master of creation

and destruction. Cultural Evolution and Contemporary Relevance

Over time, with the fall of the Ahom Empire, the grandeur of Me-Dam-Me-Phi faded. However, the festival did not vanish entirely. A dedicated group of Tai Ahoms continued to observe the rituals in their homes and communities, preserving the tra-

dition through oral history and cultural memory. Today, Meis celebrated Modern celebrations of Me-

core rituals remain intact, the festival has expanded its scope tival is now an occasion to edumains vibrant and inclusive.

Despite the diminished promi-

nence compared to its royal past, Me-Dam-Me-Phi continues to hold immense social and cultural significance. It serves as a unifying force for the Tai Ahom community, fostering a sense of belonging and pride in their ancestry. Moreover, the festival underscores the universal theme of respecting one's roots and paying homage to those who came before us.

Legacy of Me-Dam-Me-Phi in Tai Ahom Civilization

The legacy of Me-Dam-Me-Phi is intricately tied to the broader cultural and spiritual framework of the Tai Ahoms. It represents their deep reverence for ancestors, their harmonious relationship with nature, and their commitment to preserving their unique identity. The festival has also transcended geographical boundaries, influencing the cultural practices of Tai communities across Southeast Asia, where similar traditions of ancestor worship can be observed.

Today, Me-Dam-Me-Phi stands as a testament to the resilience of the Tai Ahom culture in the face of historical and social changes. It is a reminder of the rich tapestry of Assam's history and the enduring contributions of the Ahoms to its cultural and spiritual legacy. As the festival continues to be celebrated, it reinforces the timeless message that cultural heritage is not just a relic of the past but a living, evolving tradition that binds communities and inspires future generations.

In preserving and promoting Me-Dam-Me-Phi, the Tai Ahom community reaffirms their commitment to their roots, ensuring that the spirit of their ancestors lives on in the heart of Assam. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)

Me-Dam-Me-Phi: The Sacred **Tai-Ahom Festival**

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

e-Dam-Me-Phi is one of the most significant spiritual and L cultural observances of the Tai-Ahom community, a festival deeply rooted in the tradition of ancestor worship. The Ahoms, who ruled Assam for nearly six centuries, had a unique belief system that revolved around their reverence for departed souls. Unlike many other cultures that follow reincarnation, the Tai-Ahoms believe that after death, their ancestors transform into divine beings, continuing to watch over and bless their descendants. Me-Dam-Me-Phi, celebrated annually on January 31st, is an occasion to pay tribute to these ancestors, seeking their guidance, protection, and blessings. The term "Me-Dam-Me-Phi" originates from the Tai-Ahom language, where 'Me' means 'offering,' 'Dam' refers to 'ancestors or the deceased.' and 'Phi' signifies 'divine spirits.' This ritual symbolizes the transformation of ancestors into guardian deities, reinforcing the belief that the spirits of the forefathers continue to exist in the afterlife. The Ahoms do not worship any fixed deity but instead honor their forebears through ceremonies conducted in both personal and public spaces. Traditionally, every Ahom household performs rituals for the deceased, known as "Dam-Phi," on various occasions, such as marriages, agricultural events, and New Year celebrations. This practice reflects the strong spiritual bond between the living and the departed. The belief that ancestors act as protectors of their lineage is deeply ingrained in Tai-Ahom philosophy. It is often said that if the ancestral deities guard the family, no misfortune can harm them. Even venomous creatures like snakes and tigers are believed to pose no threat to those blessed by their forefathers. On the day of Me-Dam-Me-Phi, special rituals are performed under the guidance of the priestly clans known as Mohan, Deodhai, and Bailung. The rituals take place near sacred altars, which are constructed for the purpose of making offerings to the ancestors. A unique feature of the ceremony is the construction of "Mehenga," a bamboo altar on which various offerings such as rice, meat, fish, eggs, fruits, and traditional sweets are placed. The offerings are made to the spirits of the ancestors, along with prayers for peace, prosperity, and well-being. The Tai-Ahoms are also nature worshippers, and their rituals extend beyond ancestor worship to include reverence for various natural elements. They believe that divine forces manifest in nature and govern different aspects of life. Langdon, the supreme deity, controls the sky and the weather, while Ai-Lengdin is the goddess of the earth. Khao-Kham is the deity of water, and Jan Chai Hung is worshipped for strength and power. Chit-Lam-Cham is



By: Ajay Kumar

gories:

ttar Pradesh is currently immersed in the spirit of Maha Kumbh. Everywhere, the atmosphere is the same. Some feel blessed after taking a holy dip, while others eagerly await their turn. People are Yogi and the BJP, were commaking their way to Praya- pelled to visit. However, Samvidhan" rally in Mhow, graj, the city of confluence, as per their convenience. The city is witnessing a massive gathering of saints and seers, along with an ever-increasing number of devotees. Those visiting Maha Kumbh do not miss the opportunity to earn the spiritual merit of visiting Baba Vishwanath in Varanasi and Ram Lalla in Ayodhya. By the final holy bath of Maha Kumbh, the number of devotees reaching Prayagraj will be twice the population of the state. This is a world record, which, if ever broken, will happen only in another Kumbh. The Yogi government and the administration are leaving no stone unturned to ensure the smooth execution of this grand event. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath remains on high alert for even the slightest developments in the Maha Kumbh area. His entire cabinet frequently visits Prayagraj to oversee the arrangements. The most notable aspect is that devotees are praising Chief Minister Yogi more than even Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, which carries significant political implications. From the perspective of Hindutva, Yogi has now become the most popular leader in the BJP, even surpassing Prime Minis-

lowers of Sanatan Dharma but also among people worldwide who are drawn to Prayagraj to experience this grand event and learn more about Sanatan traditions. Significantly, even leaders like Akhilesh Yadav, who are staunch political opponents of

ment regarding the arrangements at Maha Kumbh, the Congress went a step further and questioned the very significance of the event. While around 9.5 million devotees take a dip daily in Prayagraj, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, speaking at the "Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai

Kumbh is a model of faith, modernity, and cleanliness.

Within the BJP, the grand success of Maha Kumbh has further solidified Yogi Adityanath's stature as the party's most prominent Hindutva face. Any internal opposition to him within the party has significantly subsided. Compared to his posi-

regarded as the protector of the seven Tai-Kum (Moon). Sacred verses from directions, while the sun and moon, Mut-Kum and Tai-Kum, are also revered. Through Me-Dam-Me-Phi, prayers are offered to these natural deities, seeking their blessings for a prosperous life.

A special flag bearing the emblem "Byaw Seng Bong Fra" is hoisted during the festival. This symbol, which resembles a flying lion, represents the Tai-Ahom identity and embodies the qualities of five powerful animals-the lion for majesty, the horse for speed, the bird for protection, the fish for adaptability, and the serpent for movement on land and water. The colors on the flag also carry deep significance, with yellow symbolizing sacrifice, red representing vitality, green denoting harmony, black standing for determination, and white signifying purity. Together, these colors embody the balance of cosmic forces that guide life.

The historical roots of Me-Dam-Me-Phi can be traced back to the time of Chao-Lung Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom, who introduced the practice in Assam. Over time, it became a widely observed ritual, particularly in Charaideo, the first capital of the Ahom dynasty. Even today, the festival is most prominently celebrated in Upper Assam, especially in districts such as Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Dhemaji, and Lakhimpur, where a significant Tai-Ahom population resides.

The main ceremony involves the construction of an octagonal altar called "Ho-Phi," where eight primary deities are worshipped. These include Langdon, the supreme sky god; Ai-Lengdin, the goddess of the earth; Khao-Kham, the deity of water; Jan Chai Hung, the god of strength; Chit-Lam-Cham, the protector of directions; Lankuri, the overseeing power; and the celestial deities Mut-Kum (Sun) and

ancient texts such as "Peng-Kaka" are recited, and offerings of betel nuts, areca leaves, incense, lamps, and flowers are made. Two unhatched chicks are also placed as a symbolic gesture, representing new life and continuity.

The observance of Me-Dam-Me-Phi is not merely a ritual but a reaffirmation of the Tai-Ahom cultural heritage. It strengthens the community's connection with its ancestors and reinforces the values of gratitude, respect, and devotion. In the modern era, where scientific progress and globalization often lead to the erosion of traditional customs, Me-Dam-Me-Phi serves as a reminder of the rich spiritual legacy of the Tai-Ahoms. Younger generations continue to participate in the festival. ensuring that the traditions and values of their forefathers are preserved.

The celebration of Me-Dam-Me-Phi has also gained official recognition, with the Assam government declaring it a state holiday. Large-scale events are organized at the state level, where people from all walks of life gather to witness the rituals, listen to religious discourses, and partake in cultural programs. This collective observance not only strengthens community bonds but also fosters awareness about the historical and spiritual significance of the festival.

Despite the passage of time, Me-Dam-Me-Phi remains an essential part of Tai-Ahom identity. It is more than a festival; it is a sacred expression of love and reverence for those who came before. As long as the Ahoms continue to honor their ancestors, the legacy of Me-Dam-Me-Phi will endure, serving as a beacon of faith, unity, and cultural pride for generations to come. (The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK who reached at can be

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ter Modi Despite unfortunate incidents such as a fire in the Maha Kumbh area and a stampede on the biggest bathing day, Mouni Amavasya, which claimed the lives of around ten devotees, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were visibly distressed. However, the situation was swiftly brought under control, and devotees, including saints, continued their holy baths without disruption.

The allure of Maha Kumbh and the desire to take a dip in the sacred confluence is strong not only among fol-

Akhilesh did not miss the opportunity to make political statements. He recalled that when the Samajwadi Party was in power, they successfully organized the Kumbh

Madhya Pradesh 925 kilometers away questioned whether bathing in the Ganga eradicates poverty or provides food to the hungry. Intellectuals argue that Congress nei-

tion in 2017 when Modi and Shah handpicked him for the Chief Minister's post Yogi has now established himself as an unchallenged leader in Uttar Pradesh. Keshav Prasad



despite limited resources, citing studies and even Harvard University's acknowledgment of it. He also praised Azam Khan, the then Urban Development Minister, for his role in making the 2013 Kumbh a memorable event. Responding to Akhilesh's

visit, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya remarked that Akhilesh had finally come

> that he would refrain from making statements that hurt religious sentiments. Maurya emphasized that the Maha Kumbh symbolizes unity in diversity and advised those still mentally opposed to it, including leaders from the Samajwadi Party and Congress, to cleanse their minds by taking a dip. Meanwhile, Cabinet Minister Om Prakash Rajbhar pointed out the irony of leaders who once criticized the Kumbh now participating

the Constitution's values. While Akhilesh took a political dig at the Yogi govern-Yogi emphasized that Maha

ther understands Hindu traditions nor acknowledges the employment opportunities generated by Maha Kumbh. There is a growing concern among non-BJP leaders that Maha Kumbh might disrupt their long-standing strategy of dividing Hindus for political gains.

At present, Prayagraj is witnessing an overwhelming atmosphere of Hindutva, tranaround and expressed hope scending caste divisions. Addressing Kharge's remarks, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath provided a fitting response, reiterating that a visiting devotee contributes significantly to the economy. Every visitor utilizes trains, buses, taxis, or planes, stays in hotels, tents, or guest houses, dines at restaurants. and shops in the city. On average, each visitor spends around ₹5,000. With an estimated 400 million devotees expected to visit Maha Kumbh, it is projected to conin it, calling it a testament to tribute ₹2 lakh crore to the state and national economy.

Maurya, once considered a strong contender for the Chief Ministerial post before the 2017 assembly elections, now fully acknowledges Yogi's leadership and refrains from any opposition. It is highly likely that the BJP will contest the 2027 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections under Yogi's leadership, as he remains the RSS's top choice. Some even speculate that Yogi could be projected as the prime ministerial candidate for the 2029 general elections. This is the political capital Yogi has amassed.

Several prominent Union Ministers, including Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah, have already taken a dip in the Maha Kumbh and praised the event. President Droupadi Murmu is scheduled to visit on February 10, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to arrive on February 5. (The author is a senior journalist from Uttar Pradesh who can be reached at 9335566111)

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Seven mega challenges for Budget 2025

By: Gautam Chikermane

storm of statistics will hit us around 11 am on 1 February 2025, as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman lays Budget 2025 in Parliament, her eighth and the NDA government's 14th(with two interim budgets in 2019 and 2024, each). Her speech will be an indicator, a beginning of several data adventures that the 14 documents she will lay on the table of the House will carry. How does one read into this Episode 2 of Season 3 being crafted by the third finance ministerafter Arun Jaitley and Piyush Goyalthat the third-term government presents? Budgets—1947 to 2024

Although every Union budget carries similar data, the underlying conditions change every year. Finance Minister R.K. Shanmukham Chetty's Budget 1947 celebrated freedom. Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Indira Gandhi's Budget 1969 extended the wealth tax to agriculture. In 1973, Finance Minister Y.B. Chavan's Budget proposed a personal income tax rate on income more than INR 100,000 to 85 percent, with a 40 percent surcharge taking the total marginal tax to an absurd 119 percent. Finance Minister Manmohan Singh's Budget 1991 fanned the opening up of the economy by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Finance Minister P. Chidambaram's Budget 1997 (recorded as a "dream budget") consolidated the three-slab personal income tax rates to an elegant 10, 20 and 30 percent structure. More recently, Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget 2023 tripled capital investment in four years and laid the foundations for long-term growth.

Challenges for Sitharaman

Budget $\overline{2025}$ comes at a time when the Indian economy faces seven big challenges • Slowdown: First, a slowdown in real

GDP (gross domestic product) to 5.4 percent for the second quarter of 2024-25, from 8.1 percent in the previous year's quarter. While this may seem like a minor dip, however, when examined closely, there is a downward trend behind it. Growth has fallen from more than 8.6 percent four quarters ago to the current 5.4 percent. Worse, manufacturing has slowed down to dangerous levels: at 2.2 percent which is way below the 7 percent in the previous quarter and 14.3 percent in the second quarter of 2023-24. In other words, Budget 2025 will have to initiate growth, particularly in manufacturing. If there is no growth visible, the Budget will not be worth the digital space it will occupy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projections of a 5 percent growth rate in 2025, the highest in the world, 2 percentage points higher than China's, and way ahead of the United States (US), the European Union (EU), and West Asia, maybe heartening but inadequate. Budget 2025 will have to articulate a clear path to greater growth. Business unusual: Second, the growth of nominal GDP in the first half of 2024-25, at 8.9 percent, presents a mixed bag. The rate needed to achieve Viksit Bharat by 2047, or a US\$30 trillion GDP, is 9.6 percent, so it lags a bit. That said, it also shows that inflation is under control. The job of increasing the growth rate, without making it inflationary will be key. Of course, growth rates in democracies carry a natural volatility. India can live with a couple of quarters of low growth, provided the long-term structural reforms, such as those around compliances, are in place.

"Business as usual" will not work anymore. • Deficits: Third, as a result of the growth slowdown. Sitharaman must ensure that the fiscal deficit, which has been consistently falling from its high of

9.2 percent in 2020-21 to a budgeted 4.9



percent in 2024-25, continues to reduce. Earlier, growth would have taken care of the deficit as the denominator (GDP) expanded to accommodate expenditure excesses. The size of budgets under the Modi government has grown by 2.8 times over the past decade, a rise of 11.1 percent per annum-that's faster than Sensex's 9.9 percent. Growth enabled this rise in public expenditure. Now that growth is slowing down, however, controlling expenditure will take some doing. It is easy to increase costs in good times and impossible to cut them in bad. A recent example of wasteful expenditure is the 17 January 2025 INR11,440 crore revival plan for Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), a defaulting public sector enterprise with a negative net worth of INR 4,538 crore and one that is unable to get loans from any bank. Questions: why is the government unable to undertake a strategic sale, as it did with Air India in January 2022, and

follow through its 1 February 2021 pol-

icy of strategic disinvestment? Where is

this government's obsession with doing business headed, and when will it end? Why is the government using good money to finance failed enterprises? And RINL is merely one of several inefficiencies. The processes by which financial efficiencies have been multiplied through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), for instance, need to be reversed for such failing public sector enterprises, schools without teachers, hospitals without doctors, and governance without accountability. How Sitharaman negotiates this equation between enabling growth and decreasing expenditure, including through strategic sales, will be watched carefully • Political economy: Fourth, in an

economy that has become a race to the bottom on the freebies front, where legally-binding and therefore mandatory expenditures rise, financial space for nationally crucial expenses such as those on defence and strategic areas become discretionary and get compromised. At a time when India is increasingly becoming and is seen to be one of the guardians of the Indian Ocean Region, this does not bode well from the economic statecraft side. From free electricity and water to free bus rides, and cash for women and the unemployed, promises are easy to make. However, there is a fiscal limit to delivering them. Good politics and good economics are increasingly becoming mutually exclusive. Balancing them at the Union level will be crucial for Budget 2025. The states can follow. Tormented taxpayers: Fifth, on the tax justice side, those already being taxed get further squeezed, which creates a constituency of overburdened middle-class taxpayers with no recourse-they are not rich enough to live a dignified life, not poor enough to get doles, not corrupt enough to evade. Their political voice is insignificant, and so they continue to be the load-bearers of politics with more and more taxes such as the tax collected at source. This injustice will continue, as the discussion on expanding the tax base has been assassinated by politics. Map this class's helplessness and anger against the taxes on the one side, failed public services on the other, unrelenting gouging by new kinds of taxes on the third, and the confidence in the state by those who bear the burden of the state follows the trend of GDP growth-downward.

· No wealth redistribution without wealth creation: Finally, Budget 2025alongside other line ministries and departments-will need to decide how long wealth redistribution will continue without wealth creation. The current political climate points to a return to the repressive serial regimes of 1947 to 1990 that looked at wealth creators as parasites and harassed them with taxes and rent-seeking. Despite digitalisation and demonetisation, corruption is back. The India Business Corruption Survey 2024 points out that in the past 12 months, 66 percent of businesses surveyed said they had to pay a bribe, 83 percent of which was paid in cash, with 54 percent being forced to do so. The pathway to end the underlying edifice of corruption-excessive and colonial era compliances-has been highlighted in an Observer Research Foundation monograph titled "Jailed for Doing Business", as have several ideas to sever this umbilical cord between the state and the corrupt. Budget 2025 should take note and nudge relevant ministries to take these forward.

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Bribes go to overpaid government officials, whose salaries are expected to jump further with the announcement of the Eighth Pay Commission, even as corruption continues unabated, and efficiencies are sacrificed at the altar of statism. At some point, this will negatively impact Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows, as 83 percent of those surveyed by EY-FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry) suggests. It will also result in a further increase in millionaires migrating out of India. Forget millionaires, average people are losing confidence-between 2021 and 2023, 605,209 Indians gave up their Indian citizenship and headed to 135 countries including Albania, Belarus, Colombia, Nigeria, and Yemen, apart from the usual destinations in the US and Eu-

It is time for a new deal between wealth creators and taxpayers on the one side and wealth redistributors and rent extractors on the other. Amid these challenges that will be accentuated by the entry of US President Donald J. Trump, who is planning to make doing business in the US easier, and whose impact on the world including India will be adverse, Budget 2025 must plant the seeds of that deal and provide leadership for related ministries to follow. (Courtesy: ORF)

Trump's Immigration Policies and India's response Trump may succeed where the Myanmar military couldn't – in silencing a defiant media house <u>By: Nandita Haksar</u> Mizzima, one of the media houses, has a nalists that it will not be able to pay them. It

By: Satyabrat Borah

mmigration has long been a critical aspect of India-U.S. relations, shaping the economic, social, and political dimensions of both nations. The issue has gained renewed significance under the leadership of U.S. President Donald Trump, whose second term has prioritized immigration policies as a cornerstone of his administration. Recent discussions between U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar highlight the complexities and opportunities surrounding this subject, particularly in the context of irregular migration, skilled labor mobility, and the broader bilateral relationship.

The United States has historically been a favored destination



The H-1B visa program, which allows U.S. employers to hire foreign workers in specialized fields, has been a cornerstone of India-U.S. economic relations. Indian IT professionals account for a significant proportion of H-1B visa holders, underscoring the program's role in facilitating the exchange of talent and expertise between the two countries. However, Trump's administration has imlogue and pragmatic solutions. plemented several reforms For the U.S., engaging with aimed at tightening the eligibil-India on immigration issues aligns with its broader strategic ity criteria for H-1B visas, citing interests in the Indo-Pacific reconcerns over wage disparities and job displacement for Amergion, where India plays a pivotal role as a democratic partner and ican workers. These changes have sparked apprehension economic powerhouse. For among Indian professionals and India, addressing immigration companies, who view the proconcerns is integral to safegram as a vital channel for innoguarding the interests of its divation and economic growth. aspora and strengthening its The discussions on immigraglobal image as a responsible tion also highlight the broader and proactive nation. implications for India-U.S. re-Looking ahead, the success of India-U.S. discussions on immilations. The movement of gration will depend on the abilskilled professionals is not merely an economic issue but ity of both nations to balance also a strategic one, reflecting their domestic priorities with the the interdependence of the two imperatives of bilateral and nations in sectors such as techglobal cooperation. This renology, healthcare, and acadequires a holistic approach that mia. Indian professionals have integrates economic, social, and played a pivotal role in driving strategic dimensions of migrainnovation in the U.S., contion, while also respecting the tributing to advancements in rights and dignity of migrants. fields ranging from artificial For India, this means continuintelligence to biotechnology. ing to advocate for the contri-Recognizing this, India has adbutions of its skilled professionals and diaspora, vocated for a more balanced and nuanced approach to immiwhile also addressing the chalgration policies that acknowllenges of irregular migration edges the mutual benefits of through effective policies and partnerships. For the U.S., it skilled labor mobility. means recognizing the value of Beyond skilled migration, the immigration as a driver of inbroader issue of people-to-people ties between India and the novation and economic growth, and crafting policies U.S. is a significant factor in shaping bilateral relations. The that reflect its tradition as a na-Indian-American community, tion of immigrants. The discussions on immigrawhich numbers over 4 million, serves as a bridge between the tion between India and the two nations, fostering cultural, United States represent a microcosm of the broader dynamics economic, and political connecshaping their bilateral relationtions. Indian-Americans have excelled in various fields, inship. The issue is emblematic of the complexities and opportunicluding business, politics, and entertainment, and their contrities inherent in a partnership butions have enhanced the that spans diverse domains, U.S.'s multicultural fabric. from trade and defense to edu-Strengthening these ties requires cation and culture. As India and the U.S. navigate the challenges policies that support family reof immigration under Trump's unification, student exchanges, and community engagement, leadership, they have an opporalongside measures to address tunity to demonstrate the strength of their relationship and irregular migration. The recent discussions on imtheir shared commitment to admigration also underscore the dressing global challenges. By fostering dialogue, promoting importance of cooperation in addressing global migration mutual respect, and leveraging challenges. Immigration is not their unique strengths, the two an issue confined to bilateral renations can turn immigration lations; it is a global phenomefrom a point of contention into non influenced by factors such a catalyst for deeper cooperation as economic disparities, politiand shared progress.

cal instability, and environmental change. As two major democracies, India and the U.S. have a shared responsibility to contribute to global solutions for managing migration in a humane and sustainable manner. This includes addressing the root causes of irregular migration, such as poverty and lack of opportunities, and fostering international collaboration on refugee resettlement, border

management, and migration governance. While immigration has been a point of contention in India-U.S. relations, it also presents opportunities for enhancing cooperation and mutual understanding. The discussions between Secretary Rubio and Foreign Minister Jaishankar reflect a recognition of the need for constructive diafavourite debate topic in Indian schools

used to be "the pen is mightier than the sword". Well, the might of the USbacked Israeli devastation of Gaza was streamed live on television and phone screens for months – the first time a genocide unfolded in front of our eyes, hour by hour, with horrifying, haunting images. Then, on January 20, US President Donald

Trump signed a record number of executive orders on his first day in office. With a signature, Trump crushed the hopes of millions of people, took away their only means of survival and condemned them to slow, painful deaths. But this will be invisible, not live-streamed.

We will not see how many HIV/AIDS patients will be deprived of life-saving medicines, how many refugees will be denied resettlement and will live without any hope for a future and how many migrants will lose their jobs. Trump's executive orders will also affect institutions, organisations and could deprive

presence across social media as well as radio stations and a TV channel. Despite the ban, Mizzima's journalists and its TV channel did not stop broadcasting and the organisation continues to report from hideouts inside the country as well as from jungles on the Thai-Myanmar border, where the media house had a temporary headquarters. The military regime has tried to bomb Mizzima out of existence and has done everything to shut it down.

The junta could not silence Mizzima but Trump may well have succeeded because as of now, one of his executive orders has stopped all US foreign aid. Mizzima got a letter from Internews, the donor agency that has supported its functioning, informing the organisation that all funding will stop immediately. Internews is part of USAID and dedicated to supporting independent media. Mizzima gets its funds under the project "investing in independent media". The immediate impact of the letter is that 86

Burmese employees of Mizzima will have no iobs. Despite the ban by the junta, the threat of arrest, torture and indefinite detention, Mizzima's journalists continued to work from hideouts in the country and outside, living in exile - most of them illegally. The salary from Mizzima was their only means of survival. The journalists risk their lives every day - in fact, several times a day – to send out reports on one has to suspend its radio services, its TV broadcast and inform satellite companies that it can no longer pay for their services.

Beyond depriving an entire country of a source of independent news, if Mizzima is unable to continue its work, the devastating effects of the conflict will become invisible, allowing the junta to continue its murderous attacks on its own people.

The conflict has already displaced 3.5 million people within Myanmar and forced more than a million others to take refuge in neighbouring Thailand and India. In India, Burmese refugees are at the heart of a contentious row fuelling the months-long violence in Manipur. Mizzima has not only exposed the brutalities

being committed by the junta but also played a crucial yet quiet role in getting humanitarian assistance for the displaced. It has played an important role in furthering Indo-Burmese ties for decades.

The media organisation regularly broadcast Hindi films with Burmese subtitles and created content to promote Indo-Burmese relations. In 2018, Mizzima had signed an agreement with India's public broadcaster Prasar Bharti for content sharing. On February 1, the fourth anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar, Mizzima will stop its media. Mizzima survived being bombed and a civil war but will it be able to survive the withdrawal of funds by the US, the self-professed leader of the free world whose Constitution upholds the right to free of speech as the most important of all? How can the devastating effects of Trump's xecutive orders be countered? Americans are fighting against these orders but we in India can also find ways. In this case, why can't India and Indians show solidarity to organisations like Mizzima? A donation from the Indian film industry or the business community would win goodwill and build a bridge instead



for Indian immigrants, who constitute one of the fastest-growing immigrant communities in the country. Indian professionals, particularly in the fields of technology, healthcare, and academia, have made substantial contributions to the U.S. economy and society. However, the issue of irregular migration has emerged as a contentious point in recent years, with an estimated 18,000 Indian nationals residing illegally in the U.S. This figure represents a small fraction of the total undocumented population but has nonetheless drawn attention due to the broader political and legal implications of immigration enforcement under Trump's administration.

The Trump administration's approach to immigration is rooted in its "America First" policy, which emphasizes border security, strict enforcement of immigration laws, and prioritization of American workers. This stance has led to executive orders targeting illegal immigration and heightened scrutiny of visa programs, including those widely used by Indian professionals, such as the H-1B visa. The recent India-U.S. discussions on immigration reflect a shared commitment to addressing irregular migration while also recognizing the value of skilled professional movement between the two nations.

For India, the issue of irregular migration poses challenges on multiple fronts. Repatriating undocumented nationals requires a coordinated effort between Indian and U.S. authorities, including verification of identities, issuance of travel documents, and logistical arrangements. India has expressed its willingness to collaborate with the U.S. in identifying and repatriating its nationals, signaling a proactive approach to resolving the issue. At the same time, India has emphasized the importance of distinguishing between irregular migrants and skilled professionals, whose contributions to the U.S. economy are undeniable.

millions of people access to independent media Take the case of Myanmar, considered one

of the least free countries in the world. The American nonprofit Freedom House gives Myanmar a score of nine out of 100 on the Global Freedom Index and categorises it as "not free". This year, I hope Freedom House will measure the impact of Trump's executive orders on freedom of expression.

Myanmar is ruled by one of the most brutal regimes in the world. It was under military rule for decades but then in 2010, it began transitioning to democracy under the leadership of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy. In 2020, the National League for Democracy won the elections by an overwhelming majority but the military rulers did not hand over power. Instead, in 2021, following a coup, the military seized power and banned all independent media.

After the coup, Mizzima worked out of jungles on the Thai-Myanmar border where it trained journalists. The organisation survived repeated aerial bombings and attacks, and the monsoons in the Burmese jungles. It managed to pay its journalists and staff and defy the junta's ban because of the support of donors in the US and Europe who support the freedom of speech and independent media.

of the most brutal and violent conflicts in the

world today.

Now, on the fourth anniversary of the military coup, Mizzima has had to inform its jour- of a wall of distrust. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

It is now a two-tier world of billionaires and those who are not: Oxfam report

By: Rajat Ghai

oday's world is a two-tier one: One of billionaires and the others who are not. It is a highly unequal world, with the rich getting richer and the poor becoming poorer, according to a new report by Oxfam.

"A Two Tier World. It's never been a better time to be a billionaire. Their wealth has skyrocketed to unprecedented levels, while people living in poverty all over the world continue to face multiple crises," Takers not makers: The unjust poverty and unearned wealth of colonialism noted.

The profound inequality between the richest and the rest of society, both between rich nations and the Global South and within countries in the Global South, is the legacy of historical colonialism, the report added. In 1820, the income of the global richest 10 per cent was 18 times higher than the poorest 50 per cent. Cut to 2020 and it was 38 times higher.

This inequity can be seen in various measures of progress and wellbeing. For instance, the average life expectancy of Africans is still more than 15 years shorter than that of Europeans.

Meanwhile, all countries that the World Bank defines as having high inequality except one are in the Global South. The richest one per cent in Africa, Asia and the Middle East receive 20 per cent of all income, almost twice the share of the richest 1 per cent in Europe.

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Today's education system also reflects this inequality. "In 2017, 39 per cent of heads of state globally were educated in universities in the UK, USA or France. Independence did not equate to equality in many newly independent countries. Often colonial rulers were simply exchanged for national elites who tended to maintain existing unequal economic and political systems that enriched them. For many countries, the colonial legacy, particularly of arbitrary borders and weak states, has in turn fuelled conflict, war and persistent fragility," the report noted.

Who wants to be a billionaire? Perhaps the biggest symbol of our unequal

world is the huge number of billionaires. In 2024, total billionaire wealth increased by US\$2 trillion, with 204 new billionaires created. This, says the report, is an average

of almost four new billionaires per week. There is more. Total billionaire wealth grew three times faster in 2024 than in 2023. Each billionaire saw their fortunes grow by US\$2million a day on average. The richest 10 billionaires' fortunes grew by US\$100

million a day on average. Oxfam noted that it had forecast a trillion-

aire within a decade last year. "If current trends continue, there will now be five trillionaires within a decade," the anlaysis said. And most of this wealth comes from in-

heritance rather than entrepreneurship. "In 2023, more billionaires were created through inheritance than entrepreneurialism for the first time," said the report.

Even more shockingly, 60 per cent of billionaire wealth comes from either inheritance, cronyism and corruption or monopoly power.

The long shadow of colonialism continues to loom over our unequal world. "Of the US\$64.82 trillion extracted from India by the UK over a century of colonialism, US\$33.8 trillion went to the richest 10%; this would be enough to carpet London in £50 notes almost four times over," noted the document.

"In 2023, the richest 1% in the Global North were paid US\$263 billion by the Global South through the financial systemover over US\$30 million an hour," it added.

Meanwhile, according to the World Bank, the number of people living in poverty has barely changed since 1990.

Key recommendations

2025 marks 70 years since the Bandung Conference, where Global South countries sought to create a New International Economic Order.

To contribute to meaningful systemic change, governments must radically reduce inequality — setting global and national goals to do so, it recommended.

Governments must also end systems of modern-day colonialism. They must tax the richest to end extreme wealth. South-South cooperation and solidarity must be promoted.

Ongoing formal colonialism in all forms must be ended. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

World

Bill introduced in US Senate to Hamas frees 8 more hostages as Gaza truce holds Israel is set to release 110 prisoners restrict birthright citizenship

KHAN YOUNIS (GAZA STRIP), Jan 30: Hamas-led militants freed eight hostages on Thursday in the latest release since a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip took hold earlier this month. Israel was expected to release another 110 Palestinian prisoners.

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The release was delayed by a chaotic scene in which a crowd of Palestinians surrounded and jeered at hostages as they were turned over to the Red Cross.

The truce is aimed at winding down the deadliest and most destructive war ever fought between Israel and Hamas, whose Oct. 7, 2023, attack into Israel sparked the fighting. It has held despite a dispute earlier this week over the sequence in which the hostages were released.

The first hostage, female Israeli soldier Agam Berger, was released in northern Gaza. Hours later, a chaotic scene unfolded as thousands of people pressed around a handover site in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, in front of the destroyed home of slain Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar.

Footage showed Arbel Yehoud, a 29-year-old hostage, looking stunned as she was led through the crowd by militants toward waiting Red Cross vehicles.

Hundreds of militants from Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group arrived with a convoy

NEW YORK, Jan 30: Former US

Sen. Bob Menendez was sentenced

Wednesday to 11 years in prison

for accepting bribes of gold and

cash and acting as an agent of

Egypt — crimes his lawyer said

he's been mocked for as "Gold Bar

after Menendez tearfully addressed

the court, saying he'd lost every-

thing he cared about, except his

family. The Democrat resigned last

year after becoming one of only a

handful of US senators ever con-

you stood at the apex of our polit-

ical system," US District Judge

Sidney H. Stein told Menendez in

a packed Manhattan courtroom.

"Somewhere along the way, and I

don't know when it was, you lost

your way and working for the pub-

lic good became working for your

The ex-senator was convicted of

selling his once-considerable clout

for bribes worth a fortune. FBI

agents who searched his house

found USD 480,000, some of it

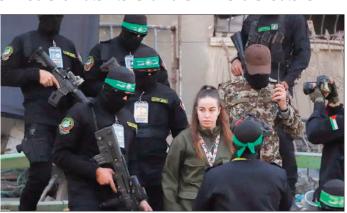
"You were successful, powerful,

victed while in office.

The judge delivered the sentence

Bob.'

good."



in a show of force, and thousands of people gathered to watch, some from the tilted rooftops of bombed-out buildings. Many in the crowd shouted and surrounded Yehoud as masked militants pushed people away and escorted her through.

Red Cross vehicles were then delayed as they tried to drive away. The Israeli army later announced the Red Cross had confirmed it had the freed hostages.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the "shockscene" and called on ing" international mediators to prevent similar events in the future.

Hamas had earlier handed Berger, 20, to the Red Cross after parading her in front of a crowd in the heavily destroyed urban refugee camp of Jabaliya in north-

Menendez, who beat a prosecu-

New Jersey Guv Phil Murphy, a

Democrat, said that despite

tencing is a reminder that nobody

should be above the law, "no mat-

from a sheet of paper.

to prison June 6.

hold."

ern Gaza. The Israeli government later release footage of Berger hugging and crying with her parents. Berger was among five young, female soldiers abducted in the

Oct. 7 attack. The other four were released on Saturday. People cheered, clapped and whistled at a square in Tel Aviv where supporters of the hostages watched Berger's handover on big screens next to a large clock that's counted the days the hostages have been in captivity. Some held signs saying: "Agam we're waiting for you at home.

The other two Israelis released Thursday are Yehoud and Gadi Moses, an 80-year-old man. Five Thai nationals were freed, but were not been officially identified. A number of foreign workers

were taken captive along with

dozens of Israeli civilians and solbeen. diers during Hamas' attack. Twenty-three Thais were among more than 100 hostages released during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023. Israel says eight Thais remain in captivity, two of whom are believed to be dead. Of the people set to be released

from prisons in Israel, 30 are serving life sentences after being convicted of deadly attacks against Israelis.

Zakaria Zubeidi, a prominent former militant leader and theater director who took part in a dramatic jailbreak in 2021 before being rearrested days later, is also among those set to be released.

Israel said Yehoud was supposed to have been freed Saturday and delayed the opening of crossings to northern Gaza when she was not.

The United States, Egypt and Qatar, which brokered the ceasefire after a year of tough negotiations, resolved the dispute with an agreement that Yehoud would be released Thursday. Another three hostages, all men, are set to be freed Saturday along with dozens more Palestinian prisoners.

On Monday, Israel began allowing Palestinians to return to northern Gaza, the most heavily destroyed part of the territory, and hundreds of thousands streamed back. Many found only mounds of rubble where their homes had

In the first phase of the ceasefire, Hamas is set to release a total of 33 Israeli hostages, including women, children, older adults and sick or wounded men, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israel says Hamas has confirmed that eight of the hostages to be released in this phase are dead. Palestinians have cheered the release of the prisoners, who they widely see as heroes who have sacrificed for the cause of ending Israel's decades-long occupation of lands they want for a future state.

Israeli forces have meanwhile pulled back from most of Gaza, allowing hundreds of thousands of people to return to what remains of their homes and humanitarian groups to surge assistance.

The deal calls for Israel and Hamas to negotiate a second phase in which Hamas would release the remaining hostages and the ceasefire would continue indefinitely. The war could resume in early March if an agreement is not reached.

Israel says it is still committed to destroying Hamas, even after the militant group reasserted its rule over Gaza within hours of the truce. A key far-right partner in Prime Minister Netanyahu's coalition is already calling for the war to resume after the ceasefire's first phase. (AP)

Philippine official told The Associ-

WASHINGTON, Jan 30: A group of Republican Senators has introduced a bill in the US Senate to restrict birthright citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants and non-immigrants on temporary

> visas According to Senators Lindsev Graham, Ted Cruz and Katie Britt, who introduced the bill, the exploitation of birthright citizenship is a major pull factor for illegal immigration and a weakness for national security.

The US is one of only 33 countries in the world with no restrictions on birthright citizenship, they said

The legislative move comes after an executive order on the matter, signed by President Donald Trump on the first day of his presidency, has been blocked by a federal judge in Washington state.

The Center for Immigration Studies estimates that in 2023, there were 2,25,000 to 2,50,000 births to illegal immigrants, amounting to close to seven per

The US Army's mobile Typhon cent of births in the US. missile system, which consists of a It is long overdue for the United States to change its policy on birthright citizenship because it is being abused in so many ways, said Graham.

"One example is birth tourism, where wealthy individuals from Philippine defense officials, a senior China and other nations come to the United States simply to have a child who will be an American cit-The Philippine official, who spoke izen. When you look at the mag-

nets that draw people to America, birthright citizenship is one of the largest," he said. "I also appreciate President

Trump's executive order to address birthright citizenship. It is time for the United States to align itself with the rest of the world and re- armed forces. (PTI)

strict this practice once and for all." Graham said

> "The promise of American citizenship should not incentivise illegal migration, but that's exactly what has happened for far too long," said Britt

It's time to fix this, she said. "Senator Lindsey Graham's and my Birthright Citizenship Act would codify President Trump's commonsense stance and end the abuse of birthright citizenship that I do not believe is consistent with the original meaning of the 14th Amendment's Citizenship Clause," she added.

"This will protect our nation's sovereignty, disincentivise illegal migration, and ensure America's citizenship practices are stronger and better aligned with peer countries around the globe," Britt said.

The three Senators said in September 2024, two individuals from California were found guilty in a "birth tourism" scheme.

Predominantly Chinese clients paid the operators of a "maternity hotel" tens of thousands of dollars to come to the US to give birth. Clients were coached on how to lie during the admissions process.

A 2022 Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee report found a birthing company catering to the wives of Russian oligarchs, celebrities, athletes and public figures.

The Birthright Citizenship Act of 2025 specifies who can receive citizenship by virtue of their birth in the United States, including children born to at least one parent who is either a citizen or national of the US, a lawful permanent resident of the US, or an alien performing active service in the

Menendez's accomplishments, "he Asked by reporters about China's said. Chinese officials did not immeguard and navy forces have been inwill be remembered for putting his criticism of the missile system, Mardiately comment on the Philippine volved in increasingly tense faceoffs own interests and financial gain cos said he did not understand the in the South China Sea. (AP) leader's remarks. ahead of the public interest.' Menendez's successor, Democratic Pakistan cannot risk exiting IMF programme with Merkel criticises German front-US Sen. Andy Kim, said the sen-

USD 100 billion external financing needs: Minister ter your title or the power you ISLAMABAD, Jan 30: A minister said Pakistan cannot afford the risk of exiting Two of the men convicted of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bribing Menendez also got subprogramme with USD 100 billion in exstantial prison terms Wednesday. ternal financing requirements in the The judge sentenced real estate developer Fred Daibes to seven years short to medium term. in prison. Wael Hana, an entrepre-

"We have a narrow path from short to edium term due to USD 100 billion for the current account deficit.

agriculture sector while traders have also remained largely untouched.

The USD 100 billion external debt repayments from the fiscal year 2024-25 to 2026-27 exclude payments on liabilities recorded on the central bank's balance sheet and financing requirements

The country's investment ratio in the last fiscal year dropped to a half-century low despite the efforts of the government and Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), which is a military-led body, to attract foreign direct investment.

Malik admitted that Pakistan lags be-

runner Merz over migration vote BERLIN, Jan 30: Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Thursday issued rare public criticism of her successor as the country's centre-right leader, the front-runner in Germany's election next month, for putting to parliament proposals for tough new migration rules that only passed with the help of a far-right party.

Germany's centre-left governing parties have cast doubt on whether conservative leader Friedrich Merz can still be trusted not to bring the far-right Alternative for Germany,

Philippine President offers deal to China: Stop Former US Sen Bob Menendez gets sea aggression and I'll return missiles to US 11 years in prison for taking bribes

MANILA, Jan 30: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr offered on Friday to remove a US missile system

South China Sea. The US Army installed the Typhon mid-range missile system in the ident Trump cleans up the cesspool northern Philippines in April last year and restores the integrity to the to support what the longtime treaty alsystem," Menendez said, reading lies described as training for joint combat readiness. China has repeat-The judge ordered him to report

remove the missile system, saying it was "inciting geopolitical confrontation and an arms race."

we have.

edly demanded that the Philippines

Chinese position because the Philippines does not comment on China's missile systems which "are a thou-

Stop claiming our territory, stop harassing our fishermen and let them have a living, stop ramming our boats, stop water cannoning our people, stop firing lasers at us and stop your aggressive and coercive behaviour, and we'll return the typhoon missiles," Marcos told reporters in central Cebu

"Let them stop everything they're doing and I'll return all of those," he

on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to discuss the sensitive issue in public, said the U.S. missile system is now nearer an area where Chinese and Philippine coast

ated Press.

tion in another corruption case a launcher and at least 16 Standard Misdecade ago, aligned himself with from the Philippines if China halts sand times more powerful than what sile-6 and Tomahawk Land Attack President Donald Trump's recent what he called its "aggressive and co-Missiles, was repositioned about two criticisms of the judicial system, ercive behaviour" in the disputed "Let's make a deal with China: weeks ago from the northern Philipparticularly in New York City. pines to a strategic area nearer the "This process is political and it's capital, Manila, in consultation with corrupted to the core. I hope Pres-

province.

stuffed inside boots and pockets of clothing, and gold bars worth an estimated USD 150,000.

Prosecutors said that in exchange for the loot, which also included a luxury car, Menendez did corrupt favours for three New Jersey businessmen. They said he tried to protect associates from criminal investigations, helped two of them in business deals with foreign powers, and also met with Egyptian intelligence officials and took steps to help that country access millions of dollars in US military aid.

"What's been the result?" Stein said. "You lost your senate seat. You lost your chairmanship and you lost your good name."

Menendez, 71, portrayed himself to the judge as a sympathetic figure, stressing his decades of public service and declaring that he was chastened by the experience. Afterward, talking to reporters with TV cameras and microphones outside, he turned defiant.

"I am innocent," he proclaimed, vowing to appeal.

Daibes, 67. tearfully told Stein his conviction had left him "borderline suicidal." Hana professed that he was innocent. A third businessman pleaded

neur, was sentenced to eight years.

guilty and testified against Menendez at a trial last year. Menendez' wife, Nadine, faces a March trial on many of the same charges.

A dozen US senators have been indicted while in office, but only four before Menendez were convicted and had those convictions stand up on appeal.

Menendez resigned last August, a month after his conviction, but he'd been sapped of his power by then. After he was charged in 2023, he was forced to surrender his powerful post as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Commit-

His trial traced his dealings with Egyptian officials and his quest to aid three men who showered him with lucrative gifts found during a 2022 raid on his home in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. (AP)

gross external financing needs and cannot be adventurous," Minister of State for Finance Ali Pervaiz Malik said while speaking at a seminar organised by the Pakistan Business Council (PBC), the representative body of local and foreign manufacturers.

The statement underscores the country's dependency on foreign creditors which has limited its options and hindered its desire for rapid economic growth due to weakened economic fundamentals, The Express Tribune reported.

This comes a day after the IMF's Resident Representative, Mahir Binici, advised Pakistan to remain on course and exercise patience. An IMF mission is expected to visit

Islamabad next month to hold the first formal review talks under the USD 7 billion bailout package

The review will determine the government's seriousness in implementing structural reforms. So far, it has not been able to privatise even one entity, and there is no tangible progress on implementing new income tax rates for the

The government lacks a viable plan to repay these loans other than requesting lenders each year to defer payments. For this fiscal year alone, external debt repayments amount to USD 18.8 billion, excluding repayments of central bank liabilities.

Pakistan has secured USD 12.7 billion in cash deposits to avoid default and heavily relies on four lending nations for annual debt rollovers.

Kuwait has previously provided a USD 700 million loan. The rollovers Pakistan seeks to meet its cumulative USD 100 billion repayments in four years primarily come from Saudi Arabia (USD 5 billion), China (USD 4 billion), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (USD 3 billion), and Kuwait (USD 700 million).

While the economy is experiencing a phase of relative stability, there is increasing pressure on the government to allow for growth.

Malik said Pakistan cannot achieve sustainable growth without addressing fiscal imbalances and low investment and savings ratios.

hind its IMF commitments to meet tax targets. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has already sustained a Rs386 billion tax shortfall, which is expected to widen further by the end of this month.

The government had agreed with the IMF to collect nearly Rs13 trillion in taxes during the current fiscal year. However, it has not taken decisive action against traders, and its Tajir Dost Scheme to collect Rs50 billion in additional taxes has failed spectacularly.

"In its rush for revenues, the federal government has created many anomalies, which have caused problems for the people," said Malik.

The government has access to data on high-net-worth individuals and traders but lacks the political courage to act, said Arif Saeed, a leading businessman and Chairman of the Board of Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited, the IT arm of the FBR.

Shabbir Dewan, Chairman of the PBC, said the government should begin reducing taxes in the next budget, starting with exempting exporters from the 10 per cent super tax. (PTI)

or AfD, into government after Wednesday's events.

Merz, determined to underline his centre-right Union bloc's commitment to cutting irregular migration after a deadly knife attack last week by a rejected asylum-seeker, put a non-binding motion calling for Germany to turn back many more migrants at its borders to a vote, although it might need AfD's votes to pass. The measure passed by a three-vote margin thanks to the far-right party's support.

Polls show Merz's mainstream centre-right Union leading with around 30 per cent support, while Alternative for Germany is second with about 20 per cent, and Chancellor Olaf Scholz's centre-left Social Democrats and their remaining coalition partners, the Greens, are further back.

Merkel, a former leader of Merz's Christian Democratic Union, noted in a rare statement that Merz had said in November that no measures should be passed with AfD's support before the February 23 election.

She said she supported that position but "I think it was wrong no longer to feel committed to this proposal and, on January 29, to enable with open eves for the first time a majority with votes from AfD in a vote in the German parliament". Merz took over the CDU after Merkel, a former rival, stepped down as chancellor in 2021. A more conservative figure than Merkel, he has taken a more restrictive stance on migration. He said last week that Germany has had a "misguided asylum and immigration policy" for a decade — since Merkel allowed large numbers of migrants into the country. (AP)



ARLINGTON, Jan 30: An American Airlines jet carrying 60 passengers and four crew members collided with an Army helicopter while landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington, prompting a large search-and-rescue operation in the nearby Potomac River.

There were multiple fatalities, according to a person familiar with the matter, but the precise number of victims was unclear as rescue crews hunted for any survivors.

Three soldiers were onboard the helicopter, an Army official said.

There was no immediate word on the cause of the Wednesday collision, but all takeoffs and landings from the airport were halted as dive teams scoured the site and helicopters from law enforcement agencies across the region flew over the scene in a methodical search for bodies

Images from the river showed boats around the partly submerged wing and what appeared to be the mangled wreckage of the plane's

fuselage "We are going to recover our

fellow citizens," District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser said at a sombre news conference at the airport in which she declined to say how many bodies had been recovered.

The person who told The Associated Press that there had been multiple deaths was not authorised to publicly discuss details of the investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Sen. Roger Marshall of Kansas said, "When one person dies it's a tragedy, but when many, many, many people die it's an unbearable sorrow.

President Donald Trump said he had been "fully briefed on this terrible accident" and, referring to the passengers, added, "May God

Bless their souls.' Passengers on the flight included a group of figure skaters, their coaches and family members who were returning from a development camp that followed the US



Figure Skating Championships in Wichita. "We are devastated by this un-

speakable tragedy and hold the victims' families closely in our hearts," US Figure Skating said in a statement.

Two of those coaches were identified by the Kremlin as Russian figure skaters Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, who won the pairs title at the 1994 world championships and competed twice in the Olympics. The Skating Club of

Boston lists them as coaches and their son, Maxim Naumov, is a competitive figure skater for the US

The Federal Aviation Administration said the midair crash occurred before 9 p.m. EST when a regional jet that had departed from Wichita, Kansas, collided with a military helicopter on a training flight while on approach to an airport runway. It occurred in some of the most tightly controlled and monitored airspace in the world,

just over three miles south of the White House and the Capitol.

Investigators will try to piece together the aircrafts' final moments before their collision, including contact with air traffic controllers as well as a loss of altitude by the passenger jet.

American Airlines Flight 5342 was inbound to Reagan National at an altitude of about 400 feet and a speed of about 140 miles per hour when it suffered a rapid loss of altitude over the Potomac River, according to data from its radio transponder. The Canadian-made Bombardier CRJ-701 twin-engine jet, manufactured in 2004, can be configured to carry up to 70 passengers.

A few minutes before landing, air traffic controllers asked the arriving commercial jet if it could land on the shorter Runway 33 at Reagan National and the pilots said they were able. Controllers then cleared the plane to land on Runway 33. Flight tracking sites showed the plane adjust its approach to the new runway. Less than 30 seconds before the crash, an air traffic controller asked the helicopter if it had the arriving plane in sight. The controller made another radio call to the helicopter moments later: "PAT 25 pass behind the CRJ." Seconds after that, the two aircraft collided. The plane's radio transponder

stopped transmitting about 2,400 feet short of the runway, roughly over the middle of the river. Video from an observation cam-

era at the nearby Kennedy Centre showed two sets of lights consistent with aircraft appearing to join in a fireball

"I know that flight. I've flown it several times myself," said Sen. Jerry Moran of Kansas. He said he expected that many people in Wichita would know people who were on the flight.

"This is a very personal circumstance." he said.

The collision occurred on a warm winter evening in Washington, with temperatures registering

as high as 60 degrees Fahrenheit, following a stretch days earlier of intense cold and ice. On Wednesday, the Potomac River was 36 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The National Weather Service reported that wind gusts of up to 25 mph were possible in the area throughout the evening.

American Airlines CEO Robert Isom expressed "deep sorrow" for the crash and said the company was focused on the needs of passengers, crew, first responders and families and loved ones of those involved.

Some 300 first responders were on scene. Inflatable rescue boats were launched into the Potomac River from a point along the George Washington Parkway, just north of the airport, and first responders set up light towers from the shore to illuminate the area near the collision site. At least a half-dozen boats were scanning the water using searchlights. (AP)

NORTHEAST

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Manipur CM to stand for unity and integrity of the state

IMPHAL, Jan 30: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh said on Thursday that his government will always stand firmly to safeguard the unity and integrity of Manipur.

He also said that the government had done nothing against any of the communities which have been living together since time immemorial, but would stand against those vested interest groups trying to disintegrate the state

Biren said this while interacting with locals of Khangabok at a public interaction programme held on Thursday at Khangabok Maisnam Leikai, UYC Ground.

The chief minister stated that many people of the State have begun to know the core issue of the current "unprecedented crisis" and have started rendering their support and cooperation in taking the State towards peace and normalcy.

Meanwhile, Singh, after listening to the grievances and demands raised during the interaction, announced to take up certain development works at Khangabok. He announced to allocate ₹7 50 lakhs for installing water pumps at four paddy fields namely Louhonbi Loukon, Keipha Loukon, Kiyam Loukon and Tentharam Loukon. He further assured to develop an

open gym. Appreciating the public's concern for conserving water bodies, the Chief Minister announced to include development projects at Ikop Pat and channel cleaning of Loukhong Pat with a cost ₹ 1.2

crore each in the work programme. The interaction programme was also attended by representatives of local bodies, Self Help Groups, Village Volunteers, and the public of Khangabok among others. (NNN)

Customs seizes meth tablets worth ₹ 12 crore

SHILLONG, Jan 30: Customs sleuths have seized meth tablets worth over ₹ 12 crores and destroyed drugs worth ₹ 191.32 crore.

A statement issued by the Customs on Tuesday informed that, on receipt of specific information, Officers of HQ Preventive, Customs, NER, Shillong along with CPF Silchar intercepted 2 scooters at Rangirkhari Point, Sonai-Silchar Road, Assam on the evening of January 26.

The scooters were coming from Churachandpur, Manipur and proceeding towards Silchar, Assam.

On thorough rummaging, 6 polythene wrapped packages were found deeply concealed inside each scooter, it also said.

The orange colour tablets found inside were tested with the NDPS Field Test Kit which confirmed the presence of methamphetamine in the recovered substance.

'The contraband drugs weighing 12 kgs having a value of about Rs 12 crores have been seized along with the vehicles and 2 persons were apprehended under the relevant provisions of the NDPS Act, ment agencies. (NNN)

1985. Further Investigation into the case is under progress," customs officials said.

In the last week, as part of a Drug Destruction Drive, the Commissionerate of Customs, NER, Shillong destroyed seized drugs at Shillong, Guwahati, Imphal, Dimapur and Karimganj.

A total of 15.90 kgs of Heroin. 92.776 kgs of methamphetamine tablets, 355.40 gms of cocaine and 1567.161 kgs of ganja totally valued at ₹ 191.328 crores were disposed of by destruction in a secure and environmentally responsible manner, ensuring that these harmful substances are permanently removed from circulation, custom officials said

Customs said it is committed to combating all types of cross-border crime involving smuggling of drugs and narcotics, gold, cigarettes, wildlife articles, fake Incurrency dian notes, import-export frauds and tradebased money laundering. Cus-

toms works in close partnership with various other law enforce-

CPI(M) spreading misinformation, unable to accept progress: BJP 'CPI(M) never prioritised development during its long rule'

HT Correspondent AGARTALA, Jan 30: The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Tripura on Thursday accused the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] of misleading the public, claiming that the opposition party is struggling to accept the state's ongoing development. Addressing a press conference,

spokesperson Subrata BJP Chakraborty alleged that the CPI(M) had organised Wednesday's public rally to spread misinformation, as it cannot tolerate the progress Tripura has made under the BJP-led government

"The CPI(M) never prioritised development during its long rule. Now, they are trying to create an atmosphere of instability in the state by



misleading people with false narratives," Chakraborty said. Tripura

He further accused senior CPI(M) leaders, including Prakash Karat and former chief minister Manik Sarkar, of making baseless claims at the rally

while ignoring the visible progress in "For 35 years, the CPI(M) gov-

erned by suppressing democracy and fostering corruption. Their political strategy was built on division and de-

ception. Now that the BJP government is dedicated to the welfare and finds itself unable to cope," he added.

through coercion

"Under the BJP's leadership, Tripura has moved past such undemocratic practices. As the state continues to develop under Chief Minister Professor (Dr.) Manik Saha, the CPI(M) is resorting to spreading falsehoods in an attempt to create unrest. However, the BJP remains committed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sabka Saath. Sabka Vikas,' ensuring inclusive growth for all," he asserted

Index

'Tripura is the 17th state we

and

Six rockets seized in Churachandpur district IMPHAL, Jan 30: Security forces seized six rockets in Manipur's Churachandpur district during search operations, police said on Wednesday.

From the Loilamkot and Nalon area under the jurisdiction of the Henglep police station the security forces seized six rockets along with one launcher, one countrymade mortar (Pompi), one each of 7.62 mm sniper round and sniper magazine, and other articles on Tuesday, the police said.

Two cadres of the proscribed KCP (PWG) were arrested from Morok Inkhol village in Imphal East District on Tuesday, police said.

They were allegedly involved in extortion from the general public, government officials and shops in different areas of Imphal, the police said, adding one 9 mm pistol with magazine, and seven 9 mm live rounds have been seized from their possession. (PTI)

Zeliang reviews projects Tripura seeks hike in tax share, infrastructure and border criteria executed by NHIDCL in Nagaland HT Correspondent years instead of the usual five, AGARTALA, Jan 30: In a

HT Correspondent DIMAPUR, Jan 30: Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister TR Zeliang, who is also minister in charge of national highways on Thursday reviewed and discussed issues related to the road projects executed by the NHIDCL in the state.

Holding a meeting with the NHIDCL officials in Kohima, a total of 19 issues on various stretches of roads were flagged and discussed for resolution. The DCs of Chumukedima, Phek and Meluri, the ADC of Jalukie, representing Peren DC and the revenue officer from Kohima DC office were also in attendance.

Out of the 19 issues discussed, 15 were related to land acquisition.

The road projects discussed in the meeting are Peren-Dimapur (Package II and V), Dimapur-Kohima (Package I, II and III), Kohima bypass- (Package I, II, III and IV), Kohima-Jessami (Package II, III, IV and V) and



Akhegwo to Avangkhu (Package I and II).

Zeliang directed the respective district administrations to immediately resolve these issues within February and submit action to the taken report, saying this is important as the working season will soon be over with the

He also asked the district administrations to seek the assistance of the gaon burhas (village heads) and village council chairmen wherever required to expedite the resolution of the land acquisition issues.

Zeliang also noted the unsatisfacstrong pitch for a revised revtory slope protection measures in the enue-sharing formula, the Dimapur-Kohima 4-lane National Tripura Government has Highway. urged the 16th Finance Com-

A representative of the construction mission to raise the state's tax company, M/s Maccaferri, said there devolution from the current are some issues related to the right of 42% to 50%, while also introway (RoW) as the NHIDCL office ducing new criteria-Infradoes not have the record of the initial structure RoW issued back in 2013-14.

International Border, each In this regard, Zeliang directed the NHIDCL to get in touch with the National Highways Authority of India office and find the record as it initially carried out the land acquisition prior to the coming of NHIDCL to the mission's deliberations in Tripura, confirmed these pro-

In cases where damage compensaposals during a press confertion has been paid and received by ence land owners but they are not allowing the contractors to carry out work cithave visited. Our mandate ing one or the other reason, he diends on October 31, 2025, and rected the district administrations to we must submit our report to issue one final notice for evacuation the President. Today, we had a and demolition by themselves. detailed meeting with Chief

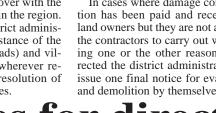
Pradyot pushes for direct central funding to TTAAD

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 30: The Tipra Motha Party (TMP), currently in alliance with the BJP in Tripura and governing the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), has urged the Centre to provide direct financial assistance to the district council.

After meeting with the 16th Finance Commission chaired by Dr Arvind Panagariya, TMP founder and Member of the District Council, Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, highlighted the insufficient allocation of funds to the council.

"We held discussions with the 16th Finance Commis-



sion today, emphasising the need for direct funding to the of COVID-19 on the Finance Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Commission's cycle, Pana-(TTAADC) under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution. Despite nearly 68% of Tripura falling under TTAADC, gariya stated that the 15th Fiwe receive only about 1.7% of the state budget. This nance Commission's award issue was raised during our meeting, and we now await period was extended to six noted. the commission's report to the Government of India,' Pradvot said.

The demand for direct funding has been a long-standtribal areas in the state.

covering 2021 to 2026.

The 16th Finance Commission is now evaluating states' demands to revise the existing revenue-sharing formula.

According to Panagariya, Tripura has sought a recalibration of weights assigned to various parameters in revenue distribution. The state has proposed reducing population weightage from 15% to 10%, cutting area weightage from 15% to 5%, increasing Forest & Ecology weightage from 10% to 20%, raising Income Distance from 45% to 50%, and reducing demographic rate weightage from 12.5% to

The state has also emphasised its geographical constraints, particularly its long international border with Bangladesh, as a factor that should influence central fund allocations.

Minister Dr Manik Saha, Fi-Tripura's demand for an in-Minister Pranajit Singha Roy, Cabinet miniscreased state share aligns with ters, and senior officials of the broader trends across the state government, where country. "Except for one or Tripura presented its case," he two states, most have called said. Highlighting the impact for raising the tax devolution to 50%. Some states sought a 45% share, but the majority including Tripura-want it raised to 50%," Panagariya

Lucknow varsity introduces ing concern for the autonomous council, which plays a crucial role in the administration and development of gold medal in Tripura CM's name

AGARTALA. Jan 30: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday thanked King George's Medical University (KGMU), Manipur Police arrest Lucknow, for introducing a gold medal in his name for meritori-

with 5% weightage-to determine fund allocation. Chairman of the 16th Fi nance Commission, Arvind Panagariya, who led the com-

early onset of monsoon in the region.

progress of the people, the CPI(M)

Chakraborty also claimed that, during its tenure, the CPI(M) often forced people to attend its rallies

Tripura's Tableau secures 2nd spot at Republic Day Parade Naga solution: Naga Hoho two in extortion case

HT Correspondent AGARTALA, Jan 30: Tripura has achieved a remarkable feat by securing the second position in the Best Tableaux category at the Republic Day Parade 2025 in New Delhi.

According to an official statement from the ministry of defence, the results were determined by three panels of judges who evaluated the performances of Marching Contingents from the Armed Forces and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), as well as tableaux from various States. Union Territories (UTs), and Central Government Ministries/Departments.

Among the top three tableaux, Uttar Pradesh secured the first position with its representation of 'Mahakumbh 2025

- Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas.

Tripura ranked second, showcasing "Eternal Reverence: The Worship of 14 Deities in Tripura - Kharchi Puja." Andhra Pradesh secured the third position with its tableau featuring "Etikoppaka Bommalu - Eco-Friendly Wooden Toys."

Tripura participated in the Republic Day tableau rally in New Delhi, where the state showcased the cultural diversity of India, Kharchi Puja, and its associated rituals.

Tripura took part in the Republic Day tableau rally in New Delhi, where a total of 26 tableaux were displayed. Tripura's tableau was serial number 19 and was themed around the cultural diversity of

2025 must be a vear of

<u>HT Correspondent</u> DIMAPUR, Jan 30: The Naga Hoho appealed to the negotiating parties of the Naga talks to expedite the solution, reiterating that 2025 must be a year of Naga solution.

Adopting a five-point resolution at its executive body meeting at Chumoukedima on Monday, the hoho urged all Naga political groups and civil society organisations to come together for an amicable political solution at the earliest.

The Naga Hoho also urged the government of India that all the competencies or common draft based on the principles of the two mutually agreed agreements- "Framework Agreement" with the NSCN (IM) and "Agreed Position" inked with the working committee of the Naga National Political Groups must be made accessible to facilitate thorough and comprehensive discussion to accelerate Naga solution at the earliest.

The media cell of the hoho, in a release, said the crucial resolutions were aimed at addressing the most pressing issues of the Naga people and promoting their well-being. Also, affirming its stand for sovereignty and self-determination, the Naga Hoho said it is the "heart and soul" of the Naga people. It added that any Naga political group, civil society organisation, or individual has "natural rights" to declare it publicly. It said the Nagas are one people wherever they are, not by circumstances but by blood, calling for a unified approach to Naga's political solution.

ICAR establishes six CHCs for improving agricultural productivity

SHILLONG, Jan 30: In a significant step towards strength ening farm mechanisation and improving agricultural productivity in Meghalaya, ICAR Research Complex for NEH Region, Umiam, has successfully established six Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) across different districts of the state.

While two of these CHCs were established earlier, four new ones have been recently set up to further empower farmers with modern agricultural tools and technology.

These CHCs aim to address the challenges of farm mechanisation by providing essential agricultural equipment on a rental basis, thereby reducing the financial burden on small and marginal farmers. Each centre is equipped with power tillers, weeders, sprayers, crop washers, seed drills, paddy threshers, mini rice mills, hatchery units, and other specialized farm tools, tailored to



Laryntihlang (FACT) Inte-

Purangang Marngar, Ri-Bhoi -

Purangang Custom Hiring

Additionally, the two long-

Centre.

Mawsiatkhnam village, East CHCs are located in: Umket Khasi Hills – Mawsiatkhnam Village, Ribhoi – Bankyntiew Custom Hiring Centre, Nala-SHG of Umket Village, para, Marngar, Ri-Bhoi - Nala-Umphrew, East Khasi Hills para Custom Hiring Centre.

Each centre has been grated Village Cooperative Soequipped with farm machinery ciety, Umktieh Mawkhim, worth Rs 5-10 lakhs, benefit-Ribhoi – Kynhun Dorbar Into ing thousands of farmers. The newly developed CHCs were Village Cooperative Society, officially installed on August 7, 2024, with MoUs signed on August 6, 2024, while the earlier CHCs have been serving

The establishment of these CHCs aligns with ICAR's commitment to modernizing agriculture in Northeast India and supporting the Government of India's mission for sustainable and inclusive agricultural growth.

come.

ICAR Research Complex for NEH Region, Umiam, remains dedicated to bridging the gap between farmers and technology, ensuring that rural communities have access to the best farming solutions to enhance productivity and livelihood. (NNN)

farmers since 2017 and 2021.

According to ICAR officials,

these CHCs will enhance agri-

cultural efficiency, reduce

drudgery, and promote sustain-

able farming practices. By pro-

accessible mechanisation serv-

ices, the initiative is expected

to increase crop yield, optimise

labour, and improve farm in-

and

viding affordable

IMPHAL, Jan 30: Manipur Police arrested two armed men quick response.

In a statement announcing in connection with an extortion case in Imphal. the formation of the anti-extor-The two persons have been tion cell, Manipur chief secreidentified as N Bothe Meitei (24) and Y Gyandas Singh tary Prashant Kumar Singh stated that many individuals in-Dinku Chaningkhomba (24) were arrested for their involvehave been threatened with sement in extortion from the vere consequences via calls, shops located in and around Paona bazar in Imphal on ous unlawful organisations if Wednesday, a police report said extortion demands are not met. on Thursday.

These activities pose a sig-One .32 pistol along with nificant threat to the law and one magazine loaded with order situation in the state, acseven rounds of 7.65 ammunicording to Prashant.

tion, two mobile handsets, Rs He had also appealed to the 6210 in cash, one Aadhaar card, public, including government and one two-wheeler vehicle officials, to report any such were recovered from their poscases of threats or extortion to session, the police report also the integrated anti-extortion cell.

It can be mentioned that the More than 200 people have Manipur government on Janubeen arrested in the last six ary 27 set up an integrated antimonths for extortion in the extortion cell to tackle the surge strife-torn state, police sources in extortion-related activities revealed. In 2024, in response under the Home Department. to a spurt in extortion-related The cell comprises represenactivities in Manipur, the police tatives from the state police, established the anti-extortion Central Armed Police Forces, cell. (NNN)

ous students

nance

"Nostalgic moment for me. King George's Medical University, Lucknow, my alma mater, has instituted a Gold Medal in my and Assam Rifles/Army for name for meritorious students excelling in Dental Sciences," the chief minister wrote on Facebook.

"I thank the entire KGMU fraternity for this honour," he said in the post.

Saha, a renowned maxillofacial surgeon, had studied at King George's Medical University (KGMU). Maxillofacial surgery is a medical speciality that treats conditions affecting the face, neck, cluding government officials and jaw. In a letter to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), Prof. Ranjit Kumar Patil of KGMU said the award will be presented annually to the top-performing student in oral and maxillofacial messages and letters from vari- surgery. (PTI)

No. DMCH/MRU/DENGUS-P/2025/181/1558

CORRIGENDUM TO THE RECRUITMENT FOR CON-TRACTUAL POSTS OF RESEARCH SCIENTIST 'B' FOR A MULTI-CENTRIC PROJECT IN MULTI-DISCIPLINARY **RESEARCH UNIT AT DIPHU MEDICAL COLLEGE &** HOSPITAL, DIPHU

As per earlier advertisement number DMCHNIRU/24-09 Dated 16-01-2025 for recruitment for the Post of Research Scientist B for multi-centric Project of Diphu Medical College and Hospital, it is hereby stated that the last date of receiving application has been extended to 10-02-2025 due to receipt of less number of applications.

> Principal-Cum-Chief Superintendent Diphu Medical College & Hospital Diphu ::::: Assam

> > Date 30/01/2025

Janasanyog /D/12089/24/31-Jan-25

No. EE/MSL-11/NIT/2017-18/

said.

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable Court fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five only. With a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F 2 form are invited from the registered Contractors of Class-III and above category under PWD (Roads Department Assam and Bodoland Territorial Council) according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the work as stated below. The tenders will be recieved by the undersigned up to 2.00PM on 11/02/2025 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.15 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Approximate Tender Value	(Earnest Money Deposit)	Cost of Tender Paper	Time of Completion of work
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Construction of 2.00m Span Slab Culvert (Ch. 180.00m) on Chirakhundi to Martyr Harkhab Narzary road under SOPD (BTC) for the year 2024-25	Rs. 11,98,000.00	(2% for Gen) & (1% for Reserved Category)	Rs. 500.00	2 (two) Month from the date of issue of F.W.O.

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up to 4.30 PM on all working days on 03/02/2025 & 04/02/2025 in the office of the undersigned on submission an application with payment in the form of Bank Draft duly pledged to the undersigned. N. B. : -

Date of receiving application for Tender documents :- 03/02/2025 & 04/02/2025.

- 2 Date of issue of Tender Paper :- 06/02/2025 (up to 4.30 PM)
- Date of receiving of Tender Paper 11/02/2025 (up to 2.00 PM)
- Date of opening of Tender Paper 11/02/2025 (at 2.15 PM)
- Place of opening Tender Paper :- Office of the E.E, PWD Mushalpur (R&B) Division, Mushalpur. 5.

Sd/- Executive Engineer,

Mushalpur PWD (R&B) Division Mushalpur

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1375

er hits back

8 THE HILLS TIMES

NATION

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2025

Kerala LoP alleges BRS leader Kavitha's involvement in brewery plant approval

Flats, working hour rules among AAP's 7 guarantees we have made fall under the Delhi

(KERALA)/HYDERABAD, Jan **30:** Congress leader V D Satheesan on Thursday alleged that BRS leader K Kavitha, daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and an accused in the Delhi liquor policy scam, had visited Kerala in connection with the approval for a brewery unit in Palakkad, a charge dismissed by the former MP.

MALAPPURAM

Kavitha termed Satheesan's allegations as "baseless and defamatory" and said she will be compelled to take legal action if the Congress leader does not retract his "false statements'

Satheesan alleged Kavitha "arrived in Kerala for the Oasis Commercial Private Limited Company

Speaking to the media, the Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly demanded an investigation into Kavitha's stay in the state.

'There were several mysterious deals behind the allocation of the brewery plant," he alleged reiterating opposition's claim that the dewas made without consulting the concerned government departments.

Satheesan stated that the decision to give permission to the Oasis Commercial Private Limited Company to set up "liquor manufacturing plants" was taken unilaterally by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Excise Minister M B Rajesh.

Responding, Kavitha said the allegations against her are nothing more than a desperate, "reckless attempt by the Congress to grab cheap political attention."

She said she categorically rejects the "fabricated claims" of Satheesan aimed at maligning her reputation.

"Let me make this clear, if Mr Satheesan does not issue an immediate and unconditional retraction of his false statements, I will be compelled to take stringent legal action to hold him accountable for this malicious slander and to protect my integrity," she said in a statement to PTI in Hyderabad.

The opposition UDF had on Wednesday released a cabinet note substantiating their claims against the LDF government on the brewery issue.

The note dated January 15 clearly mentions that no discussion was held with any other departments on the matter, according to

'Congress overlooked interests of Dalits, backwards in 90s'

He alleged that the state government altered the liquor policy to benefit Oasis Commercial Private Limited, which had purchased land in the area before the policy change

"How did the company know in advance that the liquor policy would be amended," he asked, accusing the government of tailoring the policy to suit the company.

Satheesan criticised the Excise minister MB Rajesh for defending the project and pointed out that the company has not yet responded to the allegations

He also dismissed Rajesh's claim that the setting up of the brewery project would help in saving a GST loss of Rs 210 crore, calling it a false propaganda, and said that the brewery is not subject to GST.

Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala also on Thursday demanded that the government withdraw its approval for the brewery project. He alleged a massive corruption in granting permission to a private company.

"The government moved ahead with the project without informing any departments or consulting with its constituent parties. It unilaterally approved the project without taking anyone into confidence. Moreover, permission was granted to a company linked to the Delhi liquor policy corruption case," Chennithala alleged.

He reiterated his stance that corruption was involved in the decision.

"During the E K Nayanar government, permission for a brewery was granted only after following due procedures. However, this time, the liquor policy was amended to facilitate the project," he said.

Chennithala pointed out that LDF constituent CPI has strongly opposed the move, while another ruling coalition member, the JD(S) has also expressed its disagreement.

"The government is proceeding without the support of its own allies," he said.

He also criticised Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's response in this regard, in the Assembly.

'Instead of addressing my question, the Chief Minister merely countered with allegations in the Assembly," Chennithala said. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: With days to go for the Delhi Assembly polls, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced seven guarantees, including EWS flats and working hour rules, for domestic workers employed at official residences of MPs, ministers, and

government officers. A servant registration portal, salary regulations, ₹ 10 lakh insurance cover, and free education for their children are also among the guarantees

Addressing a press conference here, Kejriwal claimed that 70-80 per cent of the domestic helpers were not paid salaries and were treated like "bonded labour," with only servant quarters provided to them.

Some MPs rented out these quarters instead of housing their domestic staff, he alleged. "First, we will create a servant

registration portal to match workers with employment opportunities. Second, hostels will be built



orderlies in Parliament, and with

the Centre, by its leaders Sanjay

Singh and Raghav Chadha.

will deploy mobile mohalla clinics for their healthcare vants with similar benefits.

"Fourth, laws will be enacted to regulate their salaries and working hours. Fifth, they will receive an insurance cover of ₹ 10 lakh. Sixth, Rs one lakh will be provided for their daughters' weddings. And seventh, their children will get free education," he said. Kejriwal said that on the lines of government's jurisdiction, and we will fulfil them. For issues under the Centre's purview, we will take them up with the central government," he said. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay

Singh said that the issue was also raised in an all-party meeting Thursday "With the Parliament session

about to begin, every AAP MP will raise this matter with full force. I assure you of our complete commitment on behalf of Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party," he said

AAP MP Raghav Chadha also promised a fight for the servants' The AAP national convener also welfare in the Parliament session assured the public of a vociferous scheduled to begin from tomorchampioning of the government

"We will ensure the government hears them and takes positive action at the earliest," he said. Delhi goes to polls on February

"These employees mostly work under officials and ministers of the 5 and the results will be declared central government. The promises on February 8. (PTI) Internal power tussle on among Mahayuti allies, Economy in slowdown; people reeling

P V Anvar welcomed into UDF's rally MALAPPURAM(KERĂLA), Jan 30: Trinamool Congress

leader P V Anvar, who has been reaching out to the Congress-led UDF opposition, was on Thursday included in the statewide campaign launched by it to highlight the issues faced by the people living in hilly regions of Kerala.

Anvar said he had requested V D Satheesan, Leader of Opposition in the state assembly, to include him in the UDF's statewide 'Malayora Samara Yatra' campaign.

"I am happy to be a part of the yatra," he said, while speaking to reporters here.

Anvar, who won from the Nilambur assembly constituency as a Left backed independent candidate, was sidelined by the LDF following his allegations against CPI(M) and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan as well as some of his close aides

Thereafter, he floated his own social collective called Democratic Movement of Kerala (DMK) and then joined the Trinamool Congress (TMC). After joining the TMC, Anvar resigned from his post as MLA. (PTI)

under 'no jobs, raging inflation': Cong situation alarming as chaos in governance: Patole **NEW DELHI, Jan 30:** Ahead of time to time. That is just filling of failing to handle his responsibilities properly. Fadthe Union Budget, the Congress on navis should do justice to the CM post," Patole said. Thursday slammed the govern-The government was indifferent to the plight of its

ment's handling of the economy, asserting that there is a slowdown "ladki bahins" (beloved sisters), he said, referring to the Ladki Bahin Yojana, under which women are with "no jobs, raging inflation, staggiven a financial assistance of ₹ 1,500 per month. nating wages and huge income in-"Unemployment is rampant. Husbands of beloved equality'

sisters, who are farmers, are committing suicide daily. Senior Congress leader and for-The government promised a price of ₹ 6,000 per quinmer finance minister P Chidambaram said the economic tal for soybeans, but farmers are not even getting ₹ 3,000. The situation of paddy, onions, and cotton is no growth could even fall by up to 2 per cent as compared with the previous year

> He made the remarks at the Congress' 24, Akbar Road office after releasing the 'Real State of the Economy 2025' report prepared by former party MP Rajeev Gowda and his team

'The economy is in a slowdown... that cannot be denied at all. however, much the government may try to do that the economy is in a slowdown and it may fall up to two per cent of the previous year's growth," he said at the press confer-

ence "There are no jobs. Youth unem-

Vote for BJP in Delhi irrespective

of candidates: Rajnath Singh

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Launching cused it of not keeping its poll prom-

pal.

ployment is close to 40 per cent. There are no jobs despite the PM handing out letters to people from

vacant posts and does not involve creation of new jobs," he said. Chidambaram said wages have stagnated for the last four-five

years. "Inflation is raging, with food, education and healthcare inflation is in double digits. Inflation has been raging since 2-3 years,' the Congress leader said.

Noting that there is huge income inequality, Chidambaram said he does concede that the top 20-30 per cent may be better off but the rest of the 70 percent, the bottom half, is living on ₹ 100-150 a day.

"There is huge inequality and that gap between the rich and the poor is growing. The government has done nothing to deal with it," he said.

Chidambaram said many of the facts mentioned in the report released by the party are conveniently buried by the Union government.

"Therefore, Prof. Rajeev Gowda's team decided to present the report on the real state of the economy, even as the unreal state of the economy is put forward by the government everyday, every hour,' he said. (PTI)

NC leader accuses BJP J&K unit of misleading Centre on statehood restoration issue JAMMU, Jan 30: A senior

MUMBAI, Jan 30: Maharashtra Congress president In the government, 65 per cent of the ministers have Nana Patole on Thursday claimed that there was an tainted backgrounds. Maharashtra's reputation is getting tarnished daily. Corruption cases in Beed district 'internal tussle' for power among the ruling Mahayuti partners and the government was functioning in a are surfacing one after the other, and a similar situation prevails in Pune and other districts, the Congress Talking to reporters here, he alleged that Maharashleader said tra was in a state of turmoil as Devendra Fadnavis had "Even ruling party MLAs are openly admitting corfailed to handle his responsibilities as chief minister

different," he said.

'Ever since the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance came to power, there has been an internal tussle for power among the three ruling parties. The situation in the government is alarming as it is functioning in a Fadnavis leads the Mahayuti government compris-

edged it. The committee appointed to investigate the crop insurance scam has also confirmed corruption. But if Ajit Pawar still claims that no scam took place, he is blatantly lying, Patole added. (PTI)

Jarange ends fast, claims govt ready to accept several demands

ing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Eknath Shinde-

led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress

"The state is in a turmoil because CM Fadnavis is

chaotic manner," he alleged.

JALNA, Jan 30: Maratha activist for issuing 'Kunbi' certificates for had to be hospitalised after their Manoj Jarange on Thursday the community members," he ended his indefinite fast after five said.

The Economically Backward

chaotic manner.

effectively.

Party (NCP).

health deteriorated. Jarange himself received intra-

ruption," he claimed When asked about Deputy Chief Minister and Na-

tionalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Ajit Pawar's statement that no crop insurance scam took place in Beed district, Patole said, "A ruling party MLA himself has admitted to corruption in the crop insurance scheme. Even the agriculture minister has acknowl-



NEW DELHI, Jan 30: The Congress did not protect the interests of the Dalits and backwards the way it should have in the 1990s. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said on Thursday.

Addressing a programme organised by Dalit influencers here, Gandhi said merely getting political representation for Dalits and backwards would not help solve their problems unless they got "bhaagidaari" in institutions and wealth.

He also said that once the "original base" of the Congress party is back, the BJP and the RSS would have to run away. It will happen soon, he added.

Gandhi said during Indira Gandhi's tenure, the Congress had full confidence of Dalits, minorities, backwards, but later in the 1990s "there were shortcomings," and the fact is not lost on the party.

We would not talk just about representation. You talk about political representation and Kanshi Ram fought for political representation. But they have made political representation irrelevant. Lok Sabha BJP MPs say they have made them a statue as they can't even speak. The institutions, be it education or corporate India, judiciary, we have to get the share of power," he said at the 'Vanchit Samaj: Dasha aur Disha' programme.

The former Congress president said there is a "huge difference" between representation and share of power.

"Like I said in the budget, backwards have 50 per cent population but the share of power is just 5 per cent. Dalits have 15 per cent population but have only one per cent share of power. The next question is the share of power and the share of wealth," he said.

Gandhi asserted that unless the Dalits and the backwards got a just share in power, the problem would not be solved. (PTI)

days of protest, claiming that government representatives assured him that several of his demands would be accepted.

Members of the Maratha community would march to Mumbai if the demands were not fulfilled. he warned.

The activist, who has been demanding reservation for the community in government jobs and education, broke his hunger strike at Antarwali Sarati village in Maharashtra's Jalna district in the presence of BJP MLA Suresh Dhas and District Collector Dr Shrikrishna Panchal.

Jarange told reporters that the government representatives promised him that several of his demands, including the reactivation of the Shinde Committee, would be fulfilled.

"The government has assured that all cases against Maratha protesters would be withdrawn, while separate sections would be set up

Section provisions for Marathas would also be implemented, while compensation would be released for those community members

who lost their lives during the quota agitation, he said. However, Jarange said, the gov-

ernment has sought more time to implement the draft notification that recognises Kunbis as 'sage sovare' (blood relatives) of Maratha community members for granting reservation to the latter under the OBC (Other Backward Class) category The Shinde Committee was

formed on September 7, 2023, to determine the methodology for issuing OBC certificates to Marathas and to gather proof establishing their members as part of the Kunbi community.

Hundreds of Maratha protesters fasting alongside Jarange also ended their hunger. During their

venous fluids on Wednesday following a request from MLA Dhas.

Calling his battle far from over, Jarange told his supporters, "I have only suspended my fast, not our struggle. We will march to Mumbai if our demands are not fulfilled. Mumbai will then come to a standstill. However, we will ensure that no harm comes to the

city," he stated. He urged Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to fulfil the promises made to the Maratha community. "Don't deceive Marathas, else, we'll head to Mumbai," he said.

This is his seventh indefinite fast since September 1, 2023, when police lathi-charged protesters at Antarwali Sarati.

In February 2024, the Maharashtra legislature unanimously passed a bill providing 10 per cent reservation for the Marathas in education and government jobs five-day protest, several of them under a separate category. (PTI)

to vote for the BJP irrespective of the candidates.

an attack on AAP for "breaking" its

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on

Thursday appealed to people in Delhi

promises like that of a Jan Lokpal,

"The BJP is the only party which has fulfilled all promises it had made in its manifesto... I would urge you to forget everything and vote for the BJP," Singh said, addressing a poll rally at Delhi Cantonment.

Vote for the BJP in Delhi and don't see who the candidate is. Your vote will be for Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Singh said.

He assured that all the schemes in Delhi will continue if the BJP comes to power. The residents will also be able to get the benefit of central schemes like Ayushman Bharat Yojana which, he said, will be implemented within 10 days of the formation of government.

Singh also said Atal Canteens will be established in all slums which will provide meals at ₹ 5.

Targeting the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Singh used the term 'AAPDA', which translates to disaster in Hindi, for the party, and ac-

would not form any political party. The trust that people bestowed on Anna Hazare's movement was used by him to form the government in Delhi... But did he fulfil his promises?" Singh said.

ises, especially to establish a Jan Lok-

ment, Arvind Kejriwal had said he

"During the Anna Hazare move-

"He (Kejriwal) said they will establish a Jan Lokpal... but today, there are so many scams in Delhi," he said. Singh said it was the BJP that gave statehood to Delhi and also regu-

larised several colonies. "But the AAP government could not provide them with water or

drainage facilities," he alleged. "AAP has fooled the people of Delhi to get their support. They had promised to clean Yamuna in three years. Where did that promise go?" he said. "To hide their failure, they are blaming that Harvana has mixed poison in the water. Haryana chief minister drank the water ... there was no poison," he said, adding that the BJP will ensure that Yamuna is cleaned in three years if they come to

power. (PTI)

tional Conference leader on Thursday accused BJP leadership in Jammu and Kashmir of misleading the Centre on the issue of statehood restoration and said "such deceptive tactics are a betraval of the people's mandate and a disservice to the aspirations of local residents".

NC provincial president, Jammu, Rattan Lal Gupta, said despite repeated assurances, the BJP-led government has failed to restore the statehood, pushing the region further into developmental stagnation. (PTI)

NAME CHANGE

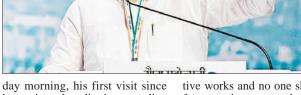
RAMNATH DAS, son of Late Subhan Patar, resident of Vill. Udari, P.O.- Udari, P.S.- Mori gaon, in the district of Morigaon Assam, and an Indian citizen by birth, do hereby solemnly affirm that my correct name is RAM-NATH DAS, as recorded in my Voter ID (No. CTH1140405), PAN Card (No. GOJPD5293H), and Aadhaar Card (No. 8405 3385 7700). However, in the Jamabandi for Surveyed Villages under P.P. No. 221, Dag No. 713 at Udari-Kissam, my name has been incorrectly recorded as RAM NATH PATAR. I hereby declare that RAMNATH DAS and RAM NATH PATAR refer to the same person, which is myself. affirm that both names refer to the same person, and this declaration is made to update my records accordingly.

Ajit Pawar warns party workers in Beed against involvement in extortion rackets

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJI-NAGAR, Jan 30: Amid the political row over the murder of a sarpanch, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday asked NCP workers in Beed district not to get involved in extortion attempts targeting development projects.

Asking his party workers to maintain a "clean character", the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief said political interference will not be tolerated in the administration. His remarks come against the backdrop of the arrest of Walmik Karad, a close associate of state NCP minister Dhananjay Munde, in an extortion case linked to the murder of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh in Beed district.

The opposition has been demanding Munde's ouster in the wake of the arrest of his associate and to facilitate an impartial probe into the murder of Deshmukh. Pawar arrived in Beed on Thurs-



becoming the district guardian minister.

Addressing a gathering of NCP workers, he said, "Maintain a clean character. Everybody should take care not to mingle with the wrong people. Our image among the people here (in Beed) should be good." "No political interference will be tolerated in the administra-

tive works and no one should ask for extortion money in develop-

ment works," Pawar said. The deputy CM said if he comes to know about such activities, he will not spare anyone and invoke the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) against the guilty.

"I can take any sort of action. I have already told (Chief Minister)

Devendra Fadnavis that when I am taking this responsibility (as guardian minister of Beed), everyone should co-operate with me," he said

Pawar also warned those brandishing guns in the public.

"I am also going to tell the (police) department that if someone is found showing a revolver or firing in the air, their licenses should be cancelled. I will not tolerate reels (short videos on social media) with weapons. Law will be equal for all, because a change should happen and people should feel the

On his plans for Beed district's development, Pawar said he will take decisions on matters which fall under his purview and will discuss with the CM the issues which

"But while doing this, I will also consult the public representatives and the two ministers - Dhananjay Munde and Panakaja Munde (both

cousins and hailing from Beed),' Pawar said.

The NCP leader further said he will help everyone, including those in the opposition.

Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh was abducted, tortured and murdered on December 9. 2024, for allegedly trying to stop an extortion bid targeting an energy firm in Beed.

Seven persons have been arrested in the murder case, including NCP's former tehsil chief Vishnu Chate.

Chate allegedly demanded Rs 2 crore from an energy company that had installed a windmill in the district and threatened to stop their operations if their demands were not met, police earlier said.

Deshmukh had tried to intervene and stop the extortion, leading to his abduction, torture and murder on December 9, following which an FIR was registered against seven persons, including Chate. (PTI)

ENGINEERING WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION Tender Notice No. : LMG/Enga/02 o 2025; Dated : 27-01-2025; E-Tender an wited by the undersigned for the followin work: Brief Description of Item Repairs to 140 nos. guarters includin with provision of individual overhead Tan for supply of water in colonies, out house Toilet), Garage & Boundary wall a Officers colony under SSE/W/N/Lumding Tender Value: ₹3,81,63,074.79/ Earnest Money: ₹3,40,800/-; Date 8 time of closing of above tender at 15:00 hrs. on 19-02-2025 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 20-02-2025. For complete information with the tender document o above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 19-02-2025 in website http:// ww.ireps.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumdi MORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

change," he said.

are under his jurisdiction.

NATION

PIL in SC seeks safety measures for devotees at Maha Kumbh

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: A PIL was filed on Thursday in the Supreme Court seeking implementation of specific guidelines and regulations to ensure safety of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh where at least 30 people were killed and 60 injured in a pre-dawn stampede at Sangam area in Prayagraj.

The stampede took place on Wednesday on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, one of the most auspicious days of the Hindu calendar.

The petition, filed a day later under Article 32 of the Constitution by lawyer Vishal Tiwari, seeks to prevent stampede incidents and protect the fundamental rights of equality and life under Article 21.

The plea, which made the Centre and all the states as parties, has sought a direction to the Centre and the state governments to work collectively in ensuring a safe and secure environment for devotees at the Maha Kumbh.

"A petition ... filed under Article 32 of the Constitution of India praying for a writ of mandamus or any other appropriate writs seek-



ing issuance of specific directions, policies and regulations initiate guidelines and directions to state governments to facilitate the people for Maha Kumbh avoid stampede incidents and to determine and initiate assessment to ensure safety, viability etc. for the enforcement of fundamental right of equality and life under Article 21 of the Constitution and to call a status report," the plea said.

It said all states should establish facilitation centres at Prayagraj to provide safety information and assist their respective residents in

emergencies It also sought installation of sig-

nage and announcements in multiple languages to help pilgrims navigate the event with ease. "All states shall establish in proper manner their facilitation

centres at Prayagraj the Maha Kumbh. These centres shall provide and display the basic information regarding the safety measures and guidelines to the persons coming from their states. In emergency these centres shall be ready for any

assistance," it said. The plea said that SMSes and Southern states pushing for more population

HYDERABAD, Jan 30: Amid

calls from some southern states

favouring higher population to ad-

dress disparities in Central funds.

Aadmi Party in offering schemes

in the Delhi Assembly poll cam-

He, however, said in a poor

paigns.

here.

WhatsApp messages be used to disseminate safety protocols to attendees.

There is the need for coordination between the Uttar Pradesh government and other states to ensure the availability of doctors and nurses at the venue, it said.

The plea also sought regulation of VIP movement and said public safety should be given priority over VIP protocols to prevent congestion and ensure smooth crowd movement.

"The VIP movement shall not effect or create danger to the common devotees safety and maximum space for entry and exit of devotees at Maha Kumbh shall be provided," it said.

The PIL also highlights the recent stampede incident that occurred on January 29 at the Maha Kumbh, resulting in the tragic loss of approximately 30 lives and leaving several others injured.

The petitioner has urged the top court to direct the Uttar Pradesh government to submit a status report on the incident and initiate legal action against those responsible for negligence.

The plea cited several past incidents of stampedes at religious gatherings, emphasising the need for proactive safety measures, and said in 1954, over 800 deaths took place due to overcrowding on a narrow bridge at the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

Around 200 people were killed in a stampede triggered by restricted access at Kumbh at Haridwar in 1986, it said, adding 39 deaths and over 140 injuries took place in 2003 at Nashik.

In 2013, 42 died at the Allahabad railway station following a footbridge collapse.

The Kumbh Mela is one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, taking place in rotation among four major locations: Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Haridwar (Uttarakhand), Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), and Nashik (Maharashtra).

Given the massive influx of pilgrims from all states, the petition stresses the need for collective responsibility in ensuring proper crowd management, medical facilities, transportation, and security. (PTI)



SHIMLA, Jan 30: The arrest of two individuals -- one from Kolkata and one from Delhi -- has revealed the operation of an extensive drug

trafficking network throughout North India, with a particular focus Shimla.

dent of Police (SP) Sanjeev Kumar Gandhi, the syndicate was an organised supply chain facilitated by online bookings through various social media platforms. Innocent people's accounts were being misused, and drugs were being delivered through couriers, he said.

The modus operandi was exposed following the arrest of interstate drug kingpin Sandeep Shah from Kolkata earlier this month. Shah was supplying chitta (adulterated heroin) through an interstate drug nexus. His close associate, Neeraj Kashyap from Mehrauli, South Delhi, was also arrested.

not good idea, says former RBI Guv Subbarao Shah, based in Kolkata, procured meeting said it has been underdrug demand through local contacts using virtual numbers and social networking sites. Communication was conducted via WhatsApp, and payments were deposited into associates' accounts in Delhi through Unified Payment Interface (UPI) after misusing the accounts of innocent people.

The delivery was then made near the client's home without any direct contact

"About 500 people are involved in this dubious trade, and the delivery is made by confirming the location through photographs and other details. The exact location where the drugs are kept is shared with the client after payment is confirmed,"

Gandhi said. The police explained that a consumable quantity of heroin is 5 grams, while a commercial quantity is 250 grams. Most of the chitta is smuggled in consumable quantities to evade punishment, as consumable quantities are bailable. A person who consumes chitta --

which costs between ₹ 4,000 to ₹ 6,000 per gram -- cannot afford the drug when they become addicted, police said. This motivates them to recruit

others, forming a chain that ultimately leads to peddling. Gandhi in drug use. (PTI)

added that the focus is to attack the demand by targeting the drug peddlers' network.

THE HILLS TIMES 9

A case has been registered under Sections 21 (Punishment for contravention in relation to manufactured drugs and preparations), 29 (Abetment) of the NDPS Act, and Section 11 of BNS (Organised Crime) Act against the accused.

So far, a total of 16 individuals, including Shah, his close associate, and a police constable, have been arrested.

The other accused arrested in the past two days include Shubham Shandil, Sandeep Dhiman, Sanjay Verma, Vishal Mehta (Lower Khalini), Ashish, Prajwal Jasta, Nitin Khepan, Dhadwari Dodra Kwar, and Abhinav Kanwar, all from Shimla district.

On August 14, 2024, Shimla police apprehended two individuals, Shimla's Bus Stand and recovered 6.38 grams of chitta from their possession

backward and forward linkages led -- Jugal Kishore, Jitender Verma, ber and October 2024.

cyber investigation tools to identify and arrest the drug supply chain's kingpin. Shah was using fake identities, virtual numbers, and several mobile phones and SIM cards to run the drug trade.

Investigations have uncovered substantial financial activity, revealing transactions exceeding ₹ 1.2 crore in the accounts of Shah and Kashyap, with additional accounts yet to be explored that could potentially involve crores, the police said. So far, a total of 21 accounts associated with 17 individuals have been frozen, totaling several lakhs, and numerous UPI transactions have been traced from Shimlabased peddlers to the accounts of Shah and Kashyap.

The police have advised parents to keep a close watch on their children and their spending, and seek early treatment and counselling if they suspect their child is involved

Judicial panel members record statements of government employees in Sambhal riots

of the judicial commission set up by the Uttar Pradesh government to investigate the riots that erupted during a survey at the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal on November 24 last year recorded the statements of government employees on Thursday.

The commission, which includes former High Court Judge Devendra Arora, former Director General of Police (DGP) Arvind Kumar Jain and former Uttar Pradesh Additional Chief Secretary Amit Mohan Prasad, is stationed at the PWD guest house on Chandausi Road to record the statements, local officials said.

The commission was formed following the riots which killed four people and injured several including policemen.

The commission had previously visited Sambhal on December 1 and January 21. During the last visit, 51 complaints were registered with the Commission in relation to the violence.

The victims of the 1978, 1986 and 1992 riots in Sambhal held a procession to the PWD guest house and submitted a memorandum to the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) of Sambhal.

Victims have long been demanding re-investigation of previous riots. They include those who lost their loved ones and suffered damage to heir propei

SAMBHAL (UP), Jan 30: Members riots, told reporters that his grandparents, Kishan Singh and Nareni, were burnt alive at the gate of Banwari Lal Murari Lal during the riots. Their bodies were never recovered and the family never received justice.

former RBI Governor D Subbarao "We have not got justice for it till on Thursday argued that populadate... The culprits should be puntion growth is not the solution. ished and the entire incident should Delivering "3rd BPR Vithal Mebe disclosed. We request the Yogi morial Lecture-India's Fiscal Fedgovernment to set up a judicial comeralism-Quo Vadis?" mission to bring out the truth of the Subbarao said the BJP, which had 1978 riots," Manoj Kumar said. earlier called freebies "revadi cul-Similarly, Vishnu Shankar Rastogi, ture" is now competing with Aam

another victim of the 1978 riots, recalled how his shop was destroyed in the violence. Despite his significant loss, he received a meagre compensation of ₹ 200.

country where millions struggle Rastogi emphasised that the comfor daily life, it is even mandatory pensation did not match the scale of for the government to help people. the loss he suffered. He also called for a re-investigation of the 1978 riots to government bus rides to women "uncover" the truth, adding, "Our free of cost, the former RBI chief MPs and MLAs at the time were not opined there is no evidence that it sympathetic to our plight and we seek s the best way to help them. ustice even today.

SDM Vandana Mishra confirmed that some people have presented a memorandum requesting a detailed investigation into the past riots.

Mishra explained that the judicial commission is currently taking statedevelopment. But I never saw that ments from government officers and we will see a day when political employees, while earlier dates were leaders will say that we must inallocated for statements from the general public. She assured that the pubwould be informed of any future

said "Evidently the subtext of the message is that some states which have done well in population control are losing out on Central transfers. But I don't believe that increasing the population is the solution, because India is one country. We still have a population

problem at the aggregate level," he On some states offering free further said. Expressing concerns about being penalised for achieving better growth and controlling its population, Kerala recently demanded "I worked in the government for an increase in its share of Central 50 years. When I first joined the taxes from the current 41 per cent to 50 per cent and a reduction in service, our biggest priority was population control, family planthe per capita-based share for ning and we believed that the popstates from the divisible pool, from ulation growth was undoing all the 45 per cent to 30 per cent.

Requesting allocations, based on population ratios, should be disbursed promptly without bias, crease our population," Subbarao Telangana in the recent pre-budget

funded with respect to Centrally sponsored schemes Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and his Tamil Nadu counterpart M K

Stalin had spoken in favour of having more children in recent times. While Naidu flagged 'ageing population', Stalin said the Lok

Sabha delimitation exercise may make people think about raising "16 children", while referring to a Tamil adage.

Subbarao opined that the Central government needed to have a mechanism to control freebies being offered by political parties beyond acceptable limits.

"The biggest disappointment on freebies is that three years ago, the Prime Minister made a statement that there must be restraint on freebies. Two months after that, in the UP elections, the BJP went on giving freebies. And today, they are competing head to head and toe to toe with AAP on freebies," he said. He said governments can not

borrow and give away money for consumption as freebies. Subbarao said a healthy cooperation between the Centre and states

is also important for "Viksit Bharat". (PTI) CBI files closure report in

on Himachal Pradesh's capital, According to Shimla Superinten-

Rohit Pandey and Suraj, both from South Delhi, near a hotel at

The investigation into the case's to the arrest of three more accused and Aastik Chauhan -- in Septem-

Police teams used advanced

Manoj Kumar, a victim of the 1978 dates of hearings. (PTI)

Three die of suspected NCW to celebrate 33rd foundation day **GBS** in Bengal in four days

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: The National Commission for Women (NCW) will celebrate its 33rd foundation day on Friday and also honour four paralympians.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar will be the chief guest at the event with NCW Chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar leading the proceedings.

This year's theme, "Nari tu Narayani", underscores the resilience and strength of women, inspired by Ahilyadevi Holkar's legacy of leadership and justice.

The NCW will also honour four exceptional female paralympians for their perseverance and achievements, recognising them as symbols of empowerment and inspiration for future generations, according to an official statement

Adding to the significance of the occasion, Rahatkar will present the first copy of her book, "Karamyogini Veerangna", to VP Dhankhar.

The book celebrates the indomitable courage of former Queen of the Malwa kingdom Ahilyadevi Holkar, highlighting her role in redefining leadership and governance. Speaking ahead of the event, Ra-

hatkar emphasised the Commission's commitment to amplifying women's voices and ensuring their rightful place in society.

"Women today are not just making strides, they are rewriting history. Our theme, 'Nari tu Narayani,' encapsulates this transformation as women continue to lead, innovate, and unlift communities across the nation," she said. (PTI)

KOLKATA, Jan 30: Three persons, including a child, have died due to suspected Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) in West Bengal in the past few days, though the state health department is yet to officially confirm the cause of the deaths.

All three persons died in government hospitals in Kolkata and Hooghly district. A senior health department official said, "The situation in West Bengal is absolutely under control and there is nothing to panic about."

The three deceased persons were Debkumar Sahu (10) of Jagaddal in North 24 Parganas district, Aritra Manal (17) from Amdanga in the same district and another 48-year-old man in Dhaniakhali village in Hooghly district, sources said. Family members of the three claimed that they died of suspected GBS. an immunological nerve disorder.

Debkumar died at the BC Roy Hospital in Kolkata on January 26 while the teenager from Amdanga, who was undergoing treatment at the NRS Medical College and Hospital in the city, died the next day, they said

The man from Hooghly district died on Wednesday in a hospital there. "The hospital told us that the condition of Debkumar kept on deteriorating while being treated

They did not tell us that the cause of his death was GB syndrome, but in the death certificate the suspected GB syndrome was mentioned," the boy's uncle Govinda Sahu said. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: The CBI has filed a closure report in the case pertaining to the 2024 UGC-NET, which was cancelled following inputs suggesting that its question paper was leaked on the darknet and was being sold on Telegram, officials said on Thursday.

In its closure report filed before a special court, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said there was no evidence of paper leak in the case. The agency also sent a report to the Union education ministry

The court will now decide whether to accept the report and close the case or direct the agency to further probe it.

The central probe agency found that a "doctored" screenshot of the "leaked" question paper for the June 18, 2024, exam was being circulated by a student to make some money, the officials said.

On the exam day, the paper was found doing the rounds on Telegram channels in the afternoon, before the second shift of Singh UGC-NET, giving an impression Shekhawat, poet Kumar Vishwas, that it was leaked and the person and filmmaker Prakash Jha are circulating it had access to it, they among the prominent speakers said.

said.

hollow ideology", he said.

The investigation found that the

UGC-NET paper leak case person who circulated the screenshot had doctored the image and its date and time stamp to show that he accessed the paper before the exam started, the officials said. More than 11 lakh candidates had registered for the exam which determines eligibility for junior research fellowship, appointment as assistant professors and PhD ad-

missions in Indian universities and colleges. The examination was cancelled

by the education ministry on June 19 following an alert from the National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C).

"The UGC received certain inputs from the National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre under the Ministry of Home Affairs on the examination. These inputs prima facie indicate that the integrity of the aforesaid examination may have been compro-

mised," the Ministry of Education had said after the cancellation of the examination.

The investigation was handed over to the CBI, which found that the purported screenshot of the paper was created by a school student using an app. (PTI)

Nine Naxalites carrying cumulative ₹ 52-

Two B'deshi women arrested in Kochi KOCHI, Jan 30: Two more

Bangladeshi women were arrested here on Thursday for illegally staying in India, police said.

Kobitiba, 22 and Rubina Sheikh, 19 were arrested from Kodanadu in the Ernakulam rural police limits.

The duo allegedly crossed the border from West Bengal and traveled to Bengaluru, where they obtained Aadhaar cards with the help of an agent, police said. Both were produced before the court and remanded to judicial custody.

They were arrested in a special operation, 'Operation Clean,' launched by Ernakulam Rural District Police Chief Vaibhav Saxena after the arrest of 28year-old Thaslima Begum two weeks ago.

With these arrests, the number of Bangladeshis detained in the rural district police limits this month has risen to seven, police said

Following the series of arrests, the police have decided to expand their investigation to West Bengal to track down agents facilitating illegal border crossings, fake ID and Aadhar cards. (PTI)

New Delhi World Book Fair 2025 to celebrate 'Republic@75' with global participation, starting Feb 1 cian Shashi Tharoor, Minister of

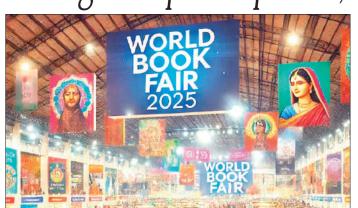
NEW DELHI, Jan 30: The New Delhi World Book Fair 2025, set to begin on February 1 with the theme "Republic@75", will celebrate passion for the written word with 50 countries participating from around the world, the National Book Trust (NBT) announced on Thursday.

To be inaugurated by President Droupadi Murmu at Bharat Mandapam on Saturday, the fair will feature over 2,000 publishers and exhibitors, along with more than 1,000 speakers from diverse nationalities and languages.

Authors and speakers from countries, including France, Qatar, Spain, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Columbia, are set to participate in NDWBF 2025, which has designated Russia as the focus nation.

According to NBT director Yuvraj Malik, the flagship event aims to serve as a platform that unites the nation's cultural heritage with its aspirations for the future

"NDWBF 2025 will not only



host and celebrate ideas, authors and discussions from across the country, but also from all over the globe. The event stands as a crucible where the essence of a 75year-old republic converges with the aspirations of a nation set to command global admiration," Malik told reporters here.

Eminent Russian author Alexéi Varlámov, who also attended the press conference, mentioned that over 1,500 books will be show-

cased by Russian publishing houses at the fair, offering an authentic representation of Russian history, culture, and literature. The 'International Events Corner' will witness book releases,

panel discussions, reading sessions, film screenings and workshops featuring authors, speakers and literary associations from the participating countries.

Actor Pankaj Tripathi, food critic Pushpesh Pant, senior politi-

'Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival', 'Penguin Dialogues' and the 'Great Indian Book Tour', will be held parallelly as part of the fair. Among the new additions at this year's NDWBF are a dedicated authors' lounge for authors

Culture

fair.

to engage and the 'Children's Corner', which will offer a wide range of storytelling, literary, art, craft, and dance sessions for young visitors.

Gajendra

from diverse fields such as litera-

ture, governance, technology, art,

and cinema, participating in the

Also, several literature festivals,

including 'Brahmaputra Literature

Festival', 'Prabhat Prakashan',

'Bharat Literature Festival',

The event, which will come to a close on February 9, will have free entry for students in school uniform and senior citizens. (PTI)

lakh reward surrender in Sukma district SUKMA, Jan 30: Nine Naxalites, Madkam Hidme and Nuppo Hungi mostly women -- carrying a cumuturned themselves in before authorities, said the official.

Of these, Mangdu, involved in a major encounter in 2020, was active as a deputy commander of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) battalion No. 1 operating under the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist). His wife armed movement citing their disillusionment with its "inhuman and Budhri was a member of the South Bastar Division battalion No. 1. Kalmu Mangdu, his wife Madvi

Sameer was the communication Budhri, Midiyam Sukka alias team commander of PLGA battalion No. 1 and his wife Raje was a Sameer, his wife Rajni alias Raje and women cadres Shanti Kawasi, CNM member, he added. Madkam Somdi, Nuppo Narsi,

is a cultural wing of Maoists.

Shanti Kawasi and Madkam Somdi were active as members of the battalion No. 1 and People's Party Committee Member (PPCM) of the battalion No. 8, respectively, the official said.

These six cadres carried a reward of ₹8 lakh each on their heads (total ₹48 lakh), he said.

Mangdu was involved in the 2020 Minpa encounter in Sukma district in which 17 security personnel were killed. Sameer was part of the 2017 Burkapal gunfight in the district in which 25 security personnel lost their lives, he added. (PTI)

Chetna Natya Mandli, or CNM,

lative reward of ₹ 52 lakh on their heads -- surrendered before security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Thursday, an official

The surrendered Naxals included two couples, and all of them quit the

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ENTERTAINMENT

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2025

He is a sensitive director: Mohanlal on reuniting with Prithviraj Sukumaran for 'L2: Empuraan'

KOCHI, Jan 30: Superstar Mohanlal, who has worked under Prithviraj Sukumaran's direction on "Lucifer", "Bro Daddy", and his latest "L2: Empuraan", says he admires the actor-filmmaker for his sensitive approach towards cinema.

"L2: Empuraan" is a sequel to 2019's release "Lucifer", which starred Mohanlal in the role of Stephen Nedumpally aka Khureshi-Ab'raam, a mysterious politician-don. Besides direction, Sukumaran also shared screen space with Mohanlal in these three films.

"He is very good. This is my third film with him. 'Bro Daddy' was a different film from 'Lucifer'. He knows what he is doing, he is very keen on scripting. He is a sensitive director. He will give more importance to acting. He is totally into the film," Mohanlal said during a media interaction after the teaser launch of "L2: Empuraan" here.

The Malayalam superstar, known for films across various languages such as "Kireedam", "Manichitrathazhu", "Bharatham", "Company", "Drishyam" and "Pulimurugan", said he is excited to showcase a different side of his action-hero persona in the movie.

"This film demands action. I've done so many action movies, there is a different kind of action in ('Lucifer' franchise). It's a trilogy and we've one more chapter to come. We haven't shot for it. It will take some time," he said.

The teaser of "L2: Empuraan" was launched by Mohanlal's close friend and colleague Mammootty at an event held in Kochi on Sunday. Co-stars promoting each other's films is not a new phenomenon, said the "Drishyam" star.

"Mammootty and I have done over 55 films together, and now we are doing one more (currently untitled) film together," added Mohanlal, who has worked with Mammootty on "Sesham Kazhchayil", "Naanayam", "Harikrishnans", and "Twenty:20".

"Industry-wise, it's a small place; there are very few actors here. The Malayalam industry is like a family. Earlier, all the South industry was based in Chennai; later, they shifted to Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kerala."

Mohanlal is pleased with the love and recognition the Malayalam industry has been receiving from all quarters since the coronavirus pandemic, which hit the country in

March 2020. "COVID was a blessing in disguise for the Malayalam film industry. 'Drishyam' played a major factor in this, and people started watching other films. "In Malayalam, we've tried so many new things, like 'Kaalapaani' (his 1996 drama) was the pan-India film, the first 3D film, I did the first co-production with France with 'Vanaprastham'," he said. Produced by Lyca Productions and Aashirvad Cinemas, "L2: Empuraan" will be out in cinemas on March 27 in Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi. Actors Tovino Thomas, Manju Warrier, and Indrajith Sukumaran will also reprise their roles in the upcoming movie.(PTI)



Will Ferrell, Reese Witherspoon on Indian weddings: Look like a lot of fun



NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Indian weddings seem like a whole lot of fun, say Hollywood actors Will Ferrell and Reese Witherspoon who have never managed to attend one. Weddings are very much a talking point for the two stars, looking forward to their romcom "You're Cordially Invited", the first time they are on screen together.

While Ferrell recalled that he once received an open invitation for one, Witherspoon got a glimpse into an Indian wedding through Mira Nair's 2001 film "Monsoon Wedding".

"I was staying at a hotel once where they were having an Indian wedding. I believe it was taking over the course of three days. We were asking some of the guests, like, 'What's going on?' They were like, 'Oh, my cousin's getting married. Do you guys want to come?' "It was like an open invite. I should have taken them up on the offer... it (an Indian wedding) looks like a lot of fun," Ferrell told PTI in a Zoom interview.

11th Smile International Film Festival for Children & Youth begins

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: The 11th edition of the Smile International Film Festival for Children & Youth (SIFFCY) opened in the national capital with the premiere of the acclaimed Italian film "The Tiger's Nest" starring Sunny Pawar of "Lion" fame.

The three-day festival will feature over 150 films, that include feature films, animation, short films, and documentaries, created by professional filmmakers, children, and students from more than 40 countries.

Ambassador of the European Union, Herve Delphin inaugurated the annual gala on Tuesday at the Siri Fort Auditorium where he was accompanied by festival chairman Santanu Mishra and festival director Jitendra Mishra.

Organised in partnership with the European Union (Delegation of the European Union to India), SIFFCY will conclude on Thursday. The annual festival is also being held over 100 locations across India in a hybrid mode.

Cinema is a universal language, Delphin said at the event.

"Europe and India stand as two incredible hubs of cinematographic creativity and culture! The European Union is happy to partner with SIFFCY again this year with films from over 15 EU countries. Starting from Delhi this show will go around cities in India with top movies for youth that will leave a trail of Smiles in its wake," added the ambassador of the European Union.

Pawar, who stars in Brando Quilici's film "The Tiger's Nest", said he was excited to be part of the festival.

"Films made for children and made by children make SIFFCY a unique international festival. I am hopeful that more films and content will be created especially for children across the world. This is much needed," the young actor said.

According to a press release, Poland is the country of honour, whereas Italy is the country of focus in SIFFCY 2025. A curated selection of some of the finest Polish and Italian films for the young audience is going to be presented during the festival.

"Lampo" from Poland, "Doubles Match" from Taiwan, "Bigman" from The Netherlands, "Winners" from Germany, "Soaring Wings" from India, "Greetings from Mars" from Germany, "7600" from Iran, "A Butterfly's Heart" from Lithuania will also be screened.

Ambassador of Finland to India, Kimmo Lahdevirta; Ambassador of Lithuania to India, Diana Mickeviciene; Ambassador of Georgia to India, Vakhtang Jaoshvili; Ambassador of Ukraine to India, Oleksandr Polishchuk; director, Polish Institute, New Delhi, Malgorzata Wejsis – Golebiak; and director, Italian Cultural Centre, Andrea Anastasio were among the guests of honour at the gala's inauguration.

Santanu Mishra, SIFFCY chairman, producer of "I am Kalam" and co-founder of Smile Foundation, said good cinema can play a crucial role in "shaping the young minds". "We are excited to present the India premiere of the internationally celebrated cinematic masterpiece The Tiger's Nest, directed by the brilliant Brando Quilici, at our festival this year. There's much more in store for the Indian audience throughout the week-long event," added Jitendra Mishra, SIFFCY festival director.

Various creative workshops and panel discussions will be held alongside screening of curated films during the festival. (PTI)

Documentary filmmaker-activist Tapan K Bose dies at 78

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Renowned documentary and activist Tapan K Bose died on Thursday at his residence here. He was 78. Bose, who started his activism stint during the Emergency period in the late 1970s, was a fearless advocate against human rights violations in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir. As a documentary director, his credits include "An Indian

As a documentary director, his credits include "An Indian Story on Bhagalpur Bindings" (1981), "Bhopal: Beyond



The prospect of attending an Indian wedding is amazing, added his co-star Witherspoon. "I've seen the movie 'Monsoon Wedding', which was very beautiful. I think it would be really fun to be there," the actor said.

The "Legally Blonde" star also collaborated with Nair for 2004's historical drama "Vanity Fair", the director's follow-up movie to "Monsoon Wedding".

"You're Cordially Invited", which premiered on Prime Video on Thursday, is directed by Nicholas Stoller, the director behind popular comedies "Forgetting Sarah Marshall", "The Five-Year Engagement" and "Neighbors".

The film revolves around two weddings that are accidentally scheduled at the same small island hotel on the same day. Witherspoon portrays Margot, a reality TV executive organising her sister's wedding. Ferrell is Jim, a widowed father preparing for his daughter's wedding. Comedic conflicts arise when they strive to outdo each other, each determined not to move. Also known for comedies such as "Sweet Home Alabama", "Just Like Heaven" and "Four

Christmases", the 48-year-old said she is "really specific" when it comes to films in the genre. "I basically decided to do this movie just because Nick Stoller was writing it, and Will Fer-

rell was in it. That's just... you can't fail. It's just gonna be funny. At the very least, you're just going to have an excellent time for two months. "... More people have told me they love this movie than many of my other movies," the Oscar winner said. Ferrell, who has many comedies, including "Anchorman", "Elf" and "The Other Guys", to his credit, said every new material presents a "fun challenge". "What's wonderful about this movie is that it's familiar territory. There have been wedding comedies before, so people already have a nice, easy entry point. At the same time, it's the reinvention of this kind of genre in a way that exceeds expectations," he added. (PTI)

Genocide" (1986), "Jharkhand" (1993) and "The Expendable People" (2016).

Bose was a part of a collective of activists, scientists, journalists and artists, who tried to strengthen the rationalist spirit of the Indian constitution and fight oppression - historic and contemporary, according to a statement.

"Tapan Bose was a very dear friend of communities who were oppressed by jingoistic nationalism and militarisation. His friendships across Balochistan, Burma, Kashmir, Naga areas and Tamil movement in Sri Lanka are well known.

"From the earlier part of his life when he made documentary films as a medium to counter undemocratic forces, he shifted to being an activist and a mentor to younger generations in resistance," it added. His knowledge of South Asia made him a recognised author with many academic publishers across the world and many younger film-makers, said Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace & Democracy.

"He committed himself to being available for communities and people who opposed the capitalist plunder of the earth and colonisation of resources and people. He extended his support to the trade union movement and was a close advisor to the fisheries peoples, forest workers movements," they added. Bose's last rites will be performed at Lodi Road Crematorium on Friday. He is survived by wife Rita Manchanda and daughter Devjani Saini. (PTI)



Film with Vishal sir set in '90s Mumbai, got quirks much like 'Kaminey': Shahid Kapoor



NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Actor Shahid Kapoor says it's a privilege to reunite with filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj for a fourth film, describing it as their "most open" project till date.

Kapoor, who previously collaborated with the acclaimed director on "Kaminey", "Haider", and "Rangoon", said the new movie is a love story, set against the backdrop of the Mumbai underworld in the 1990s.

Much like 2009's "Kaminey", the actor said the currently untitled film has a certain "quirkiness" to it.

"It's always been a privilege to work with Vishal sir. This is our most open film that we've made so far in terms of appeal and relatability... It's inherently a love story based against the backdrop of the Mumbai gangsters in the '90s...

"Like 'Kaminey', there's a quirk to the film... It has a certain uniqueness to the world, which in moments will feel a little heightened, which is very inter-

esting," Shahid told PTI in an interview here. Bhardwaj's film also stars Triptii Dimri, Nana Patekar and Randeep Hooda with Vikrant Massey in a special appearance.

The 43-year-old actor, who is awaiting the release of "Deva", said he is happy about working with such a stellar cast. "I'm excited to work with all of them, starting with Nana Patekar sir. Randeep Hooda and I have known each other for many years. So it's great to work with somebody of his calibre as an actor.

"We have a special appearance from Vikrant Massey, who I adore as an actor. We have crossed paths sometimes, I've always loved his work. There's Triptii, who's playing the female lead, and it's an extremely strong role for her. We're trying to make a film for a wide audience," he added.

"Deva", which arrives in theatres on Friday, will see Shahid playing the role of a rough-and-tough cop who goes to great lengths to seek justice for his colleague. According to the actor, his titular character from the Rosshan Andrrews directorial is another addition to the universe of 'angry young men' who are "very watchable" on the big screen.

.....

Shahid, who broke out of his "chocolate boy" image with films such as "Kaminey", "Udta Punjab", "Kabir Singh" and "Bloody Daddy", said he often fields questions about such characters and whether watching them on the screen is good for the masses.

"There are many versions of the angry young man that the audience has seen over time. The fact is that people are fascinated with such characters. They are very watchable. You might not want to come across them in real life. So it's maybe safer just to watch them on a screen when you know that it's fiction. (But) I don't exactly understand the psyche.

"Deva is a character in that ('angry young man') universe but there is much more to Deva than what meets the eye. There's one line in the film, which is also in our trailer. It says, 'Ye jo tera gussa hai na, ye tera darr hai'... All of us have made a subtle comment on the fact that sometimes anger, which can be intimidating, comes from fear," he added. The "charm" of such characters will remain as long as they're not done just for effect, he said.

"If it's inherently there in the personality of the character in the world of the film and feels organic, then the people will love it."

Deva's 'angry young man' connection first started doing social media rounds when the film's teaser poster featured Shahid smoking a cigarette in front of a mural of Amitabh Bachchan's Vijay from 1975's "Deewaar". (PTI)

SPORTS

India U-19 firm favourites in Women's T20 World Cup semifinal against England



KUALA LUMPUR (MALAYSIA), Jan 30: India would like to continue their flawless campaign when they take on England in the semifinal of the Women's U-19 T20 World Cup here on Friday.

Following a 10-wicket thrash-

ing of hosts Malaysia in their been in red-hot form across detournament opener, India hammered Sri Lanka by 60 runs. Bangladesh by eight wickets in their first Super Six game and ended the round with a massive 150-run win over Scotland.

partments with their last Super Six outing against Scotland sounding an ominous warning to the opponents.

The in-form opener Gongadi Trisha notched up a fabulous 110 the leading run-scorer in the The Niki Prasad-led side has off 59 balls with 13 fours and competition with 230 runs in five

four sixes, while her opening partner G Kamalini also gave a commanding display with a 42ball 51.

With scores of 4, 27 not out, 49, 40 and 110, Trisha has been

outings at 76.66, way ahead of England's best batter Davina Perrin who has 131 runs to show from four matches at 32.75 with one fifty.

India had shot our Scotland for a mere 58 runs in 14 overs in a Super Six match with Vaishnavi Sharma (3/5), Aayushi Shukla (4/8) and Trisha (3/6) leading the charge.

Vaishnavi and Aayushi have been at the forefront in the bowling department with 12 and 10 wickets respectively in the competition, which has helped India's cause to a great extent.

England will be wary of India's batting firepower and hope their players find their touch quickly in the contest, as a couple of wins and as many defeats in the four Super Six games do not really instil confidence.

Teams (from):

India: Niki Prasad (c), Sanika Chalke, G Trisha, Kamalini G, Bhavika Ahire, Ishwari Awasare, Mithila Vinod, Joshitha VJ, Sonam Yadav, Parunika Sisodiya, Kesari Drithi, Aayushi Shukla, Anandita Kishor, MD Shabnam, Vaishnavi S.

England: Abi Norgrove (c), Phoebe Brett, Olivia Brinsden, Tilly Corteen-Coleman, Trudy Johnson, Katie Jones, Charlotte Lambert, Eve O'Neill, Davina Perrin, Jemima Spence, Charlotte Stubbs, Amuruthaa Surenkumar, Prisha Thanawala, Erin Thomas, Grace Thompson.

Davis Cup action, happily soaking Match starts at 12:00pm IST.

Narmada shoots down national record to clinch women's 10m air rifle Gold

DEHRADUN, Jan 30: Former World Cup winner Narmada Nithin Raju overcame a strong field, which included Asian Games medallist Ramita Jindal and Olympian Elavenil Valarivan, to not just create a national record but miss equalling the world mark by a fraction of a point on her way to clinching gold in the women's 10m air rifle event at the 38th National Games here on Thursday. Narmada, representing Tamil Nadu, clinched the top podium finish with a score of 254.4, beating back the challenge from Maharashtra's Arya Borse (252.5) and

Ramita (230.4) in the eight-shooter final. In the process, she broke the national mark of 252.9 set by Olympian Apurvi Chandela at the 2019 World Cup in New Delhi. The world record in the event is 254.5 points, set by Huang Yuting of China at last year's ISSF World Cup Final in New Delhi.

This was 23-year-old Narmada's thirdbiggest career achievement in the event after she had won the 10m air rifle mixed team gold partnering Rudrankksh Patil at the 2023 Cairo World Cup and bagging a bronze at the World Cup in Bhopal the same

year. Self-assured and in total control of her nerves, Narmada, who was third at the end of the qualification round on Wednesday, shot a string of superb scores to stamp her authority over her more illustrious rivals in the final. She consistently shot high scores with three of her shots achieving maximum impact of 10.9, while another two shots in the 24-shot final fetched her 10.8.

She didn't go below 10 in any of her 24 shots in the final. Maharashtra's Arya Borse, 22, too enjoyed a great outing and, on any other day would have clinched a toppodium finish with a score 252.5 but the 2022 junior world cup gold medallist in team event wouldn't have known before the final that Narmada would come up with a record-breaking performance.

Haryana's Asian Games bronze medallist shooter Ramita, 21, who had shot a superb qualification-round score of 634.9 to top the qualification, had to settle for a bronze medal despite coming up with another loaded performance, which saw her shoot consistently 10-plus scores on Thursday. (PTI)

Back to Davis Cup action, Mukund hurt at India's plight on ranking charts

That was not the end of the night-

marish debut in Lucknow. The

AITA was not pleased and sought

to travel to Pakistan in January, cit-

ing a foot injury and also did not

make himself available for the tie

In between, he was banned by

AITA on disciplinary grounds

when no one had a clue, not even

the player that he has been sus-

pended. Captain Rohit Rajpal as-

sured him that he will have the ban

lifted if he makes himself available

However, he had already com-

mitted to play on the Tour and also

paid advance to his coach. This

further complicated the situation,

souring his relation with the na-

Cut to January 2025, the same

Mukund will be India's best-

ranked player for the World Group

I Play-off tie against Togo, starting

But Mukund does not like to

While he is excited to be back to

in the energy of the team environ-

ment, he does not like the fact the

he, the best-ranked Indian on the

court, is languishing at number

"Definitely, it hurts a little bit

when I read or when I look at the

numbers saying the number one-

ranked player is 360. This depth, it

kind of is disappointing, I have to

say, because first I am an Indian

tennis fan and then I am a player,"

Mukund said responding to a PTI

"In the past, I was 200 and

something and I was number five

(in India). But that, you know, was

because so many guys were much

is coming soon again, where the

number one is inside the top 100,

number two is knocking on top

"And God willing, that depth

360 on the ATP chart.

query on his comeback.

ahead of me.

call himself leader of the pack.

for the Sweden match.

tional federation.

Saturday.

against Sweden.

Worse was to follow. He refused

an explanation for the faux pas.

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: On his 100. Number three is somewhere Davis Cup debut, Sasikumar around 120, 130. So, that's the Mukund walked out of the court numbers we had pre-COVID cramping, wincing in pain and and, hopefully, we can hit that leaving India down 0-1 against again with all the wonderful tal-Morocco in September 2023. Not ent that we have in the present just this, he played wearing a jergeneration and in the next genersey which had India spelt wrong. ation."

That was an honest assessment of the slide that Indian tennis is facing

Mukund has always been a mature player on and off the court and it reflected further when he refused to be labelled as the leader of the pack for this tie.

"Since I was young, I have always enjoyed the team atmosphere. There was never a time where I did not like the team ambience. Sometimes, the individual tours get a little bit too lonely.

"When it comes to leading the team today, I don't like to use that word because I don't think nobody really leads a team. Each person is very, very important for the team. Even the number six player is equally important in my eyes as the number one.

"If he also does not give the intensity in practice, gives his 100 percent, the number one player can't practice, right? So, for me, I don't like those for myself. I mean, I don't think I want to also say I am leading Team India. I am part of Team India.'

India are in a situation where a player outside the top-350 is best ranked since Sumit Nagal, who touched a career-high rank of 68 last year, refused national duty again. He had missed the ties against Pakistan and Sweden in 2024.

Skipper Rajpal though hoped that he will have his best singles and doubles players in Nagal and Yuki Bhambri, back in the fold.

"It's a bit of a complex issue. Tennis is a very brutal game. The players are away from home, playing week after week, travelling week after week. It's really not easy to survive on the tour.

"And when I say we, I mean the support staff, I mean AITA. We all need to be a little bit more sensitive towards these guys. And because they're sensitive themselves, it's difficult to survive out there.

Several young players in New-look Champions League brings more Hockey India's probables' goals per game and more one-sided wins

list for FIH Pro League

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: India on Thursday included more than half-a-dozen young players in the long list of probables for the upcoming FIH Pro League, based on their performance in the Hockey India League and junior level competitions.

Among those included in the list of 32 senior probables for the first time are goalkeeper Princedeep Singh, defender Yashdeep Siwach, midfielders Rabichandra Singh and Rajinder Singh, and forwards Angad Bir Singh, Uttam Singh and Arshdeep Singh.

Veteran drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh will lead the side, while Hardik Singh will be his deputy for the Bhubaneswar leg of the Pro League, to be played at the Kalinga Stadium From February 15 to 25.

India's campaign will feature matches against Spain, Germany, Ireland and England, playing each team twice.

"Impressive performances in the junior team and the ongoing HIL has won 22-year-old Angad Bir Singh and 20-year-old Arshdeep Singh their first senior team call-ups for the upcoming FIH Pro League matches," said Hockey India in a statement.

Princedeep, a member of the gold-winning side at last year's Junior Asia Cup in Muscat, is a notable addition to the senior side and will join first-choice goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak and Suraj Karkera.

Yashdeep will be positioned in defence alongside veterans Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas and captain Harmanpreet, while in the midfield, Rabichandra Singh will have stalwarts Manpreet Singh, Hardik, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Nilakanta Sharma for company. Head coach Craig Fulton expressed confidence that the current set of players

would play entertaining, topnotch hockey in the Pro League. "Extremely happy with the squad we have selected for the Bhubaneswar leg matches of the FIH Pro League. I believe this team can win us games, perform in harmony and most importantly play an impressive brand of hockey

"Looking forward to training with the players in the camp and starting our Pro League campaign on the right note.'

India had finished seventh among nine teams in the 2023-24 edition of the Pro League but the European leg did not go as per expectations.

The team, however, came back from the setback to win a second successive bronze at the Paris Olympics.

"I have been scouting these players over the last few weeks and am excited to see what they do against some of the best international teams in the world," he added

Probables:

Goalkeepers: Krishan Ba-hadur Pathak, Suraj Karkera, Princedeep Singh.

Defenders: Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Harmanpreet Singh, Sumit, Sanjay, Jugraj Singh, Nilam Sanjeep Xess, Varun Kumar, Yashdeep Siwach

Midfielders: Rajkumar Pal, Shamsher Singh, Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek Prasad, Nilakanta Sagar Sharma, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, Rajinder Singh.

Forwards: Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Mandeep Singh, Gurjant Singh, Angad Bir Singh, Boby Singh Dhami, Shilanand Lakra, Dilpreet Singh, Araijeet Singh Hundal, Uttam Singh, Arshdeep Singh. (PTI)



LONDON, Jan 30: After a frantic last round of action Wednesday, the inaugural 36-team league phase in Champions League history is over. Here's a look at some of the numbers that tell the story of how the first season in the new-look format has gone:

144: The number of games in the 36-team league phase, up from 96 last year in the old 32-team group format.

3.27: Goals per game in the new format, up from 3.09 per game in last season's group stage.

Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski and Borussia Dortmund's Serhou Guirassy are joint top scorers with nine goals each.

28: The number of goals scored by Barcelona, six more than any other team in the league phase. Manchester City led the way with last season with 28 goals in its entire Champions League campaign, including knockout games.

7: Liverpool's winning streak stopped at seven games with a 3-2 loss at PSV Eindhoven. That loss meant there were no unbeaten teams in the league phase. Six teams qualified unbeaten from their groups last season.

23: The number of games won by a margin of four goals or more. Bayern Munich's 9-2 win over Dinamo Zagreb on the opening night set the tone as one-sided games were more

common. Last year only four group games were won by four goals or more. Having goal difference as the primary tiebreaker — unlike last year — gave stronger teams an incentive to run up the score.

0: The number of teams from eastern Europe that reached the knockout rounds, despite the expanded format. Clubs from Croatia, Czech Republic, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine all finished outside the top 24. Zagreb was closest in 25th but missed out on goal difference despite upsetting AC Milan 2-1. No eastern European team has played a Champions League knockout game since Shakhtar Donetsk in 2017-18. (AP)

2010 T20 WC final loss made me determined to win ICC trophy for 'White Ferns': Amelia Kerr

duck," she said. Born to former

Welington players Robbie and Jo,

far back as her maternal grandfa-

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Coming from a cricketers' family, the sport is in her DNA but it was New Zealand's loss in T20 World Cup final in 2010 against Australia that made Amelia Kerr want to be a White Fern and win an ICC tro-

phy for her country. Fourteen years later, she realised her goal of winning an ICC trophy by lifting the women's T20 World Cup in 2024. She also became the first New Zealander to win the ICC Women's Player of the Year award for her splendid show in 2024. "I was about 11 or 12 when our Tawa college boys

team won a tournament in Wellington and I was the captain and the only girl of the team. That was pretty special and then I used to watch White Ferns play on

TV," Kerr told a select media in an interaction felicitated by the ICC. "We lost the T20 WC final in 2010 and from that moment I wanted to become a White Fern and change as much as I can and try to achieve that," said Kerr, who was also chosen the ICC T20 Women Cricketer of the Year

2024. In the 2024 Women's T20 World Cup final against South Africa, her 43 off 38 and 3/24 played a big role in her side's maiden triumph and she was the Player of the Match in the finals. "It is a very special feeling. As

players we don't think about awards too much...but if I look back and reflect, the T20 WC win comes to mind, it was too special," said the 24-year-old who picked 15 wickets in the T20 World Cup -- the most by any bowler in a single edition of the tournament.

Coming from a family of sportspersons, Kerr started playing at a young age. She feels that playing cricket with boys has helped her immensely.

"As a kid I just loved playing any sport, not just cricket. I wanted to be the best. I played boys' cricket and that really helped me improve my game,' said the leg-spin all-rounder who scored 387 runs and took 29 wickets in 18 T20 matches in 2024. Asked how she manages to remain calm in tense situations,



she gave the credit to her upbringther, Bruce Murray, the former ing. "I have been like that since I New Zealand Test batter. Her was young. I think a lot of that elder sister Jess, who plays for comes from my family and the Wellington, was named in New messaging we had growing up. Zealand's national cricket squad My dad said to me once that if I against South Africa in 2020. "Mv role models are within my turn to the ground and walking off the field from that day I don't

family and they are very liberal. want to know from your reaction Cricket is such a fickle game and if you got a hundred or a golden there would be ups and downs, you have to take the good with the bad. It is so much more than Kerr's cricketing pedigree goes as the individual game. She hopes that the ICC award

and the World Cup inspire youngsters in her small country to look at cricket as a career option.

Asked if she tweaked anything in her game, she replied in negative. "For me, nothing has changed in my game or the process. Sometimes things go your way and sometimes they don't. I have worked on a few things in my bowling," she said.

"I want to keep improving. The accuracy in my bowing is potentially developing. I am having more confidence in my bowling to mix up pace as well. In batting, am looking to improve power and find different ways to score boundaries." A strong advocate of players' mental health well-being, Kerr feels the players should know that they are human beings first. "It is so important to look after yourself. You never know what's happening in someone's life. It's important to be patient and kind, to know that we are human beings first," said the stalwart who took a seven-month break from the game in 2021. (PTI)

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Sports

Samson's weakness against raw pace, finishing woes in focus

PUNE, Jan 30: Sanju Samson's technical weaknesses against express pace along with Rinku Singh's dip in form and fitness issues will be a concern for India when they take on a resurgent England in the fourth T20 International here on Friday.

Having fluffed their chances in the third T20I in Rajkot, the penultimate game of the five-match series gives the hosts another opportunity to seal the series going into the final game in Mumbai on February 2. Suryakumar Yadav's men won the first two games in Kolkata and Chennai.

Samson, the maverick keeper-batter from Kerala, whose sympathetic and loyal fan base never fails to remind everyone of the limited chances he has got, started the T20I season with three hundreds against Bangladesh and South Africa prior to the ongoing series.

In the current rubber, he has had scores of 26. 5 and 3 and it is not these numbers that are concerning. In T20 cricket, if one factors in risk, there would always be lot of less profitable days at the office considering the kind of strokes batters play these days.

But in case of Samson, what is of concern is his palpable discomfort against anything bowled above 145 clicks.

Against Bangladesh at home, he faced Taskin Ahmed, Tanzim Hasan Shakib while in South Africa Andile Simelane and Lutho Sipamla were among the bowlers.

These are not exactly intimidating fast bowlers and he rightfully took them to the cleaners. These are bowlers who fire in between 130 to 140 clicks and can be hit through the line on flat decks.

However, Jofra Archer and Mark Wood are different beasts, bowling between 145 kmph to 155 kmph and that pace is creating problems for Samson.

During all three games, the Kerala batter couldn't even get his bat down as deliveries would thud into Phil Salt's gloves. The hard lengths and steep bounce are

District level competition under Khel Maharan 2.0 from February 6 at Nagaon

HT Correspondent NAGAON, Jan 30: A preparatory meeting was held at the conference hall of Nagaon District Commissioner's office, chaired by additional district commissioner Sudip Nath, to discuss the upcoming Khel Maharan 2.0 district-level competitions.

The meeting decided to organise the district-level competitions on February 6, 7, and 8, 2025, at the Nagaon Sports Association (Nurul Amin Stadium) playground. The competitions will feature events like athletics, football, volleyball, cycling, kabaddi, and chess, among others.

Over 208 winners from the seven assembly constituencies in the district will participate in the competitions. The Nagaon district administration and the District

4th T20] creating a problem and even on batting shirtcoach Sitanshu Kotak and the himself.

fronts, it is not easy to hit through the line if one doesn't have proper technique or doesn't regularly face this quality of fast bowling.

Samson is one of head coach Gautam Gambhir's favourites and it is expected that he would be persisted with going into next year's T20 World Cup.

But his technical issues need to be sorted out at the earliest by Gambhir, new batting his T20I career, has gone off the rails.

Rinku Singh's back spasms forced the team management to try Dhruv Jurel in the No.7 position but he has looked out of place in this particular format unlike Test cricket. Rinku was rested for the first two games and he is expected to be fit before the fourth match.

When Gambhir became Kolkata Knikght Riders mentor, Rinku got to play a total of 70 odd balls in the 2024 IPL. As a result, he couldn't make it to the T20 World Cup as Shivam Dube, with his bowling ability, was considered better in Americas.

The Indian middle order hasn't exactly played England spinner Adil Rashid well so far and with Dube back in the mix, will Gambhir take a chance with him?

Looks unlikely as given the pace of England speedsters even the burly Mumbaikar would be ill at ease.

The third option is Ramandeep Singh, who also looks exciting as a finisher and is a better seamer than Dube. But even he is

Mohammed Shami needs a lot of bowling in match situations and the Rajkot game was a decent restart to his international career

While a bilateral series win counts for little, Gambhir wouldn't like the ignominy of being the first coach under whom India lost

Hence, it would be interesting if Arshdeep Singh, India's best T20I bowler in absence and give some breakthroughs in the Power-

after 13 years.

sixth wicket.

and a six.

front.

The pace trio of Navdeep Saini,

Siddhant Sharma and Money

Grewal exploited the early morn-

ing conditions to reduce Railways

to 66 for five in the first session

before Upendra and veteran spin-

ner Karn Sharma (50 off 105)

forged a 104-run stand for the

Kohli's towering presence on

the field fired up players on both

sides with an unprecedented fan

attendance adding to the intensity.

in the stands for a Ranji Trophy

game that would be otherwise

played in front of empty stands,

Upendra made a big impact after

Upendra was on course for a

third hundred of the season but

fell towards the close of play after

mistiming an aerial hit off left-

arm spinner Sumit Mathur to be

caught at long-off. In the previous

over, Upendra had played a cou-

ple of pull shots to get into the

90s. In total, he collected 10 fours

His partnership with left-hander

Karn frustrated Delhi as the pitch

Delhi skipper Ayush Badoni, who

is a primarily a batter, has been the

team's leading wicket-taker in the

season with his off-spin, summing

up the side's issues on the bowling

eased out after the morning session.

the fine show by Delhi pacers.

With more than 12,000 people

India: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Tilak Varma, Axar Patel, Hardik Pandya, Washington Sundar, Varun Chakravarthy, Ravi Bishnoi, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammed Shami, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Rinku Singh, Shivam Dube, Ramandeep Singh, Harshit Rana.

England: Jos Buttler (captain), Phil Salt (wk), Ben Duckett, Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone, Jamie Smith (wk), Adil Rashid, Brydon Carse, Jamie Overton, Gus Atkinson, Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Mark Wood, Jacob Bethell, Saqib Mahmood. Match Starts at 7 pm IST. (PTI)

Railways' Upendra Yadav, Delhi pacers share spoils on Kohli's grand homecoming



NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Upendra Delhi's pacers in the morning, Saini bowled with a lot of heart in Yadav negated Delhi's early advantage with a resolute 95 to steer the afternoon session. Saini broke Uttar Pradesh to 241 on day one the partnership between Karn and of their Ranji Trophy tie domi-Upendra in the 53rd over with the nated by Virat Kohli's grand releft-hander getting caught at fineturn to domestic red-ball cricket leg after a wild slog.

The very next ball, Saini fired one into the pads, trapping Ayan Chaudhari plumb in front. Those twin strikes gave Delhi some momentum, leaving Railways at 182 for seven at tea. Saini had removed opener Vivek Singh earlier in the day with a ball that seamed back in to dislodge the timber.

Left-arm spinner Mathur cleaned up the tail, drawing a loud roar from the crowd which had come to see Kohli bat.

Saini and Grewal bowled 18 and 17 overs respectively while the left-arm pacer Siddhant was used for nine overs.

Irrespective of the level of cricket, Kohli's intensity is usually sky high and it was evident in the field throughout as he kept the crowd involved to fire his team. He was mainly standing at second slip to the pacers but was also seen at cover for a considerable period

He left the field twice briefly only to return to a rousing reception. The cheers will be louder when Kohli comes out to bat on Friday.

At stumps, Delhi reached 41 for one in 10 overs. **Brief scores:**

Railways 241 all out in 67.4 overs (Upendra Yadav 95, Karn Sharma 50; Navdeep Sain 3/62, Sumit Mathur 3/20. Money Grewal While Grewal was the pick of 2/49). Delhi 41/1 in 10 overs. (PTI)

Khel Maharan 2.0: Sonitpur District **Swimming Selection Trial on February 1**

Gaddafi Stadium to be handed over to ICC for **Champions Trophy on February 11: PCB source**

LAHORE, Jan 30: Amid rising concerns over the readiness of Champions Trophy venues in the country, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has said that the iconic Gaddafi Stadium here would be handed over to the ICC on February 11, little over a week before the start of the ODI showpiece.

The PCB posted a video of the new-look stadium on 'X' and wrote, "Under the lights, it's a sight to behold!...We can't wait to welcome fans, officials and teams for the tri-nation series and Champions Trophy." The mega-event begins on February 19.

A Board source told PTI that the stadium will be handed over to the International Cricket Council (ICC), "for branding and other stuff on February 11" after Pakistan's triseries against New Zealand and South Africa.

The ICC had set January 31 as the deadline



But even Rinku, after a glorious start to

untested against quality pace attack. without being spectacular.

a home T20I series against England. of Jasprit Bumrah is in line to come back

play overs. Teams:

Sports Office have appealed to the people of Nagaon to extend their cooperation and support in making the event a success.

The preparatory meeting was attended by officials from district administration, including additional district commissioner - Philis V.L.H. Hranchhal, assistant district commissioner Nava Pegu, district sports officer Prateem Baruah, representatives of the district's MLAs, and members of the Khel Maharan 2.0 district-level committee, among others.

for the handover of all three stadiums -Gaddafi Stadium (Lahore), National Stadium (Karachi) and the Rawalpindi Stadium -which will host the global event in Pakistan.

The source added that "final touches" were being given to the Gaddafi Stadium.

...this has been a construction site and there will be some rubble, which will be removed shortly. This stadium has taken shape after six months of work," said the source.

The eight-team Champions Trophy is being held in Pakistan but India will play all its

matches in Dubai owing to security concerns.

Pakistan's leading english daily 'Dawn' had recently carried a story which stated that "it seems absolutely impossible to contemplate the renovation work being completed within the deadline, but the personnel handed the re-

sponsibility are beaming with confidence.' The PCB has also insisted that the National Stadium in Karachi will be ready in time as well. The venue will host the opening match of event between Pakistan and New Zealand

on February 19.

Ranji Trophy game. But such was his

magnetic pull that even those lofty calcu-

local time, the 36-year-old Kohli's loyal

band of supporters were jostling to enter

the stadium where entry is free for do-

6,000-capacity 'Gautam Gambhir Stand'

for spectators but sensing that the crowd

situation could go out of hand, the offi-

cials were forced to open the 'Bishan

At first, the DDCA opened the roughly

Long before the start of play at 9.30am

lations went for a toss.

mestic matches.

The PCB has spent around PKR 12 billion on renovation, construction and installation of equipment at all three venues. Tickets have already gone on sale but until the PCB announces they have possession of the new-look stadiums, concerns will remain.

On Tuesday, ICC CEO Geoff Allardice resigned after the governing body's board expressed dissatisfaction with his failure to give a clear picture of Pakistan's preparedness for the event. (PTI)

HT Correspondent TEZPUR, Jan 30: The Sonitpur District Swimming Selection Trial for Khel Maharan 2.0 is scheduled to take place on February 1 at Tezpur Swimming Club, Hazarapar Pond, from 8:00 am onwards. The competition aims to identify talented swimmers who will represent Sonitpur District at the Zonal Level Competition of Khel Maharan 2.0.

The selection trial will feature events in freestyle and backstroke for both boys and girls under two age categories – Under-14 and Under-17. Participants will compete in 50-meter and 100-meter races. Organizers have encouraged young swimmers from across the district to take part in the event and showcase their potential. For further details, interested participants can contact Smt. Lawnita Borah (9854009472) or Debasish Hazarika (7896781452).

IOC presidential candidates itch behind closed-doors

LAUSSANE, Jan 30: Behind closed doors on Thursday, seven candidates hoping to lead the International Olympic Committee are making key pitches to an exclusive club of more than 100 voters.

The only set-piece campaign event before the March 20 election in Greece lets each candidate make a 15-minute presentation that will not be broadcast and is open only to IOC members.

Those voters also are barred from asking questions of their seven colleagues competing for perhaps the most influential job in sports, and one that increasingly has a role in real world politics.

It is an opaque and quirky process to decide the first contested IOC presidential election since 2013, succeeding Thomas Bach who has reached the limit of 12 years in office.

The candidates include two Olympic gold medalists, Sebastian Coe and Kirsty Coventry; the son of a former IOC president, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr; and a member of the royal family of Jordan, Prince Feisal al Hussein.

Four are presidents of Olympic sports bodies: Johan Eliasch from skiing, David Lappartient from cycling, and Morinari Watanabe from gymnastics. Coe also leads track and field's World Athletics, organized the 2012 London Olympics and is widely viewed as the most qualified candidate. (AP)



NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Delirious fans screamed in excitement at the mere mention of his name as Virat Kohli's unmatched aura dominated the Ranji Trophy fixture between Delhi and Railways here on Thursday, triggering an unprecedented rush for seats in the stands that forced administrators to make additional last-minute arrangements.

The DDCA (Delhi and Districts Cricket Association) had projected a crowd of around 10,000 for Kohli's homecoming, which is unheard for a

Singh Bedi Stand' which can accommodate around 11,000 people.

"I have never seen something like this in Ranji Trophy. Even in my playing days, there was hardly anyone who made the effort to watch domestic cricket. It is just because of one man," a former India player present at the ground told PTI.

Homecoming of a King: Exuberant fans turn Delhi

Ranji game into spectacle for a glimpse of Kohli

What added to the commotion was the movement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cavalcade past the ground at the same time.

"I have been involved in Delhi cricket for more than 30 years but I have not witnessed such scenes for a Ranji Trophy game. It just shows the Kohli's popularity is unmatched," an overwhelmed DDCA secretary Ashok Sharma told PTI.

"What made it more challenging was that fans entering the stadium coincided with the VIP movement of PM Modi on the outside roads and as part of his strict security protocol and to maintain order, we were instructed by the police to open another stand for the public," he revealed. The Delhi Police also issued a state-

ment after some chaos outside the stadium, assuring that nothing untoward happened in the melee.

"Additional gates were soon opened, easing the situation. No injuries were reported, and the situation is now under control." it said in a statement.

The last time a domestic match evoked such a response from the fans was when the great Sachin Tendulkar played his final first-class game, for Mumbai, back in 2013 in the small town of Lahli in Haryana. That stadium, which did not have proper stands for spectators, witnessed a turnout of about 8,000, a massive number for the venue.

At the Arun Jaitley Stadium on Thursday, the 'Gautam Gambhir Stand' was already packed to the rafters and it hardly took time to fill the lower tier of the 'Bishan Bedi Stand', taking the crowd count well past 12,000 at toss.

The deafening roars of "Kohli, Kohli" could be heard from a distance as the former India captain took the field with the rest of the Delhi teammates who too were experiencing something special.

Their hopes of watching him bat did not come true immediately as Delhi opted to bowl after winning the toss. But Kohli's mere presence on the field was enough to keep the fans hooked to the proceedings.

Manning the second slip, his every move attracted a cheer from the crowd and in the 12th over, an overzealous fan breached the security to run towards the 'King

He just about managed to touch Kohli's feet before being whisked away by the security. Well aware of his popularity, Kohli did not forget to acknowledge the crowd every now and then with a wave of the hand, showing respect towards the people who were there only to catch a glimpse of him.

The immensely popular star is loved across age groups and on Thursday, the ones who came to support him included a bunch of school kids, a budding female cricketer and a housewife among several others

"We have taken off from school to watch Kohli," said the kids in a group of four.

When told that Kohli would not be batting anytime soon with Delhi opting to field, they said: "It doesn't matter, we will watch him field."

A girl child, studying in class II, was also in the crowd. Fans started to make a beeline to the stadium as early as 6am.

"I came here at 6 am with my son. We did not know which gate to enter from. It goes without saying that we are here for Kohli," said a housewife.

A young man, who was screaming the star batter's name while entering the stadium, said he was here to watch Kohli get back in form after a disappointing run in the Border-Gavaskar series against Australia.

"He should get a hundred, else the fans would be very disappointed. Everyone is here to watch only him. This is not the turnout for a Ranji match normally," he said

With the chants of his name reverberating every few minutes, it wouldn't be wrong to say that one man turned an otherwise mundane Ranji clash into a spectacle. (PTI)

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