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-The Hills Times

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Rescue ops on for 4th day, CIL brings heavy-duty pump from Maharashtra Trapped 8 labourers yet to be located



UMRANGSO, Jan 9: Rescue operations by multiple state and central agencies continued for the fourth day on Thursday to locate trapped miners inside an illegal rat-hole coal mine in

Dima Hasao district of Assam.

The search operations resumed early in the morning after the dewatering exercise all night

and the Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) has gone inside the flooded shaft, a senior official of Assam Police told PTI.

"So far, nothing has been detected by the ROV. It is trying very hard to locate the trapped miner despite the extremely hostile and difficult situation. The water inside is totally blackened and it is creating problems in finding anything," he added.

Additionally, four deep divers from the Navy also went inside the flooded shaft to find the trapped miners, the official said.

A united effort is being made by the Navy,

Army, NDRF, SDRF, ONGC, Coal India and district administration to trace the workers trapped inside.

WCL team joins rescue ops

NAGPUR, Jan 9: An expert rescue team of Nagpur-headquartered Western Coalfields Limited (WCL) has gone to Assam to take part in the operations to rescue labourers trapped inside a quarry in Umrangso. "A five-member team was flown to the accident site in a C-130 Hercules plane on January 8. The team is equipped with massive submersible pump that can pump out 500 gallons of water per minute at a height of 150 metres, complex cable network, starters and other equipment to help in the rescue operations," a WCL release said. "The heavy duty submersible pump will be installed at the incident spot where the miners are trapped and it will pump out water. The rescue team responded to the emergency call in just four hours with all the necessary equipment needed," it added. The WCL rescue team is considered among the best for such operations and had also taken part in operations to rescue workers trapped in a tunnel in Uttarakhand, officials said. (PTI)

The labourers were on Monday trapped inside the 3-Kilo Coal Quarry in Umrangso area, around 250 km from Guwahati, after a sudden gush of water flooded the site.

According to employees of the quarry, there were around 15 workers inside the illegal mine when water breached one of the walls and flooded the entire shaft and tunnels.

"We were told by the miners that nine were missing and the rest escaped the tragedy. Out of them, one body was retrieved yesterday," the official said. He (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Veteran Assamese actress Inanada Kakati dies at 94

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Veteran Assamese filmstar Inanada Kakati, one of the first Indian actresses to get global recognition, died at a hospital due to age-related ailments.

She was 94. Kakati was admitted to a private hospital in Shillong, where she breathed her last on Wednesday night, doctors said. She is survived by daughter Juri Kakati.

She was the first Assamese and one of the first Indian actresses to receive international recognition and fame when her film 'Puberun', directed by ace filmmaker Prabhat Mukherjee, was selected to be screened at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1959.

"She was invited as a special guest there. The film 'Puberun' was the only film to represent India at the Berlin International Film Festival in that year along-side films like 'Breathless' of



France's Jean Luc Goddard," film and TV personality Bobbeeta Sharma told PTI.

Sharma, who had made a documentary on the life and works of Kakati, said the veteran actor acted in 14 Assamese films and four Bengali films. Her first film was 'Parghat' in

1949, which was the seventh Assamese film. Since then, she has been a popular Assamese actress and acted in several movies, five of which won national awards.

"Living in a remote corner of India and making a foray into acting in films, that too after marriage in a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gauhati HC Bar Association opposes relocation of court complex

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: The Gauhati High Court Bar Association (GHCBA) on Thursday opposed the Assam government's decision to relocate the high court complex from its current location in the heart of Guwahati city to the northern bank of the Brahmaputra.

The GHCBA convened an extraordinary general meeting to address the government's recent decision to shift the Gauhati High Court to Rangmahal in North Guwahati.

"This move has been met with unanimous opposition from the legal fraternity, citing concerns over accessibility, infrastructure, and the lack of consultation with stakeholders," the Bar Association said in a release.

The GHCBA pointed out that despite prior assurances from the chief minister that the relocation would not take place until the completion of the ongoing bridge construction over the Brahmaputra, which will connect the southern and northern banks, the government proceeded with land acquisition for the pro-

posed judicial township at Rangmahal.

The statement also pointed out that there was a commitment from the Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court to involve the Bar Association in such decisions, but it was not done while deciding the relocation.

"The GHCBA condemns this unilateral action, emphasising that the relocation to a remote area lacking adequate infrastructure will significantly impede the efficiency of legal proceedings and adversely affect litigants and legal professionals," it added.

The association demanded an immediate halt to the project in the interest of all stakeholders and the public at large.

"The General Body resolved to escalate their opposition to the highest echelons of the judiciary and executive, seeking immediate consultations with the chief minister and the chief justice to present their case against the relocation," it added. The GHCBA said it is committed to pursuing democratic and lawful avenues (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

New surveys to be conducted in Assam for PMAY beneficiaries: Shivraj

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Union minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan on Thursday said that the government has decided to conduct a fresh survey in Assam to find out the people who left out in getting a house under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY).

Chauhan, who was in Guwahati today, took part in a program where he distributed houses under the PMAY scheme to 50,000 beneficiaries in the state.

"Prime Minister Modi gives immense importance in the development of the northeast. He took an aim to build at least 20 lakh houses under PMAY initiative in this region. Today apart from distributing 50,000 houses, I have sanctioned another more than 3 lakh houses for Assam. These houses will be handed over within the next financial year," he added.

The Union minister further stated that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma raised his concern about the



people who were left out from the list of Awas Yojana as the surveys were taken place earlier.

"I understand the concern of the Chief Minister and it has been decided to conduct another fresh survey for the PMAY. Actually families get bigger day to day and the requirement of fresh houses come up and therefore, we must carry out new surveys," he said.

Chauhan also praised Sarma and said, "Himanta Biswa Sarma has been doing excellent work for the state."

He further said that Assam has successfully implemented the Lakhpati Didi scheme here and the performance of the state is better than the expectation.

Earlier in the day, Chauhan visited Kamakhya (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gaurav Gogoi demands new policy on GST

JORHAT, Jan 9: Jorhat MP and deputy leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi has sought a new policy on Goods and Services Tax (GST) in the Union budget for the next financial year (2025-26), which will be tabled by the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1.

Addressing newsmen at the Jorhat District Congress Bhawan on Thursday, Gogoi said that the National Congress (INC) has from time to time been calling for a new GST 2.0 policy in order to provide relief from the heavy tax burden on economically marginalised and middle-class people.

"There is a strong need for a new GST policy under which there would be a reduction on GST rates to provide relief to the large section of the population who were economically backward," said Gogoi terming the present GST as "Gabbar Singh tax".

Stating that the Congress party had in its 2024 Lok Sabha polls

manifesto to bring a new GST policy if the party comes to power, Gogoi said that the party has renewed the call for a new GST policy to be announced in the upcoming Union budget.

Elaborating upon the need for a new GST policy the Jorhat MP stated, "The first point is that under the present GST policy, the poor and the middle-class sections of the society, which comprises a large chunk of the population of the country, are bearing a huge tax burden in view of GST imposed on lot of consumable items of daily use."

Gogoi further pointed out that the economically disadvantaged and middle class were paying more tax under the present GST regime than the rich and privileged.

"In some goods it was 12 per cent and 18 per cent in some other items thereby adversely impacting the lives of the people," he added.

The MP also quoted data from research (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam secures fourth spot on The New York Times' 52 places to visit in 2025



Hiranya Barman
GUWAHATI, Jan 9: The New York Times has listed Assam in the fourth place among the 52 places to visit in 2025, the only state from India and Northeast.

"Assam, a hilly state near the borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh, has long been a gateway to Northeast India, a remote, culturally distinct and comparatively crowd-free region that hangs

as if by a thread from the country's mainland. Now, the area is seeing both more international recognition and increased accessibility," the New York Times said.

The news paper further noted that in 2024, the Charaideo Moidam, or Pyramids of Assam, was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. These ancient burial mounds, constructed during the Ahom dynasty between the 13th and 19th centuries, offer a unique glimpse into the region's royal legacy and spiritual essence.

"Travelers can also visit the state's world-famous tea gardens and Kaziranga National Park, where endangered one-horned rhinoceros can be found. Improved infrastructure, including new roads, makes getting there (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Afghanistan no threat to any nation, its foreign minister tells India

ISLAMABAD, Jan 9: Afghanistan has assured New Delhi that it does not pose a threat to any nation and expressed hope for raising the level of diplomatic relations with India, which it described as "a key regional and economic player."

In a statement issued after the first publicly acknowledged engagement between Kabul and New Delhi after the Taliban government came to power, Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry urged raising the level of diplomatic relations, and easing the visa regime for Afghan businessmen, patients and students.

Afghanistan's acting foreign minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi and Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

AAP pressuring us through partners for support in Delhi: Congress

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: With the AAP facing "anti-incumbency" in Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal is "panicking" and is trying to pressure the Congress through its partners but "we are not going to make any kind of alliance" with his party, city Congress chief Devender Yadav said on Thursday.

He also said there is no official statement from INDIA bloc parties about supporting the Aam Aadmi Party in upcoming Delhi assembly polls, and any alliance leader making statement to this effect is doing so in his or her own individual capacity.

Kejriwal, as the chief minister for last 11 years, is not ready to discuss the problems of Delhi, Yadav told PTI Videos.

He also took a jibe at Kejriwal

for raising the issue of reservation to the capital's Jat community, and demanding its inclusion in the Central OBC list.

Kejriwal sees his New Delhi assembly seat and government slipping away from him that is why he is bringing new agendas, Yadav said.

Earlier in the day, AAP convenor and former chief minister Kejriwal told a press conference the BJP-led Central government has reneged on its promise to provide reservation to the capital's Jat community. Kejriwal said he wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding the inclusion of Delhi's Jat community in the Central OBC list.

"The way Kejriwal remembered the OBC issue of Jats in Delhi

today is just politics and nothing else," Yadav said.

"As far as the support of all the INDIA alliance parties is concerned, no official statement has come from the parties that anyone is supporting the AAP. We are fighting elections in Delhi independently," Yadav said, adding those who are making statement in support of the AAP are doing so as individual leaders.

He said the Congress will keep highlighting any shortcoming it finds with the AAP government.

The Congress will come up with a manifesto that reflects the needs of the people of Delhi, he said, adding they have carried forward their campaign in a systematic way. The Congress has fielded a strong (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Army airstrike on village in western Myanmar killed at least 40 people: Reports

BANGKOK, Jan 9: An airstrike by Myanmar's army on a village under the control of an armed ethnic minority group killed about 40 people and injured at least 20 others, officials of the group and a local charity said Thursday. They said hundreds of houses burned in a fire triggered by the bombing.

The attack occurred Wednesday in Kyauk Ni Maw village on Ramree island, an area controlled by the ethnic Arakan Army in western Rakhine state, they said. The military has not announced any attack in the area.

The situation in the village could not be independently confirmed, with access to the internet and cellphone service in the area mostly cut off.

Myanmar is wracked by violence that began when the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021. After the army used lethal force to suppress peaceful demonstrations, many opponents of military rule took up arms and large parts of the country are now embroiled in conflict.

Khaing Thukha, a spokesperson for the Arakan Army, told The Associated Press that a jet fighter bombed the village on Wednes-

day afternoon, killing 40 civilians and injuring more than 20 others.

"All the dead were civilians. Among the dead and injured are women and children," Khaing Thukha said. A fire started by the airstrike spread through the village, destroying more than 500 houses, Khaing Thukha added.

It was unclear why the village was targeted. The leader of a local charity group and independent media also reported the airstrike and casualties.

The military government has stepped up airstrikes over the past three years on armed pro-democracy groups collectively known as the People's Defence Force and on armed ethnic minority groups that have been fighting for decades for greater autonomy. The two groups sometimes carry out joint operations against the army.

Ramree, 340 km northwest of Yangon, the country's largest city, was captured by the Arakan Army in March last year.

The Arakan Army is the well-trained and well-armed military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority movement which seeks autonomy from Myanmar's (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The idea proved timeless, going viral again, amassing over 154 million views in just 2-3 days' Assam Police's online road safety drive reaches 154 mn views

GUWAHATI, Jan 9: Assam Police's special digital awareness drive, 'DJ Lockup', targeting drunken driving, reached a staggering 154 million views, resulting in a 55 per cent drop in accidents in Guwahati compared to previous year, a senior official said on Thursday.

In December last week, Assam Police revived its awareness theme and built the road safety campaign for New Year celebrations around the caption 'DJ Lockup' as part of the larger initiative called 'No Regret New Year'.

"The idea proved timeless, going viral again, amassing over 154 million views in just 2-3 days. The initiative garnered over 100 media mentions in local, national and international outlets, positioning Assam Police as a leader in innovative public safety campaigns," special DGP Harmeet Singh told PTI.



This time, it resonated not just as a social media trend but as a potent tool for behaviour change with the campaign earning accolades nationwide, he added.

"The success of #DJLockup isn't just measured in likes and shares. The campaign's tangible impact is evident in significant reduction of drunken driving cases in Guwahati. On December 31,

the number of such cases dropped by a staggering 55 per cent compared to the previous year," Singh said.

This campaign translated to fewer accidents, injuries and lives lost -- a testament to the power of creative awareness, he added.

"Police departments from Punjab to Gujarat adapted the idea for their own campaigns with many retaining the core essence of #DJLockup while adding local flair. The ripple effect was undeniable as police forces in Delhi, Shillong, Kolkata and Ahmedabad rolled out their versions inspired by Assam Police," Singh claimed.

He also pointed out that the campaign received mentions in international outlets and endorsements from influential personalities, including the likes of Anand Mahindra applauding a Punjab Police (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP gears up for upcoming Gaon Panchayat polls

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Jan 9: The Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) on Thursday held their first meeting with the party workers for the upcoming Gaon panchayat polls.

Party workers and representatives from three Lok Sabha seats viz. Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Lakhimpur participated in the meeting chaired by the BJP state president Bhabesh Kalita.

Talking to media persons, state BJP president Bhabesh Kalita said, "We have organised the meeting here for the upcoming Gaon Panchayat elections. We have discussed strategies and a roadmap for the polls. We will take up development as our agenda for the Gaon panchayat polls. It's a grassroots election and very important for us".

State BJP spokesperson Subhash Dutta said, "We have organised a party meeting for the



upcoming Gaon panchayat polls in Dibrugarh where district presidents from eight districts of upper Assam have participated to discuss the roadmap and strategies ahead of the panchayat polls".

"The meeting was held for Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur

Lok Sabha seats. Legislatures from all the legislative assemblies attended the meeting. Gaon panchayat elections is very important for us because we have taken a slew of measures to strengthen the Gaon Panchayat," Dutta said.

Assam Pradesh BJP Prabhari

Harish Dwivedi, state BJP president Bhabesh Kalita, Lakhimpur Lok Sabha MP Pradhan Baruah, state education minister Prasanoj Pegu, power minister Prasanta Phukan, MLAs and party members from respective legislative assemblies participated in the meeting. The elections will determine representatives for 397 Zilla Parishad Constituencies, 181 Anchalik Panchayats, 2,193 Gaon Panchayats, and 21,930 wards in 27 districts, excluding Sixth Schedule and municipal areas.

The Assam State Election Commission has recently published the draft electoral rolls, factoring in the 2024 delimitation of village, Anchalik, and Zilla Parishad constituencies.

The rolls list 17,554,589 voters, including 8,829,927 male voters, 8,724,274 female voters, and 388 other voters, across 23,781 polling stations.

Assam Yogis bring home medals from Singapore

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 9: In the 10th Asian Yogasana Championship held in Singapore from January 6 to 8, two yogis from Assam, Dishna JR Chanda and Udit Rani Bora, won medals for the Indian team.

Dishna JR Chanda won a gold medal in the Yogasana competition, a gold medal in the Free Flow Yogasana, a silver medal in the Artistic Yogasana, and a bronze medal in the Artistic Pair Yogasana.

Similarly, Udit Rani Bora won a gold medal in the Yogasana competition, a bronze medal in the Artistic Pair Yogasana, and a silver medal in the Rhythmic Yogasana.

Another Assamese yogi, Jayarani Deka, secured the sixth position in the competition, bringing pride to the state.

It's worth mentioning that Udit Rani Bora had also won a silver medal in the 8th Asian Yogasana Championship held in Kerala in 2018.

The 10th Asian Yogasana Championship was organised by the Asian Yoga Federation and saw participation from 15 countries.

The Indian team's performance in the championship was impressive, with Assam's yogis making significant contributions to the team's medal tally.

Two NSS volunteers to participate in Young Leaders' Dialogue

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 9: Niku Ghosh and Ananya Devi, NSS volunteers of Nowgong College (Autonomous) will be representing the institution in the National Level Championship, "Viksit Bharat Young Leaders' Dialogue" organised by the Government of India in New Delhi from January 11 to 12.

A press release stated that they will present their ideas in front of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Both are participating members of 30 other youth selected by the State Directorate of Sports and Youth Welfare for participation in the National Event.

They cleared the online quiz, essay round and the Viksit Bharat Vision Pitch Deck State Level presentation before making it into the National Level contest.

Governor of Assam felicitated both the participants among other participant members at Raj Bhavan before leaving to Delhi, stated in the same press note issued by Dr Bhuban Ch Chutia, programme officer of NSS Unit, Nowgong College (Autonomous).

Dr Pulin Ch Borah, principal (i/c) of the college mentioned that it is great achievement for the entire college fraternity and expressed his best wishes to both of them.

Emphasis on progress of various developmental activities in the district



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Jan 9: The DDC meeting of Sonitpur District for the current month was held on Thursday to review the actions taken by various departments based on the directions of Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, during his review meeting with district officials on December 28 last.

DC, Ankur Bharali reviewed the progress of FHTC coverage under Har Ghar Jal, with the district commissioner directing the PHE department to conduct a proper assessment of the coverage.

He also addressed the issues related to teacher rationalisation, specifically the status of single-teacher and zero-teacher schools in the district, particularly in Bodo-medium schools.

Bharali urged officials to utilise Mission Basundhara 3.0 for processing office land records efficiently.

He emphasized the need to create awareness about the PM Fasal Bima Yojana and the importance of AADHAAR seeding for farmers.

Other agendas included NFSA cards, the progress of Model Anganwadi Centres, updates on PM Vishwakarma, the status of Asom

Mala roads, and pending works under the PWD Building department.

Updates on Khel Maharan 2.0 and preparations for the Mega Jhum event were also reviewed.

The district transport officer provided a brief update on the month-long programs including awareness and enforcement drives both on-going and those planned as part of the National Road Safety Month observed from January 1 to January 31 2025.

Additionally, discussions covered the Catch the Rain Campaign, and target achievements of the Excise and Tax departments.

Notably, the district commissioner also appealed to all Heads of Departments in the District Administration to actively participate in the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyan and become Nikshay Mitras, supporting TB patients in their fight against the disease.

The meeting was attended by district development commissioner Lakhinandan Saharia, additional district commissioners, heads of departments, and other concerned officials of the District Administration.

'CEM's Open Interaction Programme' announced in Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Jan 9: The Chief Executive Member (CEM), Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, has announced the schedule for the first-ever CEM's Open Interaction Program, marking a significant step towards fostering direct communication between the Council and the people of Karbi Anglong.

The program is set to commence on January 11, 2025, and will conclude on March 8, 2025, covering all 26 Member of Autonomous Council constituencies across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts.

This initiative provides a platform for citizens to share their needs, aspirations, and concerns directly with the CEM, executive members (EMs), members of legislative assembly (MLAs), members of autonomous council (MACs), and officials of the KAAC.

The initiative is the first of its kind in the districts.

Observers have widely welcomed it as a proactive and people-centric approach for good governance, reflecting the commitment of KAAC to strengthening its connection with the public.

The Open Interaction Program aims to bridge the gap between the authority, administration and the people, ensuring that the voices of all sections of society are heard and addressed.

The schedule for each constituency has been announced, inviting all residents to participate actively in shaping the future of the twin hill districts.

This landmark move underscores the KAAC's dedication to inclusive and transparent governance, setting a precedent for community engagement in the region.

Road mishap in WKA

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Jan 9: A motorcyclist identified as Chandra Tisso died in a road accident at Plimplam Arong on the Kheroni-Jerkindong road in West Karbi Anglong. Chandra Tisso, a resident of Charchim suffered serious injury to his head succumbed to his injuries while on his way to a hospital in Jorupukhuri, Hojai. The accident occurred when the motorcycle, registered as AS 02Y 9071, was hit by a speeding dumper truck bearing registration number, AS 14C 6591, belonging to a road construction company.

Hence there could be no synergy in culture and architecture with an enemy culture invading armies.

Further, Sarma added that there is no marble floor in the garbha-graha of the Siva temple as mentioned in the INTACH archive.

The marble floor, laid decades ago by the Douli Committee, has been removed by the ASI.

Noted Tai Ahom scholar Dr Pushpa Gogoi said that there is no admixture of Ahom and Islamic architectural style anywhere in Assam, rather it is a blend of indigenous Tai Ahom, Hindu and Buddhist architecture. The temples were made with locally available materials such as hardened earth, wood, stone, and brick and decorated with creepers, flowers, animals, leaves, and Hindu gods and goddesses.

Prabin Sarma, assistant professor of History, at Sibsagar College, also criticised incorrect projection of architectural remains of the Ahom Dynasty that ruled the state for six hundred years.

CEM Ronghang inaugurates four school buildings

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, Jan 9: The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang inaugurated four school buildings under Vidya Bharati Kalyan Ashram constructed in different parts of West Karbi Anglong district. The inauguration programme was held on Thursday at the ground premises of Umchoa Lalung ME School.

The four schools inaugurated by CEM Ronghang are Umchoa Balakhang Vidya Niketan Umchobai; Shankardev Bidya Niketan in Kheyabadi; Sankardev Shihu Niketan in Borthal and Barmarjang Sankardev Shihu Niketan, Dwar Amla.

CEM Ronghang said that KAAC is giving financial assis-



tance to preserve the art and culture of all ethnic groups living in Karbi Anglong.

Ronghang further requested co-operation from all quarters to implement Article 244 (A) of the long-standing political issue in the hills of Assam.

SOS Children's Village celebrates Safety and Security Week

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 9: SOS Children's Village Hojai conducted a Safety and Security Week from January 1 to 7, 2025. The week concluded on Wednesday with an awareness program organised in collaboration with the 68th Battalion, SSB and Hojai District Police.

The event focused on various topics related to safety and security, including First Aid, providing CPR, steps during Snake Bites, Road Signs and road safety, Traffic Signals, the importance of saying no to child marriage, and the dangers of drugs. Dr. Hansraj Rajput, deputy commandant (68 Battalion SSB), conducted the session on CPR and First Aid, tips to save a person after snake bites, providing valuable insights on life-saving techniques.

Bishal Debnath, motor vehicle inspector of Hojai, led a session on Road Signs and Traffic Signals, emphasising their importance for road safety.

He further urged the children to become "Chota Cop."

Nirmali Barman, deputy superintendent of police, Hojai, addressed the issues of child marriage, encouraging the audience to say no to such social evils and

drugs menace. Rupam Bordoloi, additional deputy superintendent of police (HQ), Hojai, led a session on the harmful effects of drugs and urged the youth to stay away from substance abuse.

Amar Jyoti Sarma, state director of SOS Children's Village led the session, ensuring that the participants received valuable knowledge on the various aspects of safety and security.

The awareness program began with a warm welcome to the guests and was followed by a cultural activity, highlighting the significance of safety and security.

A total of 120 children and youth from SOS Children's Village Hojai and the Family Strengthening Program (FSP) participated in the event.

Rupam Bordoloi, additional superintendent of police, (HQ) Hojai; Dr. Hansraj Rajput, deputy commandant (68 Battalion SSB); and Nirmali Barman, deputy superintendent of police, Hojai.

List of special guests included inspector Rajendra Prasad (68 Battalion SSB), Bishal Debnath (motor vehicle inspector of Hojai), and Dandadhar Choudhury (officer in-charge, Hojai Police) besides many other distinguished guests.



Bodo Sahitya Sabha's 64th annual conference begins

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 9: The 64th annual conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha commenced from Thursday held at the Dwimu Nwgrw, Dimakuchi in Udalguri district with a four day colourful programme scheduled.

The grand event would be marking the celebration of Bodo language and literature that will showcase multi community cultural demonstration, various activities across the state.

The conference features a variety of programmes, including discussions, literary events, and cultural exchanges, aimed at

celebrating the rich heritage of Bodo literature and promoting the language across the country as well as globe.

The event has drawn participants from across Assam and neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, states of India, namely, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh etc, with scholars, writers, and cultural enthusiasts coming together to share ideas and insights.

The session is expected to strengthen efforts towards preserving and advancing the Bodo language and culture.

The first day of the conference witnesses

various inauguration of the main gate, main pandal, volunteers camp, seminar hall, delegate hall, guest reception hall etc.

The exhibition venue of the ongoing conference saw a huge thronging of the visitors from the districts of the region.

Chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma will grace the open session of the conference to be held on January 12 as the chief guest.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, several cabinet ministers of the state, along with many distinguished dignitaries will grace the event on the concluding day.

President of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Dr Surath Narzary told that the annual conference has begun with four day program scheduled at Dwimu Nwgrw in Udalguri.

He stated that the reception committee and the Sahitya Sabha have made its necessary arrangement and preparations to accord warm welcome to the delegates and invited guests for the conference.

He mentioned that the session will witness various sessions including seminar, group discussions, and felicitations.

He said that till this evening, several hundred delegates and observers have arrived at the conference venue.

Domachi Mela begins in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 9: A three-day Asomi Bhogali/Domashi Mela 2025 begun on Thursday at the Pragati Bhawan Complex in Kokrajhar. The event has been initiated to accord marketing opportunities before the upcoming Bhogali Bihu/Domashi Bwisagu, which was organised jointly the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission, Assam State Urban Livelihoods Mission and Kokrajhar Municipality Board.

Nearly hundred stalls from different parts of the district representing various self help groups (SHG), Mahila Samities, NGOs etc participated in the event, and showcased their products of producing ventures as their schedule projects.

The mela showcased various handicrafts, hand woven dresses/clothes, food items etc across the venue that garnered the attraction of the visitors.

The occasion began with the lighting of the lamp by the invited dignitaries.

Beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Swanidhi iterated their success stories and experiences of their journey.

Cultural programmes and dance competition were major attractions of the event.

The executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Saikhong Basumatary, MLA Lawrence Islay, district commissioner, Masanda Magdalin Pertin, Kokrajhar Municipality Board chairperson, Pratibha Brahma, UPPL media chairman, Hantigiri Narzary, and several distinguished dignitaries were present in the inaugural ceremony.



EM Basumatary stated that the Asomi Bhogali/Domashi Mela is an annual calendar event of the ASLRM to showcase the products of the SHGs and stakeholder members of the concerned involved associates.

He lauded the organisers and said that the mela is creating a space while selling the various products which are produced by different SHGs and other associate members under the ASLRM and ASULM missions across the region.

He said that the government of Bodoland Territorial Region and the state government are jointly working dedicatedly towards the welfare and uplift of the entrepreneurs who are involved with hand weaving, hand crafts, locally pro-

duced food items etc.

He also urged the SHG members and organisers to produce more products to earn more benefits and to live with dignified opportunities for the economic viability amongst the society.

MLA Islay said that the mela could involve many SHG members and associates in the society for promoting the importance of the producing locally produced food items, products on various aspects including handicrafts, hand woven clothes etc.

He further mentioned that the mela has given an opportunity for marketing, to sell locally produced products directly associated with SHGs, to the citizens.

Distorted description of Ahom architecture on INTACH website decried

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 9: The INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage), New Delhi in a documentation project on Ahom Architecture(heritageawards.intach.in .org, /18/panels/The Architecture of the Ahoms, Sivasagar, Assam, 1) made a glaring mistake by citing that the garbha-graha of the famous Ahom era temple Siva Douli in Sivasagar had been built in accordance to the Islamic tradition. Factually incorrect statements evoked protests from several Ahom organisations, Tai Pundits, and researchers.

ATASU central Committee (Basanta Gogoi faction) cautioned the Central institution not to distort Assam's history and culture nationally and internationally.

He said that it is done childishly without doing any research on Ahom Architecture.

In a protest letter to the chairman and the Governing Council, former INTACH convener and a life member Jayanta Sarma, Guwahati, said that the Mughals since Bakhtier Khilji's time (1615) failed to occupy Assam despite invading the province for 14

Bureau of Indian Standards and DI&CC conducts Industry Meet in Tezpur

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Jan 9: The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), in collaboration with the District Industries and Commerce Centre (DI&CC), Sonitpur, successfully conducted an Industry Meet for prospective BIS licensees at Hotel KRC Palace, Tezpur.

The event saw participation from key stakeholders representing the rice, tea, and handloom industries, with discussions centered on the role of standardisation in enhancing quality, marketability, and global competitiveness.

The event began with a warm welcome by Morgan Meston, general manager of DI&CC Sonitpur, followed by a keynote address from MLA Tezpur, Prithviraj Rabha.

He highlighted the region's immense potential and the critical role of adhering to quality standards in unlocking growth opportunities for regional products.

Shouvik Chanda, director and head of BIS Guwahati, provided an insightful address on BIS's initiatives to support industries in meeting certification requirements.

The program featured detailed presentations by BIS officials, including Ashutosh Rai, deputy director, and Pritam Agarwal, assistant director, on ISI certification, management systems certification, and the broader scope of BIS standards.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A place for everything, everything in its place
-Benjamin Franklin

UGC draft regulations

The New Year 2025 started with another assault on the education system. The Modi government, through the UGC, announced new draft regulations titled, 'University Grants Commission (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education)'. This is yet another attempt by the central government to assume control over all the higher education institutions in the country. According to the UGC, there are 56 central universities and 481 state universities. Through these regulations, the central government is appropriating the right to appointment of vice chancellors even for the state universities and decide how they are run. This is a direct attack on the principle of federalism, an important feature of our Constitution. The draft regulations prescribe the mode of appointment of the vice chancellors in all universities in the country. These regulations change the composition of the search and select committee that is constituted for the selection and appointment of the VCs. Till date, the committee has been constituted of three persons – a nominee of the UGC, a nominee of the chancellor as recommended by the state government and a nominee of the syndicate/senate/executive council of the university.

The new draft changes the composition in favour of the central government by denying any role for the state government in the process. The right of the state governments is taken away and given to the governor-cum-chancellor, who is a representative of the central government. This is an attempt to not only centralise the process of appointment, but also aims to impose persons sympathetic to the BJP-RSS as VCs of the universities. In Kerala, we already have the instance where the then governor overrode the recommendation of the search and select committee and appointed an RSS sympathiser as vice chancellor. The unilateral National Education Policy (NEP) proclaimed by the BJP government laid the path for centralisation and communalisation of Indian education system. It is rightly opposed by both the teachers and students, who are the primary participants in the education system. The draft regulations intend to take forward this policy direction of the NEP.

Since the BJP formed the central government, it has been targeting universities and higher educational institutes to implement its communal agenda. As part of its attempts to capture all important positions of the State, it started appointing Hindutva elements, though they are clearly not eligible for such positions. In the states where it is not in power, it is using governors for this purpose. The LDF government in Kerala, along with Tamil Nadu, Punjab and West Bengal has resisted such interference of governors in running and controlling state universities. They are trampling upon the rights of the states as enshrined in the Constitution, where education is in the concurrent list. The draft regulations are intended to give legal validity to the unconstitutional acts of the governors. The UGC has placed this draft before the public for their suggestions, which is open for 30 days. All who are concerned with our education system and the future of our country should register their opposition to these regulations.

NIPUN AXOM: Education for the Future

NIPUN AXOM, as a part of the national NIPUN Bharat initiative, becomes an important intervention in foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in Assam. This initiative is in consonance with the goals of NEP 2020 and marks the need for the urgent requirement of ensuring basic educational competencies among children, particularly the ones in Grades 1 to 3. The NIPUN AXOM envisions a transformed early education system in Assam by providing young learners with the foundational skills required for academic success and coping in a world that increasingly calls for knowledge and innovation.

Assam has been facing systemic challenges in its educational landscape for a long time. This state still face the same issues of education- poor infrastructure, unqualified teachers, and high dropout rates in rural and marginal areas. NIPUN AXOM hopes to solve all these critical issues by introducing a solid structure taking foundational skills as the main basis of any child's academic career. This initiative recognizes the fact that, without these basic competencies in reading, writing, and arithmetic, learning later in life will certainly be restricted and children, therefore, would not become effective contributors to society in the long run.

Of all the characteristic features, NIPUN AXOM talks about inclusion. Assam, being one of those states that boast of this linguistic and cultural diversity within its borders, poses a challenge in standardized educational programmes. NIPUN AXOM responds to this by bringing education in the child's mother tongue during early years, making learning more relevant and effective. This multi-lingual approach respects the linguistic identity of Assam's communities while it helps in



cognitive development as numerous studies have indicated that children are more capable learners if instruction is conducted in their first language. On the other hand, this program helps students get into more academically challenging and work-oriented situations using both Assamese and English.

The core element of the strategy is the training provided to teachers as NIPUN AXOM works. It realizes that the quality of education depends directly on the strength of its human resources-the capacities of its teachers. The programme, therefore, has gone all out to strengthen and build up its capacities. It trains its teachers using innovative pedagogical tools and techniques in relation to foundational learning. One key activity is to replace the rote memorization trend with an engaging, more participative activity-based mode of learning. NIPUN AXOM would help children be inquisitive and re-

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

flective as it helps not only to develop their basic skills but also brings in the love for learning beyond the classroom. The successful implementation of NIPUN AXOM will lie on its assessment and evaluation. It will be a totally inclusive and child-friendly system in order to check whether learning is taking place or if there are any gaps in the process. These are assessments that are formative and diagnostic, providing very crucial information on the child's strengths and areas that need improvement. This way, data-driven instruction helps the teacher tailor instruction to fit the needs of every learner without leaving anyone behind. Technology also enhances efficiency and accuracy in assessment, which, in turn, enhances the transparency and effective-

ness of the process.

Technology also plays a transformative role for the overall implementation of NIPUN AXOM. Recognizing the potential in digital tools to bridge accessibility and quality gaps, it uses technology to enhance both teaching and learning experiences through e-learning modules, interactive applications, and digital resources all integrated into the curriculum and making education more engaging as well as inclusive. For remote and underprivileged areas, where physical infrastructure still remains a challenge, technology is the lifeline for quality education to reach each child.

Community involvement forms another important aspect of NIPUN AXOM. The initiative understands that the role of education is not merely the responsibility of schools or teachers. It engages the parents, guardians, and local communities actively, forming a supportive ecosystem that makes foundational skills important. The awareness campaigns, community meetings, and parent-teacher interactions are made to work together to promote a collective commitment to children's education. This approach not only strengthens accountability but also ensures that the fruits of the program reach the grassroots level.

NIPUN AXOM has several challenges in the implementation process despite its grandiose goals. Assam's diverse geography, from remote to flood-prone areas, poses significant logistical challenges. This diverse and widespread context requires planning and persistent efforts to implement uniformly. Furthermore, socio-economic inequalities exist along with cultural differences and gender biases, which inhibit the access of education for all the vulnerable sections. Thus, it calls for an integrated strategy at both the policy levels and grassroots

level so that the program continues to remain inclusive and effective.

Long-term implications of NIPUN AXOM go well beyond academic results. It helps equip children with basic skills and, by so doing, contributes to the overall socio-economic development of Assam. Education is considered a powerful instrument in breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality, and the focus of NIPUN AXOM on early learning is the starting point for an equitable society. Children who achieve FLN competencies are likely to be more successful in higher education, find better employment opportunities, and live healthier, more informed lives. In this sense, NIPUN AXOM is not just an educational reform but a transformative movement with far-reaching implications for Assam's future.

Conclusion: NIPUN AXOM represents a paradigm shift in Assam's approach to education, prioritizing foundational literacy and numeracy as the key to unlocking children's potential. Setting up a benchmark for inclusive and innovative learning through the initiative's handling of state-specific challenges within the landscape of education and leveraging the cultural strengths, it brings a holistic approach to ensure that the educational process encompasses more than mere academic performance. With continued implementation by Assam in this vision program, NIPUN AXOM will be only as successful as the sustainable commitment, allocation of resources, and collaboration from stakeholders in the future. The transformational vision coupled with a strategic framework would place NIPUN AXOM on a promise for the better, brighter future of Assam and for its generations ahead. (The writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAM-PROTIK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

Trudeau's exit: Shadows of controversy linger in India-Canada relations

By: Dipak Kurmi

The announcement of Justin Trudeau's resignation on January 6, 2025, marks a defining moment in Canadian political history. Trudeau, who rose to power in 2015 as a beacon of progressive values and youthful charisma, exits the stage after nearly a decade as Prime Minister. His departure is not merely the culmination of mounting political and economic pressures but also a poignant reflection of the shifting tides in Canada's sociopolitical landscape.

The Rise and Fall of a Political Icon
When Trudeau assumed office in October 2015, he embodied hope and optimism. His inclusive policies, dedication to gender equality, and bold climate initiatives positioned him as a transformative leader, both domestically and on the global stage. Under his leadership, landmark achievements such as the legalization of cannabis and advancements in indigenous reconciliation were celebrated as hallmarks of a progressive government.

However, the weight of prolonged governance, compounded by evolving challenges, gradually eroded his standing. Once hailed as the darling of Canadian politics, Trudeau's leadership faced increasing scrutiny as soaring inflation, unaffordable housing, and stagnating wages fueled public discontent. The influx of over three million immigrants within three years—part of his liberal stance on immigration—strained public services and infrastructure, further alienating voters.

Internationally, Trudeau's image also suffered. His strained relations with former U.S. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India highlighted his diminishing diplomatic clout. Trump's jibes about Canada being the "51st state" and Modi's public cold shoulder at the G-20 Summit reflected Trudeau's declining influence on the world stage.

A Party in Disarray

Trudeau's resignation reflects the deep fractures within the Liberal Party. Long a dominant force in Canadian politics, the party has been weakened by internal discord, policy missteps, and dwindling public trust. Trudeau's leadership came under fire not only from the opposition but also from within his own ranks. Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland's resignation amid accusations of political gimmickry further underscored the cracks in party unity.

Facing the possibility of a no-confidence vote in a gridlocked Parliament, Trudeau sought prorogation until March 24 to buy his party time to regroup. This strategic delay highlights the precarious position of the Liberals as they scramble to elect a new leader capable of rejuvenating their prospects ahead of the October elections—or even earlier, should the opposition force an accelerated timeline.

The Shadow of Anti-Incumbency

The Liberal Party's struggles are exacerbated by a strong wave of anti-incumbency. Having governed for nearly a decade, the party faces the daunting task of

countering a double-digit lead enjoyed by the opposition Conservative Party in popularity polls. Public dissatisfaction with Trudeau's handling of the economy, healthcare, and immigration has fueled a narrative of change, making the Liberals' path to reelection increasingly uncertain.

Trudeau's controversial handling of Canada's relationship with India, particularly his allegations regarding Indian involvement in the killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, further alienated key allies. These accusations, widely seen as lacking substantiation, were perceived as a desperate attempt to secure political support from the New Democratic Party (NDP), whose backing of his minority government was crucial. Ultimately, this move backfired, isolating Trudeau on the international stage and failing to secure the domestic support he sought.

A New Era for Canadian Politics

Trudeau's resignation signals the end of an era and opens the door to a reimagined political landscape in Canada. The leadership race within the Liberal Party will be pivotal in determining its future trajectory. A new leader will need to address the root causes of public discontent, including the cost-of-living crisis, strained public services, and declining trust in government institutions.

For the opposition, this transition period presents a golden opportunity. The Conservative Party, emboldened by Trudeau's departure, is likely to amplify its critique of Liberal governance and push for an early election. Their goal will be not only to unseat the Liberals but also to reshape Canada's political direction for the foreseeable future.

Legacy and Lessons

As Trudeau prepares to leave office, his legacy remains a complex and contested narrative. While his tenure was marked by progressive policies and landmark achievements, it was also marred by governance challenges and polarizing decisions. Trudeau's leadership serves as a reminder of the delicate balance required to navigate the evolving demands of a diverse and dynamic democracy.

The twilight of Trudeau's premiership underscores the complexities of long-term political leadership in a rapidly changing world. It highlights the interplay between public expectations, party dynamics, and international diplomacy. For Canada, this moment offers an opportunity to reflect on its priorities and chart a path forward that addresses the pressing needs of its citizens while maintaining its standing on the global stage.

Justin Trudeau's resignation is both a personal and political milestone, marking the culmination of nearly a decade of transformative yet tumultuous leadership. As Canada enters a period of transition, the coming months will be critical in shaping its political and economic future. Trudeau's departure leaves a legacy that will be dissected and debated for years to come, but it also paves the way for new leadership and the possibility of renewal in Canadian democracy. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigmail@gmail.com)

Union Budget 2025-26 faces sharp fall in real GDP to 4-year low

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

The projection by National Statistics Office (NSO) of a sharp fall in India's real GDP growth rate to a 4-year low to only 6.4 per cent in the current financial year 2024-25 compared to the growth rate of 8.2 per cent in 2023-24 is a wake-up call to the Government. As for Net Domestic Product (NDP), it fell from 8.3 per cent to 6.4 per cent. It is like a thunderbolt for the Indian economy, though the data is still subject to change, since first advance data are typically subject to revision as coverage improves. The projection has arrested the ease of budget preparation, since it would form the base for the Union Budget 2025-26. The chief challenge for Union Minister of Finance Nirmala Sitharaman would now be reversing the trend, to maintain the growth momentum for recovery in the deteriorating job market and to improve consumption.

Real GDP is the GDP at Constant Prices, the base year being 2011-2012. The Union Budget 2024-25 has estimated it between 6.5-7 per cent. The performance of GDP growth rate was thus below the early estimate of the government. It is even below the level of the RBI's estimate that was recently announced to be 6.6 per cent. Real GDP is estimated to attain a level of ₹ 184.88 lakh crore in the financial year 2024-25, against the Provisional Estimate of GDP for the year 2023-24 of ₹ 173.82 lakh crore. The situation is bound to impact the Union Budget 2025-26.

The nominal GDP growth rate, that is the GDP at the current prices, has been estimated by the NSO at 9.7 per cent for 2024-25. It is slightly above the nominal growth rate of 9.6 per cent in 2023-24. Nominal GDP is estimated to attain a level of ₹ 324.11 lakh crore in the year 2024-25, against ₹ 295.36 lakh crore in 2023-24.

It is worth recalling that the GDP for Union Budget 2024-25 was estimated at ₹ 326.36 lakh crore which was 10.5 per cent over the Provisional Estimates (PE) of 2023-24 at ₹ 296.35 lakh crore. The estimated shortfall may create problems in reversing the current trend of sharp fall chiefly due to lack of fund.

Real GVA is estimated at ₹ 168.91 lakh crore in the year 2024-25, against the PE for the year 2023-24 of ₹ 158.74 lakh crore, registering a growth rate of 6.4% as compared to 7.2% growth rate in 2023-24. However, the Nominal GVA is estimated to attain a level of ₹ 292.64 lakh crore during FY 2024-25, against ₹ 267.62 lakh crore in 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 9.3%.

The sectoral composition of the National GVA in 2024-25 reveals the real challenge lying ahead for the country. Share of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Fishing is 18 per cent; Mining and Quarrying is 2 per cent; Manufacturing is 14 per cent; Electricity, Gas, Water Supply and Other Utility Services is 2 per cent; Construction 9 per cent; Trade, Hotels, Transport, Communication and Services related to Broadcasting 17 per cent; Finan-

cial, Real Estate and Professional Services 23 per cent; and Public Administration, Defence and Other Services 15 per cent.

Sector-wise comparison of National GVA from the year 2023-24 shows that barring only two sectors – Agriculture &c. and Public Administration &c., all the other sectors has declined. Agriculture &c growth rate increased from 1.4 per cent to 3.8 per cent, while Public Administration &c growth rate increased from 7.8 per cent to 9.1 per cent.

Sharpest fall was registered in the Real GVA growth rate of Mining & Quarrying from 7.1 per cent in 2023-24 to 2.9 per cent in 2024-25. Real GVA growth rate in manufacturing fell from 9.9 per cent to 5.3 per cent; Electricity, Gas, Water Supply & Other Utility Services from 7.5 per cent to 6.8 per cent; Construction from 9.9 per cent to 8.6 per cent; Trade, Hotels, Transport, Communication and Services related to Broadcasting from 6.4 per cent to 5.8 per cent; and Financial, Real Estate and Professional Services from 8.4 to 7.3 per cent.

No wonder, with such a sharp fall in the real GVA growth in majority of sectors brought down the GDP growth rate, which in turn worsened the job market and real consumption levels among the working class due to falling real wages and high inflations.

How difficult will be managing funds can be imagined from the Net Taxes on Products data. In 2022-23, it was ₹ 12.66

lakh crore, which increased by 19.1 per cent in 2023-24 to ₹ 15.07 lakh crore. However, the growth rate declined to 5.9 per cent in 2024-25 in comparison to 2023-24. It would pose significant challenges since the first advance estimate puts this figure at ₹ 15.97 lakh crore only.

Private final consumption expenditure share as percentage of GDP has declined from 58 per cent in 2022-23 to 56.3 per cent in 2024-25 advance estimate. Government final consumption expenditure share has also declined from 10 per cent to 9.3 per cent during this period. Exports declined from 23.9 per cent to 22.6 per cent.

Growth in the Gross National Income growth rate declined from 8.2 per cent in 2023-24 to 6.3 per cent in 2024-25 first advance estimate. Net National Income growth rate also declined from 8.3 per cent to 6.2 per cent during this period.

As for the main growth indicators, growth rates in -- production of coal declined from 12.8 per cent to 6.4 per cent, production of cement from 10.2 per cent to 3.1 per cent, consumption of steel from 15.2 per cent to 12.3 per cent, aggregate bank deposits from 12.5 per cent to 11.9 per cent, and aggregate bank credits from 15.8 per cent to 13.1 per cent. WPI of food articles has also risen from 6.1 per cent in 2023-24 to 8.6 per cent in 2024-25.

Obviously, Union Budget 2025-26 has a very tough balancing act in hand to reverse the downside risk of the Indian economy and also to maintain its earlier growth momentum. (IPA Service)

Architects of Hindi journalism

By: Er. Prabhat Kishore

Udant Martand was the first Hindi weekly paper, which was published on 30th May 1826 from Kolkata. Yugal Kishore Shukla single-handedly carried out the work of publishing this first paper of Hindi in a resourceless state for the benefit of Indians. The notable verse printed on this paper was :-

Dinkar Kar Pragat Dinhin Yah Prakash Ath Yam
Aiso Ravi Aab Ugaun Mahi, Jehi Sukh Ko Dham.
Aant Kamalini Vagist Karat Badhat Chav Chit Vaam
Let Nam Ya Patra Ko Hot Harsh Aru Kam.

Born in Kanpur in the year 1788, Shukla was the Proceeding Reader in Diwani Kacheri of Kolkata and published 'Udant Martand' for the Hindi loving people. Then its price was two rupees per annum. Looking at the news and other materials published in the paper, it appears that the foundation of journalism in those days was laid on struggle, sacrifice and fearlessness. Apart from domestic, foreign and local news, comments and articles on humour and satire were also published. It contained the appointment of government officials, fortnightly letters, time of arrival and departure of ships and the market rates of Kolkata. He was confident that this newspaper would get the full support of the government and the public and would continue its journey uninterrupted. But his hope was not fulfilled. As a result, due to his limited resources and meager capital, he had to close down the paper after one and a half years with its last issue of December 4, 1827. In its concluding issue, he expressed his anguish as follows:-

Aaj Diwastau Ugi Chukyon Maratand Udant.
Astachal Ko Jaat Hai Din Aab Aant.

Even after the closure of 'Udant Martand', the spirit of journalism continued to strike in Shukla's heart. As a result, in 1850, after collecting some money, he started the publication of another paper named 'Shamyadant Martand'. This was a shining symbol of Shukla's vibrant journalism. But misfortunes follow him again and due to lack of capital, it

was to be closed after two years. It was the courage of Shukla's hardworking personality that he took the initiative to publish the Hindi newspaper without any kind of government assistance. The self-respecting nature of Shukla was never acceptable to bow down to the British bureaucracy. This remarkable man, who single-handedly inaugurated the door of Hindi journalism, died in 1853 in Kolkata.

The first two decades of 20th century is famous as the 'Dwivedi Yug' in the history of Hindi journalism. Acharya Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, the promoter of literary and cultural journalism, took the editorship of 'Saraswati' in 1903 and continued to edit it till 1920. In this period he gave new direction and dimension to journalism, due to which this period is termed as 'Dwivedi Yug'.

The publication of 'Saraswati' started from the Indian Press, Prayag in January 1900. Initially, its editorial board consisted of Babu Kartik Prasad Khatri, Kishori Lal Goswami, Babu Jagannath Prasad Das B.A., Babu Radhakrishna Das and Babu Shyam Sundar Das B.A. The motto of the magazine was: 'Saraswati Sriti Mahati Na Diya Tam. There were essays on 59 subjects in the first issue of 'Saraswati'. The last lines of its editorial are worth praising: -

"Due to the immense compassion of the Supreme Karunik Almighty Jagdishwar such a unique opportunity has been received that today we are excited with new enthusiasm in the service of the spiritual people of Hindi and have come with a new gift whose Name is Saraswati."

In the issue of 'Saraswati', an essay by Babu Radhakrishna Das was related to Bharatendu Harishchandra. In this session, the author has discussed the motto of 'Kavi Vachan Sudha', whose opening lines are as :- "Khal Gagan Se Sajjan Dukhi, Mati Rohi, Hari Param Tir Hai. Up Dharma Chhutai Swat Nij, Bharat Gahai Kar Dukh Bhai".

Umayyak Prasad Vajpayee, the exclusive of modern journalism, has written in relation to 'Saraswati' in the history of newspapers: - "In 1900, the President of Indian Press of Prayag, Babu Chintamani Ghosh published 'Saraswati'."

In those days a message printed on 'Saraswati' was as -

'Kashi Nagari Pracharani Sabha Dwara Anumodit'. This meant that Saraswati had the support of the Sabha. Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi used to send articles and poems in 'Saraswati' even from his service period as Telegraph Inspector in GIP Railway in Jhansi (probably 1901 or 1902). In the year 1903, when he became the editor of 'Saraswati', the line 'Kashi Nagari Pracharani Sabha Dwara Anumodit' was removed from the paper. During the editorship of Dwivedi, 'Saraswati' made great progress and in the Hindi world, his essays became fierce. He became a source of inspiration for Hindi writers and journalists. He wrote many comments in Saraswati on the ability to edit and the education system of editorial arts.

In the year 1907, with the efforts of Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya, one of the propagator of Indian journalism, the publication of a Hindi weekly named 'Sahitya' was started from Prayag. Initially Malaviya himself was its editor, but when he became more busy in public works, Rajarshi Purushotam Das Tandon took over its editorship. During the First World War it was briefly converted to a daily, which was again made a weekly.

Around 1907, 'Hind Keshri' came out from Nagpur in the editorship of Madhav Rao Sapre, which contained Hindi translation of Lokmanya Tilak's writings. In the year 1909 Tilak and Sapre were tried for sedition, but surprisingly Sapre apologized. Unhappy with this happening, the publication of Hind Keshri was stopped.

Many Hindi papers came out during the First World War (1914-1918), but most of them were discontinued after the end of the war. Only 'Vishwamitra' which came out from Kolkata in 1915 with the effort of Moolchand Agrawal, is still being published today. It was also published from Mumbai, Delhi and Patliputra, but later it was closed. In contemporary or later dates, literary journalists like Baburao Vishnu Paradkar, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, Bharatendu Harishchandra and others gave a new direction to journalism with their writings. (The author is a technocrat & educationist)

Thousands flee as wildfires burn out of control

Destroy homes across Los Angeles area

LOS ANGELES, Jan 9: Multiple massive wildfires tore across the Los Angeles area with devastating force Wednesday, destroying more than 1,000 structures and killing at least two people as desperate residents escaped through flames, ferocious winds and towering clouds of smoke.

Three major blazes were burning in the metropolitan area, from the Pacific Coast inland to Pasadena, home of the famed Rose Parade. With thousands of firefighters already attacking the flames, the Los Angeles Fire Department put out a plea for off-duty firefighters to help, and weather conditions were too windy for firefighting aircraft to fly, further hampering the fight. Fire officials hoped to get the flights up later Wednesday.

In addition to the two deaths, Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said many others were hurt in the fires, which threatened at least 28,000 structures.

Images of the devastation showed luxurious homes that had collapsed in a whirlwind of flaming embers. The tops of palm trees whipped against a glowing red sky.

This morning, we woke up to a dark cloud over all of Los Angeles. But it is darkest for those who are most intimately impacted by these



fires. It has been an immensely painful 24 hours, LA County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath said.

At least 70,000 people were ordered to evacuate a number that kept changing because evacuation orders were continually being issued, officials said. The flames marched toward highly populated and affluent neighbourhoods home to California's rich and famous. Hollywood stars, including Mark Hamill, Mandy Moore and James Woods, were among those forced to flee.

The home of Vice President Kamala Harris was included in an evacuation zone, although no one was there, according to a spokesperson.

We are prioritizing life over

everything else, Sheriff Robert Luna said.

Jennie Girardo, a 39-year-old producer and director from Pasadena, said she was alarmed when her neighbour came to check on her.

When I opened my door, it smelled like I was living inside of a fireplace, she said. Then I also started to see the ash. And I've never seen that in my life. Like raining ash.

Flames that broke out Tuesday evening near a nature preserve in the foothills northeast of LA spread so rapidly that staff at a senior living centre had to push dozens of residents in wheelchairs and hospital beds down the street to a parking lot. They waited in their

bedclothes as embers fell around them until ambulances, buses and construction vans arrived to take them to safety.

Another blaze that started hours earlier ripped through the city's Pacific Palisades neighbourhood, a hillside area along the coast dotted with celebrity homes and memorialized by the Beach Boys in their 1960s hit 'Surfer's USA'. In the race to get to safety, roadways became impassable when scores of people abandoned their vehicles and fled on foot, some toting suitcases.

Sherice Wallace was unaware there was a fire burning around her until her sister called at the moment a helicopter made a water drop over her house.

I was like, 'It's raining,' Wallace said. She's like, 'No, it's not raining. Your neighborhood is on fire. You need to get out.'

A traffic jam prevented emergency vehicles from getting through, and a bulldozer was brought in to push the abandoned cars to the side and create a path. Video along the Pacific Coast Highway showed widespread destruction of homes and businesses along the famed roadway.

Pacific Palisades resident Kelsey Trainor said the only road in and out of her neighbourhood was blocked. Ash fell all around while

fires burned on both sides of the road.

People were getting out of the cars with their dogs and babies and bags," Trainor said. "They were crying and screaming."

A third wildfire started Tuesday evening and quickly prompted evacuations in Sylmar, a San Fernando Valley community that's the northernmost neighborhood in Los Angeles.

California's wildfire season typically begins in June or July and runs through October, according to the Western Fire Chiefs Association, but January wildfires are not unprecedented. There was one in 2022 and 10 in 2021, according to CalFire.

The season is beginning earlier and ending later due to rising temperatures and decreased rainfall tied to climate change, according to recent data. Rains that usually end fire season are often delayed, meaning fires can burn through the winter months, the association said.

This will likely be the most destructive windstorm seen (since a 2011 windstorm that did extensive damage to Pasadena and nearby foothills of the San Gabriel Valley, the weather service said in a red-flag warning issued early Wednesday. (AP)

Russian missile attack in southern Ukraine has killed at least 13 civilians, officials say

KYIV, Jan 9: A daytime Russian missile attack on the southern Ukraine city of Zaporizhzhia killed at least 13 civilians and wounded about 30 others on Wednesday, officials said.

Footage posted on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Telegram channel shows civilians lying in a city street littered with debris. The post shows them being treated by emergency services and taken away on gurneys.

Russian has frequently launched aerial attacks on civilian areas during the almost three-year war. Thousands of civilians have been killed in Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

Zelenskyy and regional Gov. Ivan Fedorov said Wednesday's attack killed at least 13 civilians. Minutes before the attack, Fedorov had warned of a threat of high-speed missiles and devastating glide bombs being fired at the Zaporizhzhia region.

Russian troops started launching the glide bombs at Zaporizhzhia in the middle of the afternoon, and at least two bombs struck residential buildings in the city, Fedorov said.

He announced that Thursday would be a day of mourning in the region.

There is nothing more brutal than aerial bombing of a city, knowing that ordinary civilians will suffer," Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram.

Zelenskyy said earlier Wednesday that countries wanting to end the war should offer Ukraine assurances about its future defense. Kyiv officials fear that any ceasefire or peace deal will just give the Kremlin time to rearm and invade again unless it is deterred by military force. To be honest, I believe that we have a right to demand serious security guarantees from the countries that aim for the peace in the world, Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy was responding at a news conference in Kyiv to comments the previous day by President-elect Donald Trump that he understood Russia's opposition to neighboring Ukraine joining NATO.

The United States, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia have stood in the way of Ukraine immediately joining the 32-nation alliance, Zelenskyy noted. The alliance has said only that the country is on an irreversible path to membership.

Earlier, the Ukrainian military said it struck a fuel storage depot deep inside Russia, causing a huge blaze at the facility that supplies an

important Russian air base.

Russian officials acknowledged a major drone attack in the area, and said that authorities had set up an emergency command center to fight the fire.

Ukraine's General Staff said the assault hit the storage facility near Engels, in Russia's Saratov region, about 600 kilometers (370 miles) east of the Ukrainian border. The depot supplied a nearby airfield used by aircraft that launch missiles across the border into Ukraine, a statement on Facebook said.

Ukraine has been developing its arsenal of domestically produced long-range missiles and drones capable of reaching deep behind the front line as it faces restrictions on the range that its military can fire its Western-supplied missiles into Russia.

The attacks have disrupted Russian logistics in the war, which began on Feb. 24, 2022, and embarrassed the Kremlin.

Zelenskyy said last year that his country has developed a weapon that could hit a target 700 kilometers (400 miles) away. Some Ukrainian drone attacks have hit targets more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) away.

The governor of the Saratov region, Roman Busargin, said that an unspecified industrial plant in Engels sustained damage from the falling drone debris that sparked a fire, but nobody was hurt.

Engels, which has a population of more than 220,000, is located on the left bank of the Volga River, and is home to multiple industrial plants. Saratov, a major industrial city of about 900,000, faces Engels across the river.

The damage to the oil base creates serious logistical problems for the strategic aviation of the Russian occupiers and significantly reduces their ability to strike peaceful Ukrainian cities and civilian objects. To be continued, the statement from Ukraine's General Staff said.

Russian authorities restricted flights early Wednesday at the airports of Saratov, Ulyanovsk, Kazan and Nizhnekamsk, in an apparent response to the Ukrainian attack.

The main base of Russia's nuclear-capable strategic bombers is located just outside Engels. It has come under Ukrainian drone attacks since the early stages of the war, forcing the Russian military to relocate most of the bombers to other areas. (AP)

US Vice Prez Harris calls foreign leaders before her last trip abroad next week

WASHINGTON, Jan 9: US Vice President Kamala Harris on Wednesday had telephonic conversations with several foreign leaders, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron, on the eve of her last trip abroad next week.

During her calls with Macron and Scholz, Harris, 60, thanked them for their partnership throughout the Biden-Harris Administration.

On Wednesday, Harris spoke to Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados, Chair of Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Prime Minister Andrew Holness of Jamaica, President Bernardo Arévalo of Guatemala and President William Ruto of Kenya.

Harris, who would hand over the vice presidency to Senator J D Vance from Ohio on January 20, will travel to Singapore, Bahrain, and Germany from January 13 to January 17, her press secretary Ernesto Apreza said.

On January 15, she will meet with leaders in Singapore and visit Changi Naval Base. On January 16, she will meet with leaders in Manama, Bahrain and visit Naval Support Activity-Bahrain, the headquarters of US Naval Forces Central Command and the US 5th Fleet.

On January 17, Harris will be in Spangdahlem, Germany to visit the US Air Force 52nd Fighter Wing at Spangdahlem Air Base.

"Throughout her trip, the vice president will discuss the accomplishments of the Biden-Harris Administration over the past four years in each region, the US partnership with the respective nations, the contributions of US military forces to regional and global security, and the enduring national security interests of the United States. Throughout her events at US military installations, the vice president will also engage with US service members," Apreza said.

Harris, daughter of a woman who immigrated from Chennai and father from Jamaica, could not travel to India during her four-year term as the vice president of the United States.

Joe Biden was the last US Vice President to visit India in 2013. Now the president of the United States, he served as the deputy to President Barack Obama from January 20, 2009 to January 20, 2017.

In her call with Macron, Harris expressed continued support for a strong, united NATO and thanked him for his support of Ukraine. She underscored her continued support for the longstanding US-France Alliance, based on shared democratic principles and values, and noted how the partnership has advanced their shared global priorities, from Africa to the Indo-Pacific and space and technology, a readout of the call said.

During her call with Chancellor Scholz, Harris underscored the vital importance of the US-Germany Alliance in addressing global challenges, from economic growth to global stability and security, and for standing for democratic principles around the world.

She expressed appreciation for his personal leadership to support Ukraine following Russia's unprovoked invasion.

"The vice president highlighted her upcoming visit to Spangdahlem Air Base and noted that she is grateful to Germany for hosting US servicemembers and for being a strong NATO Ally, and she reiterated her ironclad commitment to NATO," said the White House readout. In her call with Mottley, Harris emphasised her belief that US economic and strategic interests are intertwined with those of neighbours in the Caribbean.

They reviewed progress in the US-Caribbean partnership, and the vice president's leadership in strengthening the relationships throughout the region. (PTI)

Biden cancels his Italy trip to focus on response to Los Angeles wildfires

WASHINGTON, Jan 9: US President Joe Biden has cancelled his planned visit to Italy, the final overseas trip of his presidency, to monitor the response to the devastating wildfires raging in Los Angeles that have killed five people and forced thousands to evacuate.

Biden was scheduled to leave for Italy on Thursday afternoon. The announcement of the trip's cancellation comes just hours after Biden departed Los Angeles after meeting his first great-grandchild, who was born on Wednesday at an area hospital. He received a briefing from local fire officials before returning to Washington.

Biden declared a Major Disaster declaration for California after returning to Washington. "President Biden decided to cancel his upcoming trip to Italy to remain focused on directing the full federal response in the days ahead," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday. It would have been the

final trip of Biden's presidency.

Over 100,000 residents are being evacuated from their homes in Los Angeles due to wildfires. At least five people have died.

A large number of Indian Americans too have been forced to leave their houses for safety.

The uncontrollable fire has so far burned over 70 sq km in three areas: Palisades, west of Los Angeles; Eaton, north of Pasadena and San Fernando Valley.

Parts of Hollywood were ordered to evacuate Wednesday as a new fire broke out in the hills.

California Governor Gavin Newsom has deployed over 7,500 firefighting and emergency personnel to fight the devastating fire.

The Department of Defence has also deployed its resources, including 10 Navy helicopters and C-130 aircraft.

The California National Guard is adding two Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System units, and two more are being readied by the

Nevada National Guard, Pentagon Deputy Spokesperson Sabrina Singh told reporters.

Helicopters are dropping water from the air and hundreds of firefighters continue to be on the scene to help respond to the fire emergencies, the City of Los Angeles said.

Officials urge residents to continue to heed warnings, stay safe and stay prepared during the ongoing wind-driven fire events.

Describing the fire as unprecedented, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass told reporters that the firestorm was the biggest one in magnitude.

"Hurricane-force winds are usually accompanied by rain storms. But these are hurricane-force winds that are combined with extremely dry drought conditions," she said.

According to Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna, nearly 27,000 acres were on fire as of Wednesday. (PTI)

UK launches 'world's first' sanctions to crack down on illegal migration

LONDON, Jan 9: The UK on Thursday announced the "world's first" new sanctions regime to combat people smuggling crime rings and block the illicit finance fuelling such operations as part of measures to crack down on illegal migration.

The government said the new standalone sanctions are dedicated to targeting irregular migration and organised immigration crime, which will allow the authorities to target individuals and entities enabling dangerous journeys.

The new sanctions regime is expected to come into force within the year as experts from across government work with law enforcement and operational Home Office colleagues to stem finance flows at their source and deter smugglers facilitating irregular migratory movements, including dangerous sea crossings across Europe.

"We must dismantle the crime gangs facilitating breaches of our borders. By crippling

illicit finance rings allowing smugglers to traffic vulnerable people across Europe, we will deliver on our Plan for Change and secure UK borders," said Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

"That means being bold and innovative in our policy making to ensure we are leaving no stone unturned. My government will do everything in our power to save lives and protect our borders for years to come," he said. The Labour government's Plan for Change is designed to reduce dangerous small boat crossings across the English Channel and end the routine use of asylum hotels as part of measures to bring down soaring net migration.

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy laid out the details in a speech as he noted that it was "completely unrealistic" to combat irregular migration without a role for his department - the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). (PTI)

Trump meets with Republicans on Capitol Hill as GOP struggles to agree on legislative strategy

WASHINGTON, Jan 9: President-elect Donald Trump is meeting privately on Capitol Hill late Wednesday with Republican senators as House and Senate GOP leaders are straining to come up with a strategy for tackling his legislative priorities as the party takes power in Washington.

Trump said it "feels great" to be back inside the US Capitol for the first time since he left office four years ago, after the January 6, 2021, riot by his supporters. With his wife, Melania, he also paid tribute to the late President Jimmy Carter lying in state in the Rotunda ahead of funeral services Thursday.

With Trump taking the oath of office on January 20, Republicans have no time to waste.

"We're looking at the one bill versus two bills, and whatever it is, it doesn't matter," Trump said about the conflicting strategies as he arrived. "We're going to get the result."

Trump's return to Capitol Hill marked a changed era in Washington as he strode

through the corridors where four years ago a mob of his supporters had laid siege to the US Capitol as senators fled to safety in a failed attempt to salvage Trump's election defeat to President Joe Biden.

Inside the lengthy meeting, Trump received applause and bursts of laughter from the Republican senators staying late into the evening to confer with him behind closed doors. The session stretched past an hour. He also met with Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., and is also expected to huddle over the weekend with House GOP lawmakers at his private club Mar-a-Lago. Political capital is almost always at its peak at the start of a new presidential term, even more so because this is Trump's second and he is prevented under the Constitution from a third. Moving swiftly is all the more important because the GOP majorities are slim, particularly in the House, where House Speaker Mike Johnson can't afford to lose hardly any votes. (AP)

Trump's inaugural committee raises record USD 170M in donations

WASHINGTON, Jan 9: President-elect Donald Trump has raised more than USD 170 million for his upcoming inauguration, a record amount as tech executives and big donors have eagerly written large checks to help bankroll the ceremony.

The private donations collected thus far were confirmed by a person with firsthand knowledge of the fundraising who was not authorized to speak publicly. The person said Trump's inaugural committee is expected to raise more than \$200 million by the end of the effort.

Trump's inaugural committee did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment Wednesday. The committee has not yet detailed how it plans to spend the donations.

The private donations are typically used to help pay for events surrounding the inauguration, such as costs related to the oath of office ceremony itself, along with a parade and glitzy inaugural balls. Money leftover from the inaugural committee is expected to be used toward a future Trump presidential library, according to the person. The whopping amount raised thus far by Trump's presidential inaugural committee is more than double the amount President Joe Biden raised four years ago when he brought in nearly USD 62 million for his inauguration, according to Federal Election Commission records. (AP)

Jimmy Carter will be honoured at Washington funeral

WASHINGTON, Jan 9: Jimmy Carter, who considered himself an outsider even as he sat in the Oval Office as the 39th US president, will be honoured Thursday with the pageantry of a funeral at Washington National Cathedral before a second service and burial in his tiny Georgia hometown.

President Joe Biden, who was the first sitting senator to endorse Carter's 1976 presidential campaign, will eulogise his fellow Democrat 11 days before he leaves office. All of Carter's living successors are expected to attend the Washington funeral, including President-elect Donald Trump, who paid his respects before Carter's casket Wednesday.

The rare gathering of commanders in chief is one example of how Thursday will be an unusual moment of comity for the nation. Days of formal ceremonies and remembrances from political leaders, business titans and rank-and-file citizens have honoured Carter for decency and using a prodigious work ethic to do more than obtain political power.

He set a very high bar for presidents, how you can use voice and leadership for causes, said Bill Gates, the Microsoft co-founder whose foundation funded Carter's work to eliminate treatable diseases like the Guinea worm. Gates spoke



to The Associated Press on Wednesday shortly before flying to Washington for the funeral.

Whatever prestige and resources you are lucky enough to have, ideally you can take those and take a even broader societal view in your post private sector career, Gates said.

Bernice King, daughter of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., compared the two Georgians and Nobel Peace Prize winners.

Both President Jimmy Carter and my father showed us what is possible when your faith compels you to live and lead from a love-centred place, said King, who is also planning to attend the Washington service.

Ted Mondale, son of Walter

Mondale, Carter's vice president, is expected to read a eulogy his father wrote for Carter before his own death in 2021.

Thursday will conclude six days of national rites that began in Plains, Georgia, where Carter was born in 1924, lived most of his life and died Dec. 29 at the age of 100. Ceremonies continued in Atlanta and Washington, where Carter, a former Naval officer, engineer and peanut farmer, has lain in state since Tuesday.

Long lines of mourners waited several hours in frigid temperatures to file past his flag-draped casket in the Capitol Rotunda, as tributes focused as much on Carter's humanitarian work after leaving the White House as what he did as president from 1977 to 1981.

After the morning service in Washington, Carter's remains, his four children and extended family will return to Georgia on a Boeing 747 that serves as Air Force One when the sitting president is aboard.

The outspoken Baptist evangelist, who campaigned as a born-again Christian, will then be remembered in an afternoon funeral at Maranatha Baptist Church, the small edifice where he taught Sunday School for decades after leaving the White House and where his casket will sit beneath a wooden cross he fashioned in his own woodshop.

Following a final ride through his hometown, past the old train depot that served as his 1976 presidential campaign headquarters, he will be buried on family land in a plot next to former first lady Rosalynn Carter, who died in 2023 after more than 77 years of marriage.

Carter, who won the presidency promising good government and honest talk for an electorate disillusioned by the Vietnam War and Watergate, signed significant legislation and negotiated a landmark peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. But he also presided over inflation, rising interest rates and international crises and lost a landslide to Republican Ronald Reagan in 1980. (AP)

Greece holds state funeral for former PM Costas Simitis

ATHENS (GREECE), Jan 9: Mourners lined the street outside Athens' central cathedral Thursday ahead of the state funeral for former Prime Minister Costas Simitis, the architect of Greece's joining the European Union's common currency, who died last weekend at the age of 88.

Simitis will be buried with the honours of a sitting prime minister as a sign of respect to his service. A funeral service in the capital's Metropolitan Cathedral will be held at noon before his burial in Athens' First Cemetery, the resting place of numerous notable Greeks, including politicians, musicians and artists. In accordance with the wishes of his family, Simitis' body did not lie in state, but members of the public who wanted to pay their respects gathered outside the cathedral. Streets in the centre of the Greek capital were gradually being shut to traffic for the funeral and procession to the cemetery.

A committed pro-European, Simitis served as prime minister from January 1996 to March 2004 and holds the record for longevity for a Greek administration. A co-founder of the socialist PASOK party in 1974, he emerged as the leader of a modernising wing of the party who often clashed with then party leader and Prime Minister An-

dreas Papandreu before eventually succeeding him in 1996.

Simitis considered Greece's entry into the eurozone in January 2001 as the signature achievement of his premiership. But he also helped secure the 2004 Olympic Games for Athens and presided over a vast programme of infrastructure building, including a brand new airport and two subway lines, to help host the games. He also helped Cyprus join the European Union in 2004.

A four-day official period of mourning was declared after Simitis' death on Sunday. The former prime minister was taken to a hospital in Corinth with his holiday home west of Athens unconscious and without a pulse, and medical staff were unable to resuscitate him.

Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides was expected to be among the mourners at Thursday's funeral. On Sunday, he praised the late prime minister as an outstanding leader who has earned a special place in the history of not only Greece, but also of Cyprus.

Born on June 23, 1936, Simitis was the younger son of two politically active parents. His lawyer father Georgios was a member of the left-leaning resistance government during the German occupation and his mother, Fani, was an active feminist. (AP)

Army rescues 8 civilians injured in Manipur



IMPHAL, Jan 9: The Indian Army has rescued eight civilians who had met with a road accident in Manipur's Kangpokpi district, a defence statement said on Wednesday.

The accident took place near Khunku Naga village in the Leimakhong area late on Monday. According to information received from the chief of Henjang village, a truck carrying eight persons had lost control and plunged into a deep gorge near Khunku Naga village.

A rescue team of the army was immediately mobilised to the accident site and the injured civilians were rescued and evacuated to a military hospital, where first-aid was administered and trauma care provided by the army doctors, the statement added. (PTI)

Manipur CM thanks home ministry for new border regulation

IMPHAL, Jan 9: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Thursday thanked the Union Home Ministry for introducing a regulation that allows Myanmar residents living within 10 km of the international border to temporarily enter the state with a "border pass" issued by the Assam Rifles.

Talking to reporters, Singh described the move as "a good beginning," emphasising the importance of regulating cross-border movement.

"Earlier, nobody paid attention to who was going in or out of the country. I thank the Union home minister and the ministry of home affairs for introducing this regulation. Not only Assam Rifles, but also the state police, health officials, and DC office staff at the border are involved. I urge everyone to take extra care and use advanced machinery to prevent illegal immigration," Singh said.

On the recent suicide of a 21-year-old woman at Mekola relief camp, Singh said an FIR had been

Centre committed to empower tribal communities: Union minister

AIZAWL, Jan 9: Union Minister Durgadas Uikey said the Centre is committed to empowering and uplifting tribal communities in the country, particularly in the north-east region, an official statement here said.

Uikey, the Union minister of state for tribal affairs, arrived in Aizawl on Tuesday on a three-day visit and interacted with officials in the state over development initiatives under the tribal affairs ministry.

He visited Mamit, the lone aspirational district in Mizoram, inspecting development initiatives under the Aspirational District Programme, and also held interaction with officials and tribal representatives on Wednesday, the official statement said.

During a meeting with officials of various departments in Mamit, Uikey said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi gives priority to the uplift of people living in rural areas.

He urged officials to make massive efforts to ensure that the schemes, which aimed at the uplift



the marginalised sections, are successfully executed.

The Union minister emphasised the importance of improving education and health sectors to uplift the people. Mamit deputy commissioner K Lalitawmlova presented a detailed overview of Mamit's development indicators.

He informed the meeting that Mamit district, with a population of 1,01,290 spread over an area of 3,025 sq km, comprises 20,902 households and has achieved a literacy rate of 84.93 per cent.

He pointed out that the district has made significant progress in different parameters under the Aspirational District Programme, which led to the district securing ₹ 19 crore in funding from the NITI Aayog.

In the last ranking, Mamit district held 5th rank among aspirational districts in the country, he said.

Uikey also interacted with representatives from various tribal

communities in Mamit during which tribal leaders shared their challenges and pressing needs, including better access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure, the statement said.

The Union minister assured them of the Centre's continued support and emphasised the importance of grassroots participation.

On Tuesday, Uikey attended a meeting in Aizawl with Mizoram Social Welfare and Tribal Affairs, Women and Child Development minister Lalrinpui and senior officials in Aizawl.

He told the meeting that the Central government headed by Prime Minister Modi is making massive efforts to empower and uplift the tribal communities in the country, particularly in the North-eastern states.

He stressed the importance of inclusive and equitable development and highlighted various schemes for the uplift of the tribal communities.

He encouraged Mizoram to maximise these opportunities to achieve sustainable growth. (PTI)

Nagaland sets up committees to monitor 8th economic census

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 9: Nagaland's economic and statistics department has constituted state level coordination committee (SLCC) and district-level coordination committees (DLCCs) to monitor the execution of the 8th economic census in the state.

The SLCC, headed by the chief secretary as the chairperson, has a total of 13 members and one member secretary, while the DLCC is headed by the respective DC with five other members, the state economic and statistics department said on Thursday.

The SLCC is tasked to monitor preparedness, progress, and resolve administrative and technical issues faced in the conduct of the economic census in the state.

It has also been asked to review the deployment of an adequate number of enumerators and supervisor, review progress of field work on a monthly basis, ensure complete coverage of the data canvassed through validation against existing databases such as the state business register and prepare a report on data correctness based on supervision carried out by the state and national sample survey office (field operations division) supervisor.



The DLCCs have been tasked to monitor preparedness, progress, and resolve administrative issues in the conduct of the census in their respective district on a regular basis.

They are also to provide feedback to the SLCC to perform its roles and functions effectively at the district level, sensitise/direct the local law and order agencies, local government functionaries at panchayat/ward level for cooperation in smooth conduct of the census and facilitate providing administrative unit maps of wards/villages for fieldwork.

Crucial to protect our lands from encroachment: COCOMI

IMPHAL, Jan 9: While condemning the "assault and manhandling" of a Liangmai woman on January 7, 2025 in Kongsakhul, and the destruction of her mobile phone while she was working on her land, the Co-ordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) has called upon all the "indigenous communities of Manipur" to exercise vigilance and caution when dealing with requests for settlement from "new groups" in their respective areas.

"It is crucial to protect our lands, identities, and resources from exploitation and illegal encroachment," the COCOMI said today in a statement. The COCOMI then said the January 7 incident "is a shocking act of aggression". The statement also said, "This incident, perpetrated by tenant settlers from the Chin-Kuki community, reflects the popular Manipuri proverb 'Yong na loupu tanlakpa' (owner of the paddy field chased away by invading monkeys)".

The indigenous communities of Manipur have long faced systematic encroachment and occupation of their lands by immigrant groups and unaccounted refugees over the past decades, the COCOMI also said.

The situation has reached alarming proportions, with public through them to spread the message of safe driving habits and to follow traffic laws.

Awareness campaigns were also conducted for the autorickshaws and truck drivers through their unions.

Further, lectures on the importance of road safety and traffic rules and regulations were delivered in churches and seminar programmes of various public organisations.

Besides, booklets/pamphlets/leaflets on road safety, traffic laws and rules were distributed among the road users during road safety week and enforcement drives, the police commissionerate said.

It also said precautionary solar blinker lights were installed at black spots and ac-

the status of hill villages has further emboldened these groups, who exploit the gaps to justify illegal occupations," it further added.

The COCOMI strongly condemned the "high-handed actions of the tenant settlers who attacked the rightful landowner with the ulterior motive of legitimizing their claims over the land". It said such "acts of aggression" against indigenous communities must not be tolerated.

The COCOMI urged the Kongsakhul Village Authority to remain steadfast in their commitment to expose and address these encroachments while safeguarding the rights of the indigenous people.

The COCOMI then appealed to the concerned state administration to take immediate action to resolve this issue in accordance with the law, based on historical records and facts. At the same time, it urged all parties to refrain from resorting to violence but to seek peaceful resolutions.

The COCOMI then said the struggle to preserve the integrity of "our indigenous lands and communities" is a collective responsibility. The COCOMI then said it "remains committed" to safeguarding the rights and dignity of the indigenous people of Manipur. (NNN)

TUN in Nagaland opposes fencing of Indo-Myanmar border



KOHIMA, Jan 9: The Tenyimi Union Nagaland (TUN), an apex body of five major tribes in Nagaland, has opposed the Central government's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border, claiming that it will have a "devastating" impact on the Naga people, their livelihoods and their cultural ties.

TUN is the apex body of five tribes - Angami, Chakhesang, Pochury, Rengma and Zeliang.

It claimed that the fencing of the Indo-Myanmar border would disrupt the economic lifelines, isolate communities, break vital connections, and restrict access to education and healthcare.

"The fence is not just a physical barrier, it is an assault on our identity, heritage, and dignity," said TUN president Kekhwengulo Lea in a statement issued on Wednesday.

He urged the Central government to reconsider the decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border, stressing the importance of safeguarding the ancestral lands and upholding the rights and dignity of the Naga people.

"The Free Movement Regime (FMR) introduced in the 1950s allowed limited cross-border travel, but successive regulations have since curtailed this, severely affecting the Naga communities' ability to maintain cross-border social, cultural, and economic ties," Lea said.

The TUN has called on all Naga individuals, communities, and organizations to unite in opposition to the border fencing and to defend the Naga people's collective future from further division and fragmentation. (PTI)

Illegal poppy farm destroyed in Manipur's Churachandpur

IMPHAL, Jan 9: Poppy plants over four acres were destroyed in Manipur's Churachandpur district on Wednesday, Chief Minister N Biren Singh said.

The cultivation was done on the Haopi Mollen Hill, he said.

A joint team of the police, Forest Department and Assam Rifles destroyed the poppy plants, he added.

"While no arrests were made, 10 poppy pods were seized, and formalities were completed at Sangai Kot Police Station. The yield, estimated at 12 kg if harvested, highlights the importance of such actions in the War on Drugs," Singh said in a post on X.

Addressing a programme during the day, Singh said appropriate action will be taken against people spreading rumours on social media.

"I have come to know that some people are spreading rumours through social media to create enmity between two communities. I have instructed departments concerned to identify the culprits and take appropriate action," he said.

"The state government is committed to taking stringent action against anyone found guilty of causing unrest through malicious rumours and misinformation," he said. (PTI)

ANSAM expresses grief over sudden demise of kilonser

SENAPATI, Jan 9: The All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM) said on Wednesday that it was "deeply saddened" by the sudden demise of Chonthingla Shimray, kilonser (minister) of NSCN-IM, wife of General Ningkhan Shimray, the chief of the Naga army (NSCN-IM), on January 7, 2025, at Referral Hospital, Dimapur.

The ANSAM said Chonthingla Shimray, kilonser, NSCN-IM, was a visionary leader, a charismatic and dedicated woman who tirelessly served the nation. "Her instrumental role in building a unified Naga nation will be etched in our memories forever," the ANSAM also said.

As a loving mother, she embodied simplicity, bravery, and courage, standing firm in times of trials and tribulations. "Her unwavering commitment to the Naga cause and her sacrificial love for her nation and family, especially her husband, inspired us all," the Naga student body added.

In her untimely passing, the Naga nation has lost a brave mother and national leader who stood strong by her principles and committed herself to the Naga people's cause, it also stated. The ANSAM as an association and on behalf of its units and subordinate units extended its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members during this time of pain and grief.

Also issuing a message in this regard, the Maring Students Union (MSU) expressed its "deepest condolences to General Anthony Ningkhan Shimray, MC, VC, Longvibu of the Naga Army and his family on the untimely demise of his beloved spouse, Enoli Chonthingla Shimray, Kilonser, WTR, GPRN on January 7, 2025".

The MSU said Chonthingla Shimray was an extraordinary woman whose unwavering dedication to the Naga cause will be remembered with great reverence. She was not only a pillar of strength for her family but also an inspiration to all who cherish the ideals of unity, freedom, and justice for the Naga people, the MSU also said. Her sacrifices and steadfast commitment to the struggle for Naga rights reflect her profound patriotism and courage, it added.

In this moment of grief, the MSU extended its heartfelt prayers for comfort and strength to the family. "May her enduring legacy inspire us all to continue the noble journey toward a united and dignified Naga homeland. Her life and contributions will forever remain a guiding light for generations to come. May her soul find eternal peace in the arms of the Almighty God," the MSU further added. (NNN)

Two militants arrested in Manipur's Kakching

IMPHAL, Jan 9: Security forces have arrested two members of the banned militant outfit Kangleipak Communist Party (Taibanganba) from Manipur's Kakching district for their alleged involvement in extortion activities, police said on Thursday.

The two were involved in extortion activities in Sugnu, Chairel, and Kakching Khunou area in Kakching district and were arrested on Wednesday, police said.

Meanwhile, security forces during search operations in Kangpokpi district on Wednesday seized sophisticated firearms along with ammunition.

One 5.56 Heckler and Koch G3 rifle with magazine, one .32 pistol with magazine, one 9 mm pistol with magazine, ammunition, single barrel rifle and two tube launchers were seized from Saheibung peak, Zero point Kotzim road under New Keithelnam police station in Kangpokpi district, police said. (PTI)

Meghalaya's power scenario in very good position



SHILLONG, Jan 9: Meghalaya Power Minister Abu Taher Mondal on Wednesday said that the power scenario in Meghalaya is in a very good position as of now and there is no plan for imposition of any load shedding.

"However, as and when the situation comes, we will take a call on that. But our intention is to see the examination season pass off without any load shedding," he told reporters.

Stating that challenges will always be there, the minister said, "In the new year you see the quantum of sudden load factor in every transformer is quite high and sometimes it is very difficult for us also to know how much additional load will be given in a particular period of time."

"But as I mentioned earlier that we are very comfortable as far as the power scenario of the state is concerned, we are not into any load shedding, there is no plan as of now and we are already planning to see that the examination period for the

children also goes without any load shedding," he assured.

Mondal however said instances of power cuts are due to repairing and renovation works and implementation of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) in the state.

"But having said that it doesn't mean that if there is some interruption of or if there is some disruption of power that it doesn't mean it is because of the loadshedding. We got to understand another thing that this is the season where we exactly be able to do all the repair and renovation works and more over implementation of new works also like we are going on in the case of RDSS so that will require shut-down also and many substations we need to upgrade and that will also require a lot of shutdowns," he explained.

"So, we request our esteemed consumers that there may be a situation where lights may not be there for some time but then no load shedding is there. If there is any technical problem comes then we got to look into it so one thing is for sure that we will not go for immediate load shedding but at the same time this is the season where we can maximize our efforts to see that all the substations and transformers are looked after properly," the minister stated. (NNN)

Marked reduction in road accidents in 3 N'land districts

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 9: There was a marked reduction in the number of vehicular accident cases in Dimapur, Chuimoukedima, and Nuland districts in 2024 as compared to 2022 and 2023.

According to a road accident data for the last three years released by the Dimapur commissionerate of police on Thursday, vehicular accidents recorded in 2024 were 110 while 557 accidents occurred in 2022 and 267 in 2023.

The comparative reduction in road accident cases between 2022 and 2024 was 80.25%.

The police commissionerate attributed this drastic reduction mainly to road safety awareness campaigns and



traffic lights and appurtenances.

It said schools and colleges were the primary focus of the awareness campaigns, aiming to educate and inculcate in children safe driving habits and traffic laws.

More than 60 educational

institutions under the three districts were covered by the traffic personnel under this programme.

This grassroots approach attempted to educate not only the student community but also indirectly reach out to the parents, guardians and general

public through them to spread the message of safe driving habits and to follow traffic laws.

Awareness campaigns were also conducted for the autorickshaws and truck drivers through their unions.

Further, lectures on the importance of road safety and traffic rules and regulations were delivered in churches and seminar programmes of various public organisations.

Besides, booklets/pamphlets/leaflets on road safety, traffic laws and rules were distributed among the road users during road safety week and enforcement drives, the police commissionerate said.

It also said precautionary solar blinker lights were installed at black spots and ac-

cident-prone areas to alert drivers, especially at night while delineator lights were erected at important junctions to discourage double/triple piling of vehicles at traffic stops.

Signages were also installed at various strategic locations to caution and alert the drivers, it said adding barricades were also installed and placed at important locations.

It also said along with restrictions in speed limit, especially during the festive season, enforcement driven driving were carried out throughout the night to prevent and minimise road accidents, which proved vital in the reduction of accident cases.

No.DWCD/BTC/256/Pt-IV/2024-25/82 Dated Kokrajhar, the 9th January, 2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Joint Director cum CHD, Women & Child Development, B.T.C, Kokrajhar invites Notice Inviting Tender affixing court fee stamp of Rs. 8,25/- only from Firms / Suppliers regarding Supply of Computer set with Printer & Xerox machine for Office of the DSWO, Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri & Joint Director, WCD, BTC, Kokrajhar under SOPD-G fund during the year 2024-25 (estimated amount Rs. 15.00 Lakhs only). The Notice Inviting Tender with detail terms & conditions for the said work may be obtained from the office of the undersigned. Intending Firms / Suppliers may obtain NIT documents during Office hours till 1:00 P.M. of the 29th day of January '2025. The sealed NIT with all particulars / documents viz. GST registration certificate, Pan Card etc. as required as per terms & conditions are to be submitted to the office of the Joint Director cum CHD, Women & Child Dev., BTC, Kokrajhar on or before 2:00 P.M. of 29th day of January, 2025. The successful Supplier / Firm will have to submit security deposit 1% only in case of ST / SC and 2% for General Firm / Supplier of the estimated value in the form of Bank Draft / Banker's Cheque in favour of the Joint Director, Women & Child Dev., B.T.C, Kokrajhar. The NIT will be opened on the same day at 3:00 P.M. in presence of Suppliers / Firms or their authorized representative. However, in the event of any Holiday, same time on the next working day shall be taken into account.

The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the offers / proposals, without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/-
i/c. Jt. Director cum CHD,
Women & Child Dev., B.T.C, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/JC/2024-25/1377

Himachal cabinet's nod to include families with no adult member in 18-59 age group to BPL list



SHIMLA, Jan 9: The Himachal Pradesh cabinet on Thursday approved inclusion of families with no adult members between 18 and 59 years, headed by women or whose head has a disability of 50 per cent or more under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list.

Families that worked for at least 100 days under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) in the previous financial year and families whose earning members are suffering from chronic diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, muscular dystrophy, thalassemia or any other condition resulting in permanent disability are also included in the BPL list, a statement issued here said.

The state cabinet, in its meeting presided by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, approved the establishment of a special task force (STF) to combat drug abuse and dismantle drug trafficking and organised crime networks in the state through a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach.

Besides, the cabinet has decided to promulgate an ordinance amending Schedule 1A of the Indian Stamp Act, 1899. This amendment will enable the levy of a uniform stamp duty rate of 12 per cent on transfer and lease transactions secured under Section 118(2) (H) of the Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, 1972, with prior sanction from the state government.

The cabinet gave its nod to rename the Himachal Pradesh Institute of Public Administration (HIPA) as Dr Manmohan Singh Himachal Pradesh Institute of Public Administration. It also paid tributes to the former prime minister, observed two minutes of silence in his memory and acknowledged his significant contributions to the nation and state's development.

The cabinet noted that several key projects in the state like Atal Tunnel, three medical colleges, ESIC Hospital at Ner Chowk, IIT Mandi, IIT Una, Central University and National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in Kangra were realised due to Singh's vision and support.

Some of the initiatives of Singh's tenure were the Right to Information Act, Right to Education Act, MNREGA, the Food Security Act, introduction of Aadhaar, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and loan waiver for 72 lakh farmers, and they were highlighted as milestones, the statement added.

The cabinet reiterated its request

to the Centre to adopt the 90:10 funding formula for the power component of the Kishau Multi-purpose Project at the border of Himachal and Uttarakhand, similar to the formula adopted for the water component.

Alternatively, it proposed providing a 50-year interest-free loan for the entire amount payable by the state government for the power component under the Inter-State Agreement.

In addition, the cabinet has decided to delegate the mandate for the allotment and monitoring of hydro and solar power projects above 5 MW as well as Green Hydrogen, Biomass and Pumped Storage Projects to the Department of Energy.

The cabinet approved the imposition of Green Energy Development Charges for Pumped Storage Projects. A charge of Rs 2.5 lakh per MW per year will be levied for the first 10 years after the project's commissioning, which will increase to Rs 5 lakh per MW per year thereafter.

The cabinet approved establishing the Himachal Pradesh State Water Informatics Centre to collect data from domain-specific bodies, developing new databases and disseminating comprehensive water-related information.

It gave its approval to the Baddi-Barotiwala Nalagarh Development Authority Land Pooling Policy-2025.

The cabinet gave its nod to introduce Himachal Pradesh Sadbhawana Legacy Cases Resolution Scheme 2025 to dispose of pending cases, litigations and arrears under the subsumed enactments such as VAT, CST and entry tax.

To protect the environment and minimise the footprints of human interventions in the green belts, the cabinet decided to bring the area surrounding Tara Devi Temple in Shimla district under the ambit of Green Area.

It decided to select the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) under the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to conduct computer-based tests for the recruitment of Group-C posts through Himachal Pradesh Rajya Chayan Aayog in Hamirpur.

The Cabinet gave its approval for the upgradation of sub-tehsil Panchrukhi in Kangra district as tehsil, opening new sub-tehsils in Dhamwari of Shimla district, Saho in Chamba district and Chachiyan in Kangra district along with the creation and filling up of requisite posts, the statement said. (PTI)

India's GST world's 'worst' tax regime, middle class contributing to govt's revenue collection: Cong

AHMEDABAD, Jan 9: The opposition Congress on Thursday called India's GST the world's "worst" such regime, accusing the government of being interested only in imposing new levies under the cover of rationalisation.

The country has reached a point where the middle class is propping the government's tax revenue because corporates are not paying as much tax revenues due to a downturn in business, claimed party spokesperson Rangarajan Mohan Kumaramangalam here.

Calling the present system "tax terrorism", the Congress leader hoped Prime Minister Narendra Modi will "rectify the faulty" GST system.

"We have a regime that has created one of the worst GST (Goods and Services Tax) systems in the whole world. In about 50 countries, there is a tax collection system equivalent to GST. But nobody has such complications which are put in our GST system," he said.

"Just last month, Finance Minister



ter Nirmala Sitharaman again tried to complicate GST even more by putting three different taxes on three different forms of popcorn," said the Congress leader in the press conference.

He claimed that the middle class is shrinking and the ultra-rich and upper middle class are driving consumption. "So this government now wants to put everything in the luxury bucket and collect 28 per cent GST," he said. Kumaraman-

galam alleged that the government is now trying to tax the only people left who are actually buying products. "In the end, that consumption will also come down, resulting in further job losses," he said.

Instead of focusing on the shrinking middle class and the tax burden on it, the government wants to collect tax from wherever it can, said the Congress leader.

"It will come up with some reason to impose new taxes and cess

under GST in some sort of vague method of rationalisation. In the end, it will kill whatever consumption, which is already reducing, (happening) in our economy," he said.

According to a new study, 64 per cent of India's GST collection comes from the bottom 50 per cent of the population, claimed Kumaramangalam.

"We are going after the poorest of the poor. Half of the GST is taken from them. Such a tax system is the main reason why our economy is slowing down. Now it has become apparent and GDP numbers don't lie," he said.

Latest GDP figures suggest that every sector is suffering, he said. Six months ago, all companies had started complaining that demand had slowed down because the common men did not have enough money, said the Congress leader.

"For the first time, the amount of money collected from companies is less than the tax revenue collected from individual taxpayers

which is going up. Corporate tax collection is up 1.2 per cent. While GST collection is up 12 per cent, income tax is up by 20 per cent," he said. The individual taxpayers are funding the government and new tax slabs are being introduced on goods consumed by the common public, he said.

"Today, there are nearly nine different rates of GST, starting from 0 per cent to 28 per cent. If we consider cess, some products like tobacco attract a 35 per cent tax," he said.

According to Kumaramangalam, confusion about tax slabs is adversely affecting small businesses because compliance has become a huge challenge.

"This (compliance) is not an issue for large corporates because they have a separate department to handle it. These complications are benefiting large companies only. The economy is slowing down because the government is taking people's money, leaving them with nothing to spend," he said. (PTI)

UCC to be implemented in Uttarakhand this month: CM Dharami

BAREILLY (UP), Jan 9: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dharami on Thursday highlighted the various initiatives undertaken in the state, reaffirming the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the "Devbhoomi" this month. Uttarakhand is the first state in the country to have UCC Act, which seeks to establish a uniform and an equal set of rules on marriage, divorce, succession and inheritance for all citizens in the state, except the Scheduled Tribes (STs), irrespective of religion. It makes registration of all marriages and live-in relationships mandatory.

"We have formulated the Uniform Civil Code law in Devbhoomi Uttarakhand. This is the state's first honour and will be implemented within this month," Dharami said during the inauguration of the 29th Uttarayani Mela in Bareilly.

He compared the UCC to India's sacred rivers such as Sharda, Ganga, Saraswati and Kaveri, stating that just as they sustain life across the country, the UCC will work similarly.

Regarding the state's tourism and infrastruc-

ture initiatives, Dharami said, "In Haridwar and Rishikesh, we are planning to develop the Ganga Corridor. Work on a corridor along the Sharda River has also begun."

He added that Uttarakhand continues to see an increasing influx of devotees and tourists which would be bolstered by the reconstruction efforts in Kedarnath and the master plan underway at Badrinath Dham.

Dharami also announced beautification and restoration efforts for temples in the Kumaon region and development at Purnagiri.

"It gives me immense joy that more devotees from Uttar Pradesh visit Purnagiri. We are creating the Sharda Corridor, which will enhance the ghats and beautify the area," he said.

The chief minister expressed hope for Uttarakhand becoming a hub for destination weddings and tourism, emphasising the state's growing reputation.

"Handicraft products from Uttarakhand are gaining recognition among multinational companies and women in the state are doing excellent work. Over one lakh women in

Uttarakhand are now earning a substantial income. We will provide them with interest-free loans," he said.

On governance and security, Dharami shared progress on several legal reforms, including the anti-conversion law, the introduction of anti-riot legislation and measures to counter exam malpractice. "We have taken strong steps by enacting an anti-riot law. Any damages caused during riots will be recovered from the perpetrators."

"Similarly, with our anti-cheating law, over 100 individuals involved in exam malpractice have been jailed."

This ensures fair opportunities for deserving candidates," he added.

Dharami mentioned initiatives to combat "land jihad", stating that 5,000 acres of encroached land have been freed. He also discussed tackling issues like "spit jihad" with new laws to maintain public order. Looking ahead, the chief minister announced that the 28th National Games would commence on January 28 in Uttarakhand, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi set to inaugurate the event. (PTI)

'Naxalism' 'more or less' ended in Karnataka

BENGALURU, Jan 9:

Naxalism has "more or less" ended in Karnataka, Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Thursday, following the surrender of six Maoists. He also strongly defended their surrender before Chief Minister Siddaramaiah amid criticism. He stated that the Maoists were unarmed when they surrendered, and the police would investigate where they might have left their weapons.

The group of six Maoists who surrendered on Wednesday includes four from Karnataka—Mundagaru Latha from Sringeri, Vanajakshi Balehole from Kalasa, Sundari Kutturu from Dakshina Kannada, and Mareppa Aroli from Raichur. The other two are

Vasanth K from Vellore in Tamil Nadu and N Jeesha from Wayanad in Kerala.

"Who is saying it was not appropriate for the Naxals to surrender before the CM? They should explain what is wrong and why they think it is wrong. We wanted to send a message to society that Naxalism has no place. When the surrender happens before the CM, the whole state becomes aware, and those who believe in Naxalism may rethink," Parameshwara said in response to criticism from the BJP.

Speaking to reporters, he said the surrender was intended to send a message to those involved in Naxal activities, making them aware that the government and the CM are committed to re-

forming them. "What's wrong with it? Let critics explain. Simply saying the surrender shouldn't have happened before the CM is not right. They should provide reasons for their objections," he added.

Addressing objections raised about the rehabilitation package for the surrendered Maoists, the Home Minister defended the decision. "We will extend the package to all those involved in Naxal activities who wish to return to the mainstream. What's wrong with that?" he said.

The six surrendered Maoists will be rehabilitated under categories 'A' and 'B' of the Karnataka Naxal Surrender Policy, 2024, and will receive Rs 3 lakh each.

Reacting to BJP general secretary and MLA Sunil Kumar's statement that the Congress government was facilitating the surrender of Maoists as a "package" to convert forest Naxals into urban Naxals, Parameshwara dismissed the claims.

"He says such things, but Naxal activities were increasing in his constituency. The Anti-Naxal Force is based there in Karkala," he remarked.

When asked about whether the Maoists had surrendered their weapons, Parameshwara clarified that they were unarmed when they surrendered. "They left their arms behind. The police will investigate where they abandoned them," he said. (PTI)

No confusion in Karnataka Cong: Minister Parameshwara

BENGALURU, Jan 9: Trying to downplay the 'dinner politics' playing out in the state unit of the Congress, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday ruled out any confusion within the ruling party.

He said there was no need for anyone in the party to be "anxious" in any way, regarding the meeting of SC/ST leaders under his leadership, which has now been postponed.

A meeting of Congress leaders, ministers, and lawmakers from SC/ST communities that was scheduled for Wednesday evening under the leadership of Parameshwara, had to be postponed following instructions from AICC general secretary in-charge of the state, Randeep Singh Surjewala.

The meeting was said to be intended as a preparatory discussion for an SC/ST convention aimed at consolidating community support for the party.

According to sources, the decision to postpone the preparatory meeting came after D K Shivakumar, a chief ministerial aspirant, met AICC general secretary (Organisation) K C Venugopal in New Delhi on Monday night to discuss party developments.

"The CLP (Congress Legislature Party) meeting has been called, the agenda is still not known...there is no confusion. Where is the confusion?" Parameshwara said in response to a question by reporters about whether the CLP meeting, scheduled on January 13, was aimed at getting rid of internal confusion in the party.

When asked if there was no confusion, why obstruction was caused to the party SC/ST leaders meeting called under his leadership, and was there a trust deficit, he said, "It has been postponed due to various reasons, as AICC general secretary too wanted to participate...where is the question of trust deficit? All this is the creation of the media."

Asked whether the meeting had caused anxiety among some within the party and so they complained to the high command, ultimately leading to its postponement, Parameshwara said, "who caused anxiety and who got the anxiety? I don't know. As far as I know no one is anxious and there is no need for it....Have we ever said the meeting will be organised outside the party forum?"

When specifically asked whether Shivakumar was anxious about him holding such a meeting, he said, "Has Shivakumar said he is anxious? Both of us were together for the whole day yesterday. We even held a press conference together. He never said any such things..."

To a question about whether Shivakumar had expressed his anxiousness to the high command, so the AICC general secretary asked for the meeting to be postponed, Parameshwara said, he was not aware of it. (PTI)

OTP feature in RTI portal meant to protect user privacy: Centre

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: The recent introduction of a one-time password (OTP) feature for the RTI portal is meant to protect user privacy, the Centre said on Thursday.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has examined the concerns raised about the functioning of the Right to Information (RTI) portal -- www.rtiportal.gov.in -- and clarified that the system is operational and effective after the introduction of a new OTP feature, an official statement said.

The portal allows an user to file RTI applications, appeals and to know their status.

A comprehensive review by the DoPT has confirmed that the portal's newly-implemented features, including an enhanced security protocol, are operational and user-friendly, it said.

Responding to issues reported by some users, the DoPT said the OTP feature, introduced on January 2, 2025, has been implemented to authenticate users and protect sensitive personal information included in the RTI applications.

By ensuring only authorised access, the measure strengthens cybersecurity and aligns with best practices, the statement issued by the

personnel ministry said.


"Concerns were raised about delays in receiving OTPs. The DoPT explained that while OTPs are promptly dispatched from the NIC email domain, delays may occasionally occur due to high traffic on either NIC server or external email services like Gmail or Yahoo," it said.

Importantly, OTPs do not expire until they are used, meaning users can access the status of their applications as soon as the OTP arrives, the statement said.

As of January 9 at 10:55 am, 9,782 users have successfully accessed their RTI status using the new system, underscoring its reliability, the statement added.

As per the latest feature, an OTP is generated by the system to an applicant's email for accessing the status of RTI applications filed by him or her. "Some users also criticised the additional step as complicating the process. The DoPT reiterated that the measure is vital for protecting user privacy and that the system has been tested thoroughly to ensure smooth functioning," the statement said. (PTI)

E-AUCTION FOR CATERING UNITS OVER TINSUKIA DIVISION		
E-Auction is invited for Provision of Catering Contract of Tea Stall through General Minor Unit (GMU) & Special Minor Unit (SMU) at Dulaijan and Simalguri Junction Railway station over Tinsukia Division. Auction Catalogue No.: Catg-gmu-smu-07. Lot Auction Start (All Lots): At 11:00 hrs. on 22-01-2025. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee; Days: 1826.		
SL No.	Lot No./Category	Lot Description
AA/1	Catg-TSK-DJG-GMU-58-24-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	At PF-1, GMU tea stall no 3 size 8X4=32 sq feet at Dulaijan Station
AA/2	Catg-TSK-SLGR-GMU-55-25-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	At PF-2, GMU Tea stall no-6 size 8X4=32 sq feet at Simalguri station
AA/3	Catg-TSK-DJG-GMU-57-24-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit)	At PF-1, GMU tea stall no 4, size 8X4=32 sq feet at Dulaijan Station
AB/1	Catg-TSK-SLGR-SMU-50-25-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	At PF-2, SMU Tea stall no-4 size 8X4=32 sq feet at Simalguri station
AB/2	Catg-TSK-SLGR-SMU-48-25-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit)	At PF-1, SMU Tea stall no-3 size 8X4=32 sq feet at Simalguri station
Auction closing date & time : At 12:10 hours on 22-01-2025. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Successive lots closing interval 10 minutes. Note : Prospective bidder are requested to visit e-Auction leasing module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in for more details.		
Divisional Railway Manager (C), Tinsukia		



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S&T ASSOCIATED WORKS	HIRING OF NON-AC VEHICLES
Tender Notice No: 11 of 2024-25. Open E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: E-Tender No. N-2024-25-11-Dy.CSTE-NW. Name of work: S&T associated works in connection with renovation of existing Assam Type and DS Old ORH Building at Kamakhya Officer's Rest House and up gradation of existing the Luitgah Officer's Rest House at Nambani Maligaon. Tender Value: ₹26,80,294/-; Bid Security: ₹53,600/-; E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 28-01-2025 and opened at 15:30 hrs. on 28-01-2025. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in	E-Tender Notice No. TSK/Elect/173; dated: 07-01-2025. Works tender through E-Tendering System are invited by the undersigned for the following works: SN.1. Brief Description of Item: "Hiring of non-ac vehicles for crew lobbies at New Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Mariani Jn. for a period of 2 (two) years." (Tender No. LV/17-14/T/TSK/883-R1). Tender Value: ₹46,83,203.77/-; Earnest Money: ₹93,700/-; E-tenders will be closed at 13:00 hrs. on 30-01-2025 and Opened at 15:00 hrs. on 30-01-2025. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 13:00 hrs on 30-01-2025 in website http://www.ireps.gov.in
Dy. Chief Signal & Telecom Engineer/Network, Maligaon	DRM (Elect), Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY "Serving Customers with a smile"	NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY "Serving Customers with a smile"

E-AUCTION FOR THE CONTRACT OF LEASING OUT OF VPH & SLR COMPARTMENT		
E-Auction for the contract of leasing out of VPH & SLR Compartment through e-Auction by various train on round and single trip basis for a period of 2 years. Description: Seq No. AA/1 to AA/28 : Parcel Space in SLR Coach (Single Compartment) and Seq No. AB/1 to AB/4: Parcel Space in Parcel Van. Auction Start Date & Time: 10:00 hrs. on 23-01-2025; Auction Close Date & Time : 15:40 hrs. on 23-01-2025. Rate Unit: Seq No. AA/1 to AA/28: Per Trip Licensing Fee; Seq No. AB/1 to AB/4 : Per Round Trip (Two Way).		
Auction Catalogue No.: TSK-SLR-VP-46		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Trips/Days
AA/1	22502-SLR-F1-NTSK-SMVB-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	105
AA/2	12423-SLR-F1-DBRG-NDLS-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	730
AA/3	15988-SLR-R1-LEDO-RNY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	313
AA/4	15946-SLR-F1-DBRG-LTT-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	209
AA/5	15670-SLR-F2-DBRG-GHY-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	730
AA/6	15962-SLR-F1-DBRG-HWH-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	209
AA/7	15604-SLR-F2-LEDO-GHY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	730
AA/8	15642-SLR-F2-NTSK-SCL-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	105
AA/9	15642-SLR-R1-NTSK-SCL-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	105
AA/10	20505-SLR-F1-DBRG-NDLS-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	209
AA/11	15670-SLR-F1-DBRG-GHY-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	730
AA/12	15928-SLR-F2-NTSK-RNY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	418
AA/13	15604-SLR-F1-LEDO-GHY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	730
AA/14	15933-SLR-F1-NTSK-ASR-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	105
AA/15	15968-SLR-F1-LEDO-RNY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	313
AA/16	15928-SLR-R1-NTSK-RNY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	418
AA/17	15909-SLR-F1-DBRG-LGH-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	730
AA/18	15670-SLR-R1-DBRG-GHY-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	730
AA/19	15960-SLR-F1-DBRG-HWH-24-1 (Parcel-SLR)	521
AA/20	15930-SLR-F1-NTSK-TBM-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	105
AA/21	15642-SLR-F1-NTSK-SCL-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	105
AA/22	15968-SLR-F2-LEDO-RNY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	313
AA/23	20503-SLR-F1-DBRG-NDLS-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	522
AA/24	15928-SLR-F1-NTSK-RNY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	418
AA/25	22504-SLR-F1-DBRG-CAPE-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	418
AA/26	15604-SLR-R1-LEDO-GHY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	730
AA/27	13281-SLR-F1-DBRG-RJPB-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	105
AA/28	15903-SLR-F1-DBRG-CDG-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	209
AB/1	15960-15959-VP-1-DBRG-HWH-24-2 (Parcel-Parcel Van)	521
AB/2	20505-20506-VP-1-DBRG-NDLS-22-1 (Parcel-Parcel Van)	209
AB/3	13281-13282-VP-1-DBRG-RJPB-22-1 (Parcel-Parcel Van)	105
AB/4	15930-15929-VP-1-NTSK-TBM-22-1 (Parcel-Parcel Van)	105

The Auction catalogue has already been uploaded on 03-01-2025 on IREPS website.

Divisional Commercial Manager (IC), Tinsukia
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NAME CORRECTION

I, REBEKA RAHMAN do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident under mentioned Address and citizen by birth. That my father's actual and correct name is MAJNU HUSSAIN. In my passport Vide No J1797422 my father's name was written as Manju Miya instead of Majnu Hussain. The name of my father's also due to inadvertent mistake written in some documents as SHAHAJADA MIYA instead of MAJNU HUSSAIN. Aforesaid MAJNU MIYA and MAJNU HUSSAIN and SHAHAJADA MIYA and is the same and one person, who is my father.

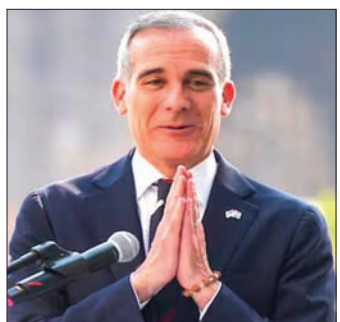
REBEKA RAHMAN
D/O- Late Majnu Hussain
W/O- Late Hamidur Rahman.
Mangaldai Town, Ward No- 2
P.O & P.S.-Mangaldai
Dist- Darrang, Assam

AFFIDAVIT

I, Mokhtar Hussain, aged about 54 years of the below mentioned address do hereby declare that my actual and correct name is Mokhtar Hussain. That is in my child's name Rehan Raja's birth certificate vide Regd No. 6254/10 dated 23/09/2016 issued by Addl. Registrar Birth & death, Kharpeta BPHC, my name has been recorded as "Mukhtar Hussain" in place of Mokhtar Hussain. That both Mokhtar Hussain and Mokhtar Hussain are the same and one person. This Affidavit is required to be produced before the authority concerned as a piece of document.

Sd/-
Mokhtar Hussain
SO- Late Anwar Hussain
R/O- Burigaon, PO- Ghan-simuli PS- Dalgaoon, Dist-Darrang (Assam)

India captured my heart, says US envoy Garcetti



MUMBAI, Jan 9: US ambassador to India Eric Garcetti on Thursday described his tenure in the country as the "most extraordinary", and said India captured his heart.

During his interaction with select media representatives on the sidelines of a programme here, he said the relationship between India and the US holds "endless possibilities".

Garcetti, whose term as the US ambassador to India is ending soon, said his stint in the country was the most extraordinary job of his life.

"This was to be in the right place at the right time with the right relationship," he said.

"President Joe Biden had said India was the most important country in the world to him and if you want to work on the future, you need to come to India. No US president has ever said this," he said.

"India US relationship is the defining relationship. All of us know that building peace is to deter war, to make sure it doesn't occur. Borders should be sacred and sacrosanct. Rules are the only way to keep peace," he said.

Hailing the relationship between the two countries, he said, "We are resilient and desirous of being closer. I welcome India's role in the world - be it for peace in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, patrolling the Indian Ocean. We love to see India's growth. It's a strong, proud India the modern world has never seen."

On the current political situation in Canada, he said it was tough to be an incumbent.

"These are challenging times for leaders - be it in Canada, US, East Asia. People want change and solutions overnight... India and the US are models of stability. Even if leaders change, values don't," he added.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his resignation

Monday in the face of rising discontent over his leadership and after the abrupt departure of his finance minister signalled growing turmoil within his government.

Responding to a query on Indian billionaire Gautam Adani, who has been charged by US prosecutors for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay over USD 250 million (about Rs 2,100 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange of favourable terms for solar power contracts, he said, "I have no comment on it. We have an independent criminal justice system."

"We have had amazing partners with great industrialists and big companies here. We have been directly funding new factories, ports," he said.

Adani has been charged with bribery and securities fraud in two separate cases brought by US authorities -- a criminal indictment by the US Department of Justice in a New York court that charges him and seven others with paying bribes to unidentified officials of state governments like those in Andhra Pradesh to buy expensive solar power, potentially earn more than USD 2 billion profit over 20 years.

When asked about the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), Garcetti said the work has not slowed down.

"We need companies that are not controlled by state actors. Even our Gulf partners say this," the US envoy said.

Talking about the Indo-US trade ties, the ambassador said trade should be done fairly.

"We have a trade deficit with India. Tariffs are high. I share President-elect Donald Trump's view that tariffs are high. We need to reduce tariffs so that we can manufacture semiconductors, telecommunication equipment and defence equipment together," he said.

On whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be invited for President Trump's swearing-in scheduled later this month, Garcetti said Modi and Trump were very close.

"I look forward to when they meet in Washington together directly and later in India when the QUAD is hosted here. It is not about invitations to a crowded swearing-in, but one-on-one conversations that we will have and define the next chapter in our relations," he said. (PTI)

Future not in war, but in Buddha: PM Modi

'The speed at which India is progressing in the 21st century'

BHUBANESWAR, Jan 9: Asserting that the world today listens to India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that due to the country's heritage, it is able to tell the international community that the future does not lie in 'yudh' (war) but in 'Budh' (Buddha).

Addressing the diaspora at the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in Bhubaneswar, Modi said India is not only the mother of democracy, but democracy is a part of people's lives here.

He said the world today listens to India, which not only presents its own views strongly but also those of the Global South.

Noting that at the time when the world was witnessing the expansion of empires by the power of the sword, Emperor Ashoka chose the path of peace, he said this was the strength of India's heritage.

"Due to this heritage, India is able to tell the world -- 'bhavishya yudh mein nahi hai, Budh mein hai' (the future does not lie in war but in Buddha)," he said.

Modi said he has always considered the diaspora as India's ambassador to the countries they live in.

"We are not just the mother of democracy, but democracy is part of our lives, our lifestyle. We don't have to be taught diversity, rather, our life runs on diversity. That's why wherever Indians go, they become part of the society of that particular place. We respect the rules and traditions of that country and also honestly serve that country and its society, contributing to its growth and prosperity. At the same time, our hearts continue to beat for India," he said.

The PM said it was because of the diaspora, that he keeps his head high wherever he goes.

"I do not forget the love, affection and prestige I receive across the world. I would like to say thank you. This is because of you, I keep my head high across the world. During the last 10 years, I have met several leaders across the world. The world leaders praise the Indian diaspora. It's because of the social values you add to their society," he said.

"Your safety and welfare are our top priority. We consider it our responsibility to help our diaspora during crisis situations no matter where they are. This is one of the guiding principles of India's foreign policy today. Over the last decade, our embassies and offices have been sensitive and proactive," he said.

Modi said that earlier in many countries, people had to travel long distances to access consular facilities and wait for days for help.

"Now, these problems are being solved. In the last two years, 14 embassies and consulates have been opened. The scope of the OCI card is also being expanded," he said.

The PM said the diaspora played a major role in Independence in 1947, and sought their help to make India a developed country by 2047.

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He said G20 meetings were organised in various parts of the country to give the world a first-hand experience of India's diversity.

Modi said the speed at which India is progressing in the 21st century, the scale on which development work is being done in the country, is unprecedented.

"In just 10 years, 25 crore people have been lifted out of poverty in India. In just 10 years, India has become the 5th largest economy in the world from the 10th. The day isn't far when India will be the

third-largest economy. India's success is being witnessed by the world. We feel proud when Chandrayaan reaches the Shiv Shakti Point. The world is amazed by the digital power of India," he said.

"Today, fighter jets and transport aircraft are being made in India. The day is not too far when you all will come on 'Made in India' planes to attend the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas," he added.

Modi urged the diaspora to propagate "the true history of India" in the places where they live and encourage people to visit the country.

He noted that the current generation in these countries may not be aware of India's prosperity, long period of subjugation, and struggles.

"This is a time for vibrant festivals and gatherings in India. In just a few days, the 'Mahakumbh' will



He said India is not only a young country but also a country of skilled youths.

"The government is trying to ensure that whenever Indian youths go abroad, they go with skills," Modi said, noting that India has the potential to fulfil the world's demand for skilled talent.

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"This is a time for vibrant festivals and gatherings in India. In just a few days, the 'Mahakumbh' will

start in Prayagraj and you all must visit it. There is a joyful atmosphere everywhere. It was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi came back to India after a long stay abroad. Your presence in India at such a wonderful time is adding to the festive spirit," he said.

"India is now recognised as a Vishwa Bandhu," exclaimed the PM, urging the diaspora to strengthen this global connection.

Modi also suggested the diaspora for organising award functions in their respective countries, specifically for the local residents.

"These awards could be given to prominent individuals in various fields such as literature, art and craft, film, and theatre," he said, maintaining that the Indian embassies and consulates would support them.

This, he noted, would enhance personal connections and emotional bonding with the local people.

He also stressed the role of the diaspora in making local Indian products global.

"Purchase 'Made in India' food packets, clothes, and other items, either locally or online, and include these products in your kitchens and drawing rooms. This will be a substantial contribution towards building a developed India," he said.

The three-day convention is witnessing the participation of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) from 50 different countries. (PTI)

Space is not just about excitement of being astronomers, but also time-consuming science, says ISRO chief

BENGALURU, Jan 9: ISRO chairman Somanath on Thursday said space science is not just about the excitement of becoming as-

tronomers, but it also involves complex and time-consuming science, an expertise that can only be built persistently over the years.

Somanath, who is also Secretary, Department of Space, was delivering a keynote speech at the virtual launch of the third edition of ISRO's Space Science and Technology Awareness Training (START 2025) programme. This year, 20,000 students from over 560 institutions have registered for the START programme that will be held from January 9 to 29, added Somanath.

Although the mysteries of the universe quite naturally become the primary focus of attention, Somanath said space science is more about

crunching numbers and cracking heads over formulae, to say, optimally design sensors or build satellites and rockets.



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So, in the START programme, we will be talking about all of these. We will be talking about our exciting space missions. But we'll also tell you a little bit about how to launch and build rockets and the science of orbits and trajectories, said Somanath.

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tions of repute. It's very important to choose good institutions and target to study in those institutions to really become a great space scientist or engineer, added Somanath.

He also told the students to focus on what is being offered with an open mind and not be intimidated by the complex nature of space science. With cutting-edge technology, like artificial intelligence and machine learning, pushing the boundaries of space science, Somanath said there is a possibility for things to be very different in the future.

The way we do things may not be the way you do things, added Somanath.

The possibilities of what the future holds for space science is immense, said Somanath urging the students to go that extra mile.

Possibly you will be the one who will design a rocket based on AI tools. Some day you may design a software to which you can say, design a rocket for me'. (PTI)

Efforts underway to restore 5 religious sites rediscovered in Sambhal: DM

SAMBHAL (UP), Jan 9: Sambhal District Magistrate (DM) Rajender Pensiya on Thursday said efforts are underway to restore the five religious sites that were rediscovered and excavated following the recent anti-encroachment drive.

Addressing the media, the DM explained that while these pilgrimage sites and their associated wells were recorded in sacred texts, many had been encroached upon for various reasons.

The DM inspected the five rediscovered and excavated religious sites -- Chaturmukh Koop, Ashok Koop, Chatur Sagar, Ekant Tirtha, and Shankh Madhav. "These places were traditionally ponds where religious activities such as bathing and worship took place," the DM said. Talking about the Ekant Tirtha pond, Pensiya said the site will be revitalised under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

He revealed that efforts will be made to preserve these sacred sites through MNREGA and Gram Sadak Yojana, while urban sites will be developed under government schemes and the Nagar Palika (municipality). Work is currently underway at the Chaturmukh well and improvements will soon be made to the Ashok well, he said. The DM added that the remaining sites, including Chatur Sagar, Ekant Tirtha and Shankh Madhav, would also undergo renovation in the coming months.

"These efforts are part of a broader initiative to transform Sambhal into a tourist hub, which would provide the city with a fresh identity and attract visitors from across the region," said the DM. (PTI)

India's contribution to world civilization remarkable: Trinidad and Tobago President

BHUBANESWAR, Jan 9: President of Trinidad and Tobago Christine Carla Kangaloo on Thursday said India has made some of the "greatest contributions" to the world civilization in various fields such as mathematics, medicine and navigation.

Addressing the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, 2025 convention virtually as the chief guest, Kangaloo said, "India's contributions to the world's development are remarkable. The world's first university was established in Takshashila in 700 BC."

Stating that Ayurveda is widely acknowledged as an earlier school of medicine, she said that the art of navigation was born in the Sindhu river about 6,000 years ago.

"Algebra, trigonometry and calculus were also first developed in India," she said.

This apart, Kangaloo also noted that India was the first country of civilization which used the symbol zero (0) in arithmetic operations. The game of chess is also believed to have originated in eastern India while the decimal system is widely acknowledged to have been developed in India.

And India's very own Shushruta is widely acknowledged to be the father of surgery," she said.

India is one of the countries that established diplomatic relations with Trinidad and Tobago following the country's independence from the United Kingdom in 1962, Kangaloo said. "Our country's ties with India, however, long precedes that. Our relationship goes back to 1845 when the first ship carrying 225 Indians reached the shores of Trinidad and Tobago, then a British colony, she said.

Nearly 72 unbroken years thereafter, more than 1,43,000 Indians came from cities and states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and many others, reshaping the social, demographic, economic and cultural landscape of Trinidad and Tobago forever, the Trinidad and Tobago President said.

"They were a fascinating mix of people - languages, tradition and belief system, all united in a new life," Kangaloo said. Lauding India's efforts in holding the PBD, she said that over the last two decades, this convention has been collaborating between India and its diaspora. (PTI)

Executive, legislature to take call on exclusion from reservation: SC

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: The Supreme Court on Thursday said the executive and the legislature would decide whether persons, who had availed quota benefits and were in a position to compete with others, were to be excluded from reservation.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih made the observation on a plea referring to a seven-judge Constitution bench judgment of the apex court in August last year.

"We have given our view that taking into consideration the past 75 years, such persons who have already availed benefits and are in a position to compete with others, should be excluded from reservation. But it is a call to be taken by the executive and the legislature,"

said Justice Gavai.

The Constitution bench, by a majority verdict, held states were constitutionally empowered to make sub-classifications within the scheduled castes (SC), which form a socially heterogeneous class, for granting reservation for the upliftment of castes that were socially and educationally more backward among them.

Justice Gavai, who was part of the Constitution bench and penned a separate verdict, had said states must evolve a policy for identifying the "creamy layer" even among the SCs and schedule tribes and deny them the benefit of reservation.

On Thursday, the counsel appearing for the petitioner referred to the apex court's verdict asking

for the policy to identify such a "creamy layer".

Justice Gavai said the apex court's view was that the sub-classification was permissible.

The petitioner's counsel said the Constitution bench had directed states to formulate the policy and almost six months had passed since. "We are not inclined," the bench said.

When the counsel requested to withdraw the plea to file a representation before the authority concerned, which could decide on the issue, the bench allowed it.

He argued states would not frame the policy and eventually the top court would have to intervene, to which the court said. "The legislators are there. Legislators can enact a law." (PTI)

Rajasthan HC orders status quo on Sub-Inspector Recruitment Exam

JAIPUR, Jan 9: The Rajasthan High Court on Thursday ordered status quo on the Sub-Inspector Recruitment Exam-2021 after the government said the exam cannot be cancelled in haste.

A bench of Justice Sameer Jain listed the matter for hearing on February 10.

Before this, Additional Advocate General (AAG) Vigyan Shah submitted the state government's view on the exam.

"Whether it is the opinion of the advocate general or the committee formed by the state, the government said it has not yet reached a decision on whether to cancel the exam or not. The government said the decision is under process and it cannot cancel the exam in haste," Vedant Sharma, counsel of accused candidates and recruited sub-inspectors, told reporters.

He said as far as the November 19, 2024 order of the high court to maintain status quo on the exam is concerned, the court has further clarified that status quo has to be maintained on the entire recruitment and training-posting process.

He said the court has also appointed senior advocate RD Rastogi as the amicus curiae in the case to help the court in resolving

the difficulties.

Harendra Neel, counsel of petitioners who want the exam to be cancelled, said, "The government in its reply has cleared that recruitment is not going to be cancelled as of now as investigation is underway. When the investigation is completely over then the government will be able to make a decision."

He said the court has stalled the field training and posting for the selected candidates in the exam.

Vacancies were announced to fill 859 candidates. Fifty trainee sub-inspectors and two RPS members are among the total 150 people arrested by the police.

Police headquarters and the advocate general had recommended cancelling the examination.

A cabinet committee of six ministers was formed on October 1, 2024 to decide whether to cancel the exam.

The case is being investigated by the Special Operations Group (SOG) of Rajasthan police.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel has been made the convener of the six-member cabinet committee constituted to review the SI Recruitment Examination-2021. (PTI)

Climate change to cut wheat, rice yields by up to 10 percent, warn officials

India's average temperature increased by about 0.7 degree Celsius between 1901 and 2018: IMD data

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: India's rice and wheat output is projected to dip by 6-10 per cent due to climate change, impacting access to affordable food for millions, senior officials have said.

Another effect of climate change is that sea water is becoming warmer along the coast forcing fish to move away to cooler water in deep sea, which has also hit the fishing community, the officials said. India's wheat production had touched 113.29 million tonnes in the 2023-24 crop year, which was about 14 per cent of the global output, while rice harvests topped 137 million tonnes. Rice and wheat form staple diet for the country's 1.4 billion population, 80 per cent of which relies on subsidised food grains supplied through various government schemes.

"Climate change will reduce the yields of both wheat and rice by 6 to 10 per cent, significantly impacting farmers and food security of the country," Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, the Director General of

the India Meteorological Department (IMD), told PTI.

He said global warming was also reducing the frequency and strength of Western Disturbances, which are weather systems emerging from the Mediterranean region that bring winter rain and snow to northwest India. This could lead to severe water shortages for billions of people living in the Himalayas and the plains below in the near future, M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said during an interaction with PTI along with Mohapatra.

According to the National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA), wheat yield in India is projected to decline by 6 to 25 per cent by 2100. Irrigated rice yields are expected to reduce by 7 per cent by 2050 and 10 per cent by 2080.

Around half of the population in India depends on agriculture. Over 80 per cent of the farmers are small and marginal farmers, having land less than 2 hectares, government



data shows. Ravichandran said rising ocean temperatures are also reducing fish catches near the coast.

"Like humans, fish prefer cooler waters. As sea temperatures rise, fish are moving to cooler waters away from the coast. This is creating major problems for the fishing community and impacting their livelihoods," he said.

rainfall from three days to one and a half days," Mohapatra said.

Ravichandran said the reduction in the number and intensity of Western Disturbances impacting northwest India is leading to decreased ice accumulation in the Himalayas, even as melting of snow is increasing.

"The input is less, and the output is more. This means water availability is decreasing. Over two billion people, including those in India and China, depend on this water. It is a very serious issue, and we should be worried about the future," he warned. The snowclad Himalayan and Hindukush mountain ranges are referred to as the Third Pole that holds the largest water resources outside the polar regions. One seventh of the world's population is dependent on the water of rivers originating in these mountain ranges.

According to IMD data, India's average temperature increased by about 0.7 degree Celsius between 1901 and 2018.(PTI)

Film personalities remember 'creative genius' and 'brilliant' Pritish Nandy

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Film-makers Sudhir Mishra, Hansal Mehta, actors Kareena Kapoor Khan, Sayani Gupta, and Sanjay Dutt paid rich tributes to veteran journalist, poet and filmmaker Pritish Nandy, who died in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Nandy died after a cardiac arrest at his home in south Mumbai. He was 73.

As a film producer, Nandy backed films such as "Hazaar Khwahishen Aisi", "Kaante", "Jhankaar Beats", "Chameli", "Shabd", and "Pyaar Ke Side Effects". Mishra expressed gratitude towards Nandy for producing his acclaimed 2005 film "Hazaar Khwahishen Aisi". "Pritish Nandy changed my life. Only he could make 'Hazaar Khwahishen Aisi'. He

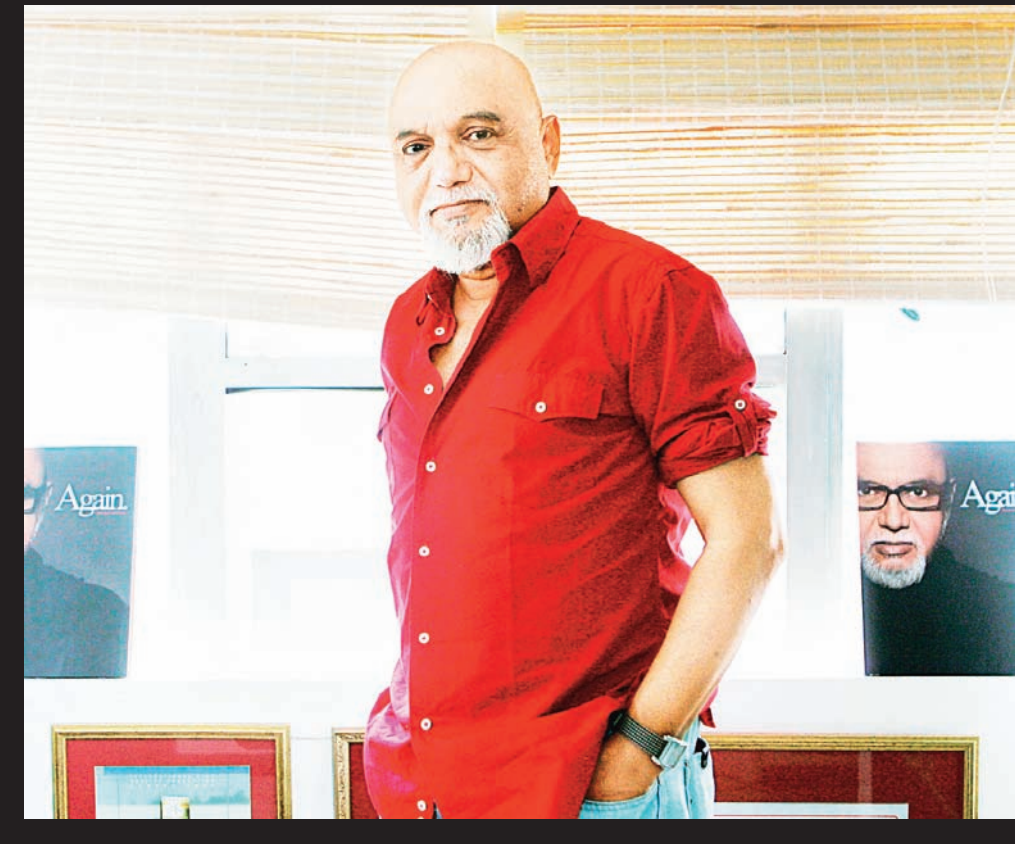
taught me so much. I am so sorry Pritish Da. I couldn't come up with an idea for the sequel," he wrote on X.

Mehta said his most personal work, the 2017 movie "Omerta", had lost "one of its greatest patrons". He revealed that it was Nandy who encouraged him to make Rajkumar Rao-starrer which was based on the life of British-Pakistani terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh. "I remember when I first met him in 2005 I had shared the idea for 'Omerta'. Let's make it he said. When nobody had belief in me or my ideas Mr Pritish Nandy gave me the strength to dare, to dream and to tell stories that mattered to me - no matter what. "He did not end up producing 'Omerta' eventually but I owe

the film and a lot of my journey beginning from Shahid to him. We had the most delightful conversations, he was always candid with me and I always left his room very energized. So hard to believe that he is gone," he posted on X. Kareena, who received critical acclaim for her performance as a sex worker in "Chameli", shared a picture from the set of the 2004 movie with an infinity symbol and a folded hands emoji as a caption.

Dutt said Nandy was "a true creative genius and a kind soul" who would be missed. The actor worked in "Kaante" and "Shabd". "Fierce. Fearless. Fine. Godspeed Pritish Uncle," director Meghna Gulzar wrote on Instagram. Anil Kapoor posted on X, "Shocked and

heartbroken by the loss of my dear friend Pritish Nandy. A fearless editor, a brave soul, and a man of his word, he embodied integrity like no other." Nandy was the "youngest guy in the room, the most articulate and brilliant", said Sayani Gupta, one of the lead actors of Prime Video series "Four More Shots Please!", which is backed by Nandy's banner Pritish Nandy Communications. "Always smiling, always warm and with that glint in his eyes. He loved a good conversation. He loved Bong women. And I knew he loved me. He would always express his love & never shied away from appreciating the people around him. There are very few people who are this magnetic. (PTI)



NORA FATEHI FLIES OUT OF LOS ANGELES AMID CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES: THIS IS SCARY



NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Dancer-actor Nora Fatehi, who was in Los Angeles, said she and her team were asked to evacuate the city in the wake of devastating wildfires in the US state of California. Fatehi posted a video on her Instagram Story on Wednesday night, minutes before flying out of the city, home to several Hollywood stars. "I'm in LA, and the wildfires are crazy. I've never seen anything like this. This is insane. We just got an evacuation order like five minutes ago, so I quickly packed all my stuff, and I'm evacuating out of here, out of this area," she said. Known for her dance performance in songs such as "Manohari", "Dilbar", "Jehda Nasha", and "Naah" as well as "Madgaon Express" and "Bhuj", Fatehi said she was headed to the airport. "I have a flight today. I really hope I can catch it. I hope it doesn't get cancelled because this is scary. I have never experienced this before. I am going to keep you guys updated. Hopefully, I can get

out on time. I hope people in LA are safe," she further said in the video. Earlier, actor-producer Priyanka Chopra Jonas gave a shout-out to the "incredibly brave first responders". "Thank you for working tirelessly overnight and continuing to help families affected. @lasdhq @losangelesfiredepartment @lapdhq," she captioned her post. Priyanka, who is now based out of Los Angeles, also shared a video of the wildfires on her Instagram Story. "It's crazy," she can be heard saying in the clip. "My thoughts are with everyone affected. Hope we are all able to be safe tonight," she wrote in the caption. At least five people were killed and more than 1,000 structures were destroyed as fierce wildfires raged in the Los Angeles area, the US media quoted officials as saying. Fast-moving flames burned through homes and businesses as residents fled smoke-filled canyons and picturesque neighborhoods that are home to many celebrities. (PTI)

'MTV Roadies' season 20 to launch on January 11

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Popular reality show "MTV Roadies" will be back with its landmark 20th season on January 11, the organisers announced on Thursday.

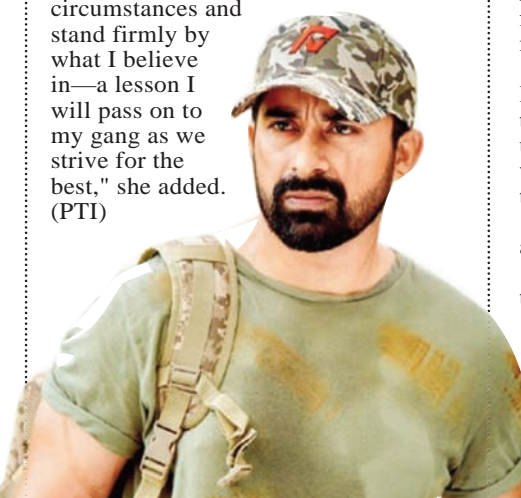
Titled "MTV Roadies Double Cross", the 20th season will air on MTV and stream on JioCinema every Saturday and Sunday after its premiere on January 11, a press release said.

Rannvijay Singha, the winner of the show's inaugural chapter in 2003, will return to host the 20th installment, touted to be its "boldest and most unpredictable season".

"MTV Roadies" has always felt like home to me and being part of this milestone season is truly special. With the Double Cross theme, fans are in for the most intense and unpredictable MTV Roadies journey yet," Singha said.

The actor-host is joined by gang leaders Prince Narula, Neha Dhupia, Elvish Yadav and Rhea Chakraborty. Dhupia said, "The love from fans has been overwhelming, and I'm back to fulfill their wish. MTV Roadies has always been about strength and power, and as a woman, I'm here to lead with courage and inspire my gang to break boundaries and shine."

"This journey has given me the strength to speak my mind under all circumstances and stand firmly by what I believe in—a lesson I will pass on to my gang as we strive for the best," she added. (PTI)



Hrithik Roshan says he felt 'embarrassed' when his father pitched idea of docu-series 'The Roshans'



MUMBAI, Jan 9: As someone who doesn't like attention, Bollywood superstar Hrithik Roshan on Wednesday said he was embarrassed by the idea of the upcoming docu-series "The Roshans" only to realise that the project will explore his family's legacy and could inspire many others.

Hrithik, who made his debut as a leading man with his father Rakesh Roshan's movie "Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai" 25 years ago, said the Netflix series chronicles the stories and struggles of his family, which also includes his musician uncle Rajesh Roshan, and late grandfather and music maestro Roshan, and how it inspired him as an actor.

"When my father said that he wanted to make this documentary, I first felt embarrassed. I don't like attention. Then I realised, 'No, this is not about me. It's not about me at all.' This is about history. And history is important. It is the history of my ancestors, my parents, my grandfather, my uncle. "That history was in my cells and gave me a drive... Their stories inspired me so much that I was unstoppable. It was nothing else but that," Hrithik told reporters at the trailer launch event of the docu-series here.

Hrithik said he hopes that the documentary will inspire others, particularly students of cinema and people worldwide.

"If it does that, then that would be the celebration for the documentary. It is going to be important for people to know other people's journeys."

"When you're aspiring and you're working against barriers in your life and you need inspiration, it is other people's stories that come to the rescue. And if my grandfather's story, my father's story, my chacha's story, our entire arc can inspire, then that would be worth it. Which is why I agreed to it," he added.

Set to be launched on Netflix on January 17, "The Roshans" will take viewers on an intimate journey through their lives, exploring three generations of passion, dedication, and outstanding contributions to Hindi cinema. (PTI)

I thought Indira Gandhi was powerful but my research found her to be weak: Kangana



MUMBAI, Jan 9: Kangana Ranaut, who plays the role Indira Gandhi in her new film "Emergency", said she did extensive research and now believes the former prime minister was not powerful as she had thought but "weak" and "unsure of herself".

The first-time MP from Mandi, often in the headlines for her provocative comments, also said there is no director today who deserves her.

"I'm very proudly saying that today there is not a single director in the film industry that I want to work with because they don't have that kind of quality... that I feel that they deserve me," Ranaut told PTI in a video interview ahead of the release of the much in the news "Emergency".

Ranaut, who has directed and produced the film that documents the 21 months of Emergency imposed in 1975 by the then prime minister, said she has empathy for Indira Gandhi and viewed as very powerful until she started working on the

project.

"But when I did my research, I understood it was quite the contrary. It also strengthened my belief that the weaker you are, the more control you would want. She was a very weak person and she was also very unsure of herself and really vulnerable. "She had many crutches around and she was constantly seeking a kind of validation. She was also hugely dependent on many people, one of them was Sanjay Gandhi... I didn't have that kind of empathy for her before 'Emergency'," she said.

The "Queen" star said she took "no liberties at all" in the portrayal of Indira Gandhi and the Emergency months. Ranaut also said she ran into Indira Gandhi's granddaughter and fellow MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in Parliament and brought up the issue of the film.

"I met Mrs Priyanka Gandhi in Parliament and she complimented me on my work and my hair. So I was like, 'You know, I made this film Emergency and maybe you should see it'. And she was like,

'Okay, maybe'," Ranaut said as she recounted her brief interaction with the Congress MP from Wayanad.

"And I think if they have a little bit of acceptance for what has been, they will appreciate the film," she added. The film, Ranaut said, has not been made with the intention of hurting people or their sentiments but the cuts don't matter.

"As the film is not made with that intention, even if that was removed, it doesn't impact my story."

"Emergency" will release on January 17 after months of controversy over its censor certificate and allegations that it misrepresents the Sikh community.

It missed out on its September 6, 2024 release date as it was unable to obtain the clearance certificate from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

Ranaut had then accused the CBFC of stalling the certification. The matter went to the Bombay High Court where production banner Zee Studios eventually agreed to comply with the changes suggested

by CBFC's revising committee.

She did not reveal the number of cuts the CBFC directed but said she would have liked the film to release the way she had made it.

According to Ranaut, people tried hard to stop "Emergency" from releasing. "I was completely devastated. I thought maybe it will never see the light of the day. Because there was earlier a film on Mrs Gandhi called 'Kissa Kursi Ka'.

"I thought maybe it's jinxed or something that you can't make a film on her... And I had also put some investments into it. There were a lot of issues, obviously I was disheartened," she said.

Describing "Emergency" as an "unusual and controversial" film, Ranaut said audiences are used to watching traditional song-and-dance movies from Bollywood.

"But when you have something so unusual, people are a bit unsettled about it. 'How come she made a film like this?' This is controversial and talks about a very important chapter in history." (PTI)

Senthil, Maaya keep Indian flag flying at ITF J300 event

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: Senthil Kumar had to work hard to book his place in the boys semifinals of the ITF J300 event while Maaya Rajeshwaran advanced to the last-four when her opponent withdrew mid-way from her quarterfinal, here on Thursday.

Top seed and favourite Senthil, ranked as high as 36 in the world, was up against compatriot Samarth Sahita, who belied his 280th rank with a stunning fight. Senthil had to dig deep into his resources to beat Samarth 6-3 3-6 6-4 in the gruelling quarterfinal at court number 3 at the DLTA Complex.

It could have been an all-Indian semifinal too but Arnav Parkar fell to fourth seed Korean Donghyun Hwang 6-4 4-6 5-7 in another high-quality quarterfinal in the boys event.

Now Senthil and Hwang will clash for a place in the summit final.

The other semifinal will be between Korea's Hyon Seok Seo and America's Rosha Santhosh.

Seo fought past Latvia's Arturs Zagras 7-5 6-4 while Santhosh also had to work hard to earn a 6-1 2-6 7-6(4) win over Kazakhstan's Damir Zhalgasbay.

In the girls singles, Maaya continued her giant-killing run as she knocked out seventh seed Rada Zolotareva, who pulled out of the quarterfinal contest when the Indian was leading 6-3 1-0.

Maaya, though, now has a tough task at hand as she will up against second seed Elejah Inisan, who ended the run of Serbian fifth seed Petra Koljikusic 7-5 6-0. The other semifinal will be between Polina Berezina and Ekaterina Tupitsyna, who sent packing eighth seed Briton Allegra Korpanec Davies 7-6(9) 7-5.

The boys doubles final will be between fourth seeds Artem Bogomolov/Roman Kharlamov and Alan Aitukhanov/Alexey Shibaev after they won their respective semifinals. (PTI)

TOTTENHAM BEAT LIVERPOOL 1-0 IN ENGLISH CUP SEMIS



LONDON, Jan 9: Lucas Bergvall's first goal for Tottenham secured a 1-0 win over Liverpool in the English League Cup semifinals on Wednesday in a first-leg match notable for a serious-looking injury to Rodrigo Bentancur and the first in-stadium announcement by a referee in the English game.

The 18-year-old Bergvall slotted home the winner in the 86th minute following a pass from Dominic Solanke, who thought 10 minutes earlier that he had given Tottenham the lead. That goal was ruled out after a VAR check for offside and referee Stuart Attwell communicated the decision via a wireless microphone to spectators inside Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and to TV viewers.

In the sixth minute, Bentancur

— the Uruguay midfielder who plays for Tottenham — fell to the ground and lay prone after landing awkwardly when attempting a header from a corner.

He was carried off on a stretcher, to applause from around the ground, after receiving treatment during a 10-minute delay and Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou confirmed after the game that Bentancur was "conscious" and talking.

The second leg is at Anfield on Feb. 6. Newcastle leads Arsenal 2-0 after the first leg of the other semifinal match.

Liverpool, the defending League Cup champion, saw its 24-match unbeaten run in all competitions come to an end and there was a hint of controversy about only the team's second loss of the

season.

Visiting players and manager Arne Slot were unhappy that Bergvall was on the field to score what proved to be the winning goal after he escaped collecting a second yellow card for a foul on Kostas Tsimikas moments earlier. Indeed, Tsimikas was off the field, waiting to come back on having received treatment following Bergvall's tackle, when the Sweden midfielder tucked home his finish.

Slot earned a yellow card himself for his protests, though he shook Attwell's hand after the final whistle. "The decision he made had a lot of impact on the result tonight," Slot said.

Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk said it was "quite obvious" that Bergvall deserved a second yellow card.

"And a minute later he scores the winner," Van Dijk said. "He (Attwell) made a mistake, in my opinion. And I told him that."

It was a busy end to the match for Attwell, who took center stage after there was a video review following Solanke's strike in the 76th minute.

After being notified that Solanke was offside, Attwell used the public address system to declare the goal had been ruled out, in an NFL-style announcement.

The League Cup semifinals were chosen to pilot a process in England that has been widely used in other sports, and in soccer at the Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in 2023 and other FIFA events. (AP)

Janssen stars with hat-trick for Dragons; Toofans register first win

ROURKELA, Jan 9: Jip Janssen slammed a hat-trick to steer Tamil Nadu Dragons to a tight 6-5 win over Team Gonasika in a high-scoring Hockey India League (HIL) clash here on Wednesday.

The result has taken Dragons to the second spot on the standings with nine points in four matches. In the day's second game, Hyderabad Toofans got their first outright win of the tournament as they defeated UP Rudras 3-0. Zachary Wallace (6'), Rajinder Singh (14') and Shilanand Lakra (32') scored for Hyderabad Toofans in a dominating display by their team. Hyderabad Toofans are now placed fifth in the eight team standings, while UP Rudras are in fourth position after two wins from four outings. Earlier, Team Gonasika dominated the initial proceedings and found the opener as early as the fifth minute.

Arajeet Singh Hundal was offered a tad too much space at the edge of the circle and he made the most of it by letting one rip off his stick. David Harte was no match to the strike as Arajeet raised his arms in celebration and Gonasika took the lead.

Gonasika didn't have to wait too long to extend their lead as Arajeet struck again in the 10th minute. Timothee Clement made a surging run into the circle and played a lovely aerial pass for Arajeet, who calmly put the ball past Harte.

As Gonasika appeared to run away with the contest, the Dragons struck back in the final minute of the first quarter via a well-worked penalty corner. Janssen played a lovely variation to Abharan Sudev, who executed a perfect finish to halve his side's deficit. The

Dragons were back on level terms four minutes into the second quarter as Janssen scored a stunning dragflick.

They upped the pressure to win back-to-back penalty corners and the second one saw the Dutch star time his strike to perfection to make it 2-2.

Gonasika then had reason to celebrate as Struan Walker scored a mind-blowing goal in the 43rd minute to restore their lead. The 22-year-old striker's drag flick from the penalty corner was unstoppable as he rifled it into the top right corner. Gonasika went into the final quarter with the scoreboard favouring them at 4-3.

The Dragons' relentless pressure in the final 15 paid off as they won three successive corners and the third of those led to a fabulous goal.

Blake Govers set up Janssen off a cleverly-worked variation and the Dutchman slotted the ball home to make it 4-4 and earn his hat-trick.

The roller-coaster nature of this contest continued as Dragons, against the run of play, took the lead in the 55th minute.

There were multiple players crowding around the goalmouth and the ball found its way to Nathan Ephraums, who put it past Payne to give the Dragons a 5-4 lead.

Gonasika gave it their all and found a way back into the contest when Clement turned in Manpreet Singh's deflection with a fantastic one-handed attempt in the 58th minute.

But the drama didn't stop there as the Dragons took just 12 seconds to soar into the lead. Karthi Selvam made a surging run into the box, cut back and set himself up beautifully before easing it past the keeper and making it 6-5. (PTI)

Being a psychology student has helped me a lot in cricket: Pratika Rawal

NEW DELHI, Jan 9: It's all in the mind, and young India cricketer Pratika Rawal recognised this early in life when she decided to take up psychology, a subject that is now helping her cement her place in the senior national women's team. Pratika has emerged as a strong contender to partner the charismatic Smriti Mandhana at the top following her strong batting performances against the West Indies on debut in the recently-concluded three-match Women's ODI series.

Pratika scored 40 and 76 in the first two games at Vadodara as India, building on the opening partnership, crossed the 300-run mark twice to clinch the series 3-0. Pratika, 24, says her strong connect with her subject and love for cricket have helped in her journey to the India team.

"I wanted to study about that (human mind) and when I started studying about it, I was very keen on understanding how we mentally process (things) on the field

and off the field. And, it has helped me a lot in cricket as well," said the Delhi cricketer in a video titled 'Pratika Rawal: Psychology meets Cricket' posted by BCCI on 'X'.

"When I'm on the field before a match there is a lot of positive self talk, what all I have to do in present and in future. Like, when I'm batting then also I see myself 'you know you are the best, you can do this'. So, that affirmation needs to be there," added Pratika, who decided to pursue psychology in Class 9. The young cricketer, who has been retained for the three-match ODI series against Ireland beginning in Rajkot on Friday, said she is committed to studies and dropped out of U19 when she was in Class 12.

"I went to Modern School, Barakhamba. I am a pass-out from there. My family has always pushed me to be excellent in academics, although I just couldn't deny my love and passion for cricket... so that's what I wanted to do my whole life." (PTI)

Spanish govt provisionally allows Dani Olmo to continue playing for Barcelona

MADRID, Jan 9: Spain's government stepped in Wednesday to provisionally allow midfielder Dani Olmo and forward Pau Victor to continue playing for Barcelona following the Spanish league's refusal to do so.

Barcelona appealed the decision by the league to Spain's Higher Council for Sport, a government body under the auspices of the ministry of education and sports. The council has initially ruled in Barcelona's favor to allow the two players to continue participating in official competitions while it studies the appeal and makes a definitive ruling. Last summer, the two players were registered only through the end of 2024, and the financially troubled Barcelona failed to meet the league's financial fair-play rules by the end-of-year deadline. Once the club got its paperwork in order, the league, with the backing of the Spanish soccer federation, said that it was rejecting Barcelona's attempt to register the players for the rest of the season. The league and the federation said in a joint statement

that even though Barcelona eventually was able to meet the salary-cap rules, the players can't be registered again after already having been dropped because of the missed deadline. Barcelona argued that the deadline for registering new players should be at the end of January, when the transfer windows closes, and not the end of December as the league requires. Barcelona was able to finally increase its salary cap after reportedly receiving a payment last week of 100 million euros (\$103 million) for VIP seats at the renovated Camp Nou stadium.

Each La Liga club has a salary cap that is calculated based on factors including revenues, costs and debts. It is proportional to roughly 70% of a club's revenues.

Barcelona has endured difficulties registering players recently because of its financial struggles. It has resorted to selling off assets in recent seasons, including the sale of future television rights. The club's financial struggles led to the departure of Lionel Messi in 2021. (AP)

Sinner, Djokovic in opposite halves at the Australian Open, Sabalenka vs Stephens in 1st round

MELBOURNE, Jan 9: Defending champion Jannik Sinner and 10-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic have landed in opposite sides of the draw for the season's first major, ruling out a replay of last year's semifinal match. Sinner upset Djokovic in the semifinals here last year before coming back to beat Daniil Medvedev in the final 3-6, 3-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-3 for his first Grand Slam singles title.

Top-ranked Sinner has a first-round match against Nicolas Jarry and also has Taylor Fritz, Ben Shelton and Medvedev in his quarter of the draw. Fritz will open against fellow American Jensen Brooksby. Djokovic and No. 3 Carlos

Alcaraz could meet in the quarterfinals, with a possible semifinal against No. 2 Alexander Zverev.

At the draw Thursday to set the brackets for the singles fields, defending champions Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka walked into the official ceremony holding their trophies.

Sabalenka won her second consecutive title at Melbourne Park in 2024 by defeating Zheng Qinwen 6-3, 6-2 in the final. Sabalenka will be attempting to win a third consecutive women's singles title at Melbourne Park, something last accomplished by Martina Hingis from 1997 to 1999.

Sabalenka drew a tough opening match against 2017

U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens and has 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva and Zheng in her section.

"I have a lot of great memories and to be back here ... as a two-time Australian Open champion, it's definitely something special," Sabalenka, who won the Brisbane International title last week, said at the draw ceremony. "I hope that I can keep doing what I'm doing here in Australia."

Third-seeded Coco Gauff is a potential semifinal rival for Sabalenka. Gauff has a challenging first-round match against former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin and is in the same section of the draw as seventh-seeded Jessica Pegula. (AP)



Sony Open starts the race for fewer PGA Tour players to keep their jobs

HONOLULU, Jan 9: The royal palms on a Waialae course that runs along the Pacific Ocean give a peaceful ambience to the Sony Open, the ideal place for the full PGA Tour membership to start the year.

But a new season has brought a small degree of stress in paradise.

The Sony Open effectively starts the chase for a PGA Tour card — only 100 from the FedEx Cup this year, down from 125, marking the most significant change in eligibility in some 40 years.

Camilo Villegas described it as an important year for him, and it's only January.

"There is a sense of urgency," Villegas said Wednesday. "You've got to play when you get in (tournaments) and you have to perform. It's going to be very compact. It's going to be a dogfight out there, which is cool."

Players warming up in the morning darkness — floodlights on the driving range but not the putting green — was another reminder of some of the changes. Along with a reduction in cards, the field sizes will be shrinking starting in 2026 to make sure anyone with a card gets into a fair

amount of tournaments and rounds have a better chance of finishing on time with a smaller number of players on the course.

Optimism, of course, is as great as ever. Villegas won in Bermuda toward the end of 2023 to earn a two-year exemption, and last year was among his best. He knows he has to play well to keep his job, and he was unwilling to even address the possibility he won't finish in the top 100.

"I am going to keep my card," he said with a smile.

Hideki Matsuyama has no such issues as the No. 5 player in the world who is coming off a record scoring performance to win last week at Kapalua. Now the Japanese star tries to become the third player to sweep the Hawaii swing, joining Justin Thomas (2017) and Ernie Els (2003).

For everyone else, veterans and rookies alike, it's only the beginning. "I would say I'm more excited this year because I felt like I got a lot better last year at playing golf, and I felt like I improved last year," said Keith Mitchell, who is starting his eighth year. "And every year you have a card, you have a blank slate to prove your



improvement."

Mitchell missed out on the FedEx Cup playoffs last year by an estimated three shots — had he been three shots better in the final round of the regular season, it would have been enough. He also can look back at 18 other tournaments where he could have picked up a shot or two. Every player can do that.

Even with a seven-month season to keep the card, Mitchell has been around long enough to realize that getting off to a good start can ease the real pressure that comes later.

"Everybody is at zero," Mitchell said. "Each week doesn't feel as monumental as it does the last three or four weeks. The beginning of the season, people play a little more free or relaxed because it doesn't feel as urgent." Mitchell said the putts he makes, the scores he posts, are just as valuable now as they are in the final regular-season tournaments in the summer. "Theoretically it is," he said. "But emotionally it's not."

The Sony Open is the start of a three-tournament stretch in which the leading five players become eligible for \$20 million signature events in California. Getting in the big events can go a long way for someone trying to keep his job.

Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley has even more experience with the optimism and nerves that come with a new season. He made his debut as a PGA Tour member in the Sony Open in 2011. Bradley went on to win the Byron Nelson and the PGA Championship that year, but he also has strong memories of the start.

"It's a scary feeling," he said. "I got here my first event, Ernie Els was on the putting green, and that was like a Holy cow' moment for me. But it's a real daunting feeling because you worked your whole life to get here, and now you have to play the best golf of your life in order to keep your card."

"I look at the rookies, and part of me is so jealous that they have all of this in front of them," he said. "And another part of me is like, Man, they've got a lot of pressure on them, starting right out of the gate." I wish them all the best. It's a really tough business to be successful in." (AP)

I think he will be the next captain: Gavaskar on Bumrah

SYDNEY, Jan 9: The legendary Sunil Gavaskar is in awe of Jasprit Bumrah's leadership qualities and reckons the peerless fast bowler will succeed Rohit Sharma as the next captain of the Indian team following his extraordinary display in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Bumrah recently produced one of the best-ever bowling performances by an overseas pacer in Australia and picked 32 wickets over five Tests.

He was also captain during India's only victory in the series, helping the visitors to a convincing win at the Optus Stadium in Perth in the opener.

"He could be the next man. I think he will be the next man. Because he leads from the front, he has got a very good air about him, the air of a leader but not somebody who is going to pressure on you," Gavaskar aired his views on Channel 7. The batting great added, "Sometimes, you have captains who put a lot of pressure on you. With Bumrah you can see that, he expects the others to do what their job is, why they are in the national team, but it doesn't seem to pressurise anybody."

Bumrah has been spearheading the Indian pace attack for some years now and his guidance has helped the likes of Mohammed Siraj to grow as a fast bowler.

"With the fast bowlers, he has been absolutely brilliant, standing at mid-off, mid-on



and every time just being at hand to tell them. I think he was absolutely brilliant and I won't be surprised if he takes over very soon."

Bumrah took his wickets at an incredible average of 13.06 and an even better strike rate of 28.37 before pulling up injured midway through Australia's first innings at the SCG in the final Test. In Bumrah's absence, the home team chased down 162 on the third day to win the series 3-1.

The lead pacer was handed the captaincy in the final Test after the out-of-form Rohit Sharma "opted out" but a back spasm prevented Bumrah from bowling on the crucial

third day. Bumrah destroyed Australia in Perth with eight wickets, grabbed six wickets in the first innings at the Gabba, and nearly turned the Boxing Day Test on its head with his exploits on the fourth afternoon at SCG.

In the series decider at MCG, Bumrah sent back Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne early in Australia's first innings but could only bowl one over after lunch on the second day when the game was evenly poised. The Indian pacer was named the Player of the Series for his unforgettable performance. (PTI)

Had a lot more to give to NZ cricket, am a bit disappointed how it ended: Guptill after retirement

AUCKLAND, Jan 9: Just-retired Martin Guptill reckons he had a lot more to offer to New Zealand cricket and was "disappointed" with how his career ended.

One of the most accomplished white-ball players to emerge from New Zealand, Guptill, scored 7,346 runs from 198 ODI matches with 18 hundreds and 39 fifties. The 38-year-old also competed in 122 T20I for the Blackcaps, scoring 3,531 runs with two hundreds and 20 fifties.

Guptill last played for the Blackcaps in 2022. He gave back his contract to explore opportunities in the various T20 leagues around the world after it became clear that New Zealand Cricket (NZC) wanted to blood younger players.

He did not find place in the squad for the 2023 World Cup in India and went without international cricket for two years before announcing his retirement.

"It is what it is, and the decisions that have been made around it. Obviously I would have loved to have played a lot more, I feel like I had a lot more to give New Zealand Cricket and the Black Caps," Guptill was quoted as saying by The New Zealand Herald on Thursday.

"I'm a little bit disappointed with



how it all ended, but I've got to move forward and move on," he added.

The first New Zealander to smash a century on his ODI debut, and also the first to hit a double-century in the format during the 2015 World Cup quarterfinal against the West Indies.

The cricketer, who ran out Mahendra Singh Dhoni at the 2019 World Cup, ending the Indian super star's international career, said he always

prided his black cap.

"One of my proudest moments was to get a black cap, and that sits proudly at home."

The charismatic cricketer also added he always loved playing as an opener.

"I had the opportunity to keep batting at five, but I wanted to go back to the top. I've got no regrets. I gave it a good shot. I had so much fun doing it." (PTI)

Mandhana-led India eye dominant show in first-ever bilateral series against Ireland



RAJKOT, Jan 9: Riding high on a dominant performance against the West Indies, India under Smriti Mandhana will look to carry forward their winning momentum when they take on Ireland in the first-ever women's bilateral series, with the opening ODI scheduled here on Friday.

India had swept the West Indies 3-0 in the ODI series, following a 2-1 triumph in the T20 series. Mandhana emerged as the top run-scorer across formats, scoring 148 runs in the ODI series, including two half-centuries, and 193 runs in the T20s, with three successive fifties.

Notably, she scored five consecutive half-centuries, only missing out in the final ODI and Mandhana will look to bring the same form as she leads the team in the absence of regular captain Harmanpreet Kaur, who has been rested alongside fast bowler Renuka Singh.

With Kaur and Renuka missing, the responsibility shifts to the rest of the batters, including Harleen Deol, Pratika Rawal, and Jemimah Rodrigues, to step up.

Deol was the top scorer in the ODI series with 160 runs, including a brilliant 115, while Rawal and Rodrigues also had solid outings, scoring 134 and 112 runs, respectively, with a fifty each in the ODIs.

In the bowling department, Renuka's absence will be felt as she was the leading wicket-taker with 10 wickets in the ODI series against the West Indies. The onus will now fall on newcomers Titas Sadhu and Saima Thakor to make their mark.

Sadhu, 20, who has three wickets in ODIs and 13 wickets in T20Is, will be expected to provide early breakthroughs, having impressed with her pace and swing in domestic and recent international cricket. Saima, 28, will also look to continue her good form after taking seven wickets in eight ODIs so far.

Vice-captain and off-spinner Deepti Sharma will be crucial, especially after her career-best bowling performance of 6 for 31 in the third ODI against the West Indies. Priya Mishra and Tanuja Kanwar will play key roles in sup-

porting Deepti.

Eyes will also be on all-rounders Raghvi Bist and Sayali Satghare, who have been included in the squad for this series. Bist has the ability to score quickly and is also a reliable fielder. She will look to seize the opportunity after making her debut in the WI T20 series.

Ireland, led by Gaby Lewis with all-rounder Orla Prendergast as her deputy, will face a tough challenge against India.

The Irish team has never beaten India in the 12 ODIs they have played against them. India won their last encounter in the 2023 T20 World Cup by a narrow five-run margin.

However, Gaby said her team will go into the match with a winning mindset.

"Our team has completed every practice session very well over the last three days. We hope to enter the field with the intention of winning the first match. The Irish team is always ready to play with challenges," said Gaby, who will complete a half-century of ODIs on Friday.

"We are playing against the Indian team for the first time. There are some very good players in the Indian team. We have a very good challenge (awaiting us)," the 23-year-old said.

The Irish team boasts of some quality all-rounders, with Prendergast likely to be a key player. Having gained experience in Australia and the WBBL, she will look to bring that to the fore as Ireland takes on the formidable India at home.

Squad:
India: Smriti Mandhana (C), Deepti Sharma (VC), Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Jemimah Rodrigues, Uma Chetty (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Tejal Hasabnis, Raghvi Bist, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Tanuja Kanwar, Titas Sadhu, Saima Thakor, Sayali Satghare.

Ireland: Gaby Lewis (C), Ava Canning, Christina Coulter Reilly, Alana Dalzell, Laura Delany, Georgina Dempsey, Sarah Forbes, Arlene Kelly, Joanna Loughran, Aimee Maguire, Leah Paul, Orla Prendergast, Una Raymond-Hoey, Freya Sargent, Rebecca Stokell. (PTI)

Inter-district volleyball tournament gets underway in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 9: Nasir Hussain Memorial Inter-District Gold Cup Volleyball Tournament got underway here at Diphu Govt Boys HS school playground.

As many as 28 teams from various districts are participating in the two day sports event ending tomorrow. The tournament is organised by AASU central committee and Karbi Anglong District Committee.

A grand inaugural programme was organised with participation from various ethnic groups. The inaugural function started with hoisting of AASU flag by president Utpal Sarma followed with smriti tarpan by lighting a lamp in memory of late Nasir Hussain. The inaugural function was attended by AASU adviser Samujal Bhattacharjee and former Indian volleyball captain Abhijit Bhattacharjee, AASU general secretary Shorjun Hanse and other dignitaries.

The former Indian volleyball captain



Bhattacharjee said the tournament has been organised in a befitting manner and needs appreciation.

"Volleyball is played in our home town and villages. Participants from various districts of Assam have come to participate creating sportsman spirit among the

youths," Bhattacharjee said.

He also said, "I want to thank the AASU for providing a platform for our younger generation. Volleyball is played at grassroot level. In villages after cutting paddy we see young boys playing volleyball in dry open paddy fields."

The former Indian volleyball captain stated that Bramaputra Volleyball League is one of the popular volleyball leagues played in Assam. It is one of the best volleyball leagues recognised internationally. AASU president Sarma said the volleyball tournament would provide a platform to youths and to give them better opportunities.

AASU adviser Bhattacharjee said that AASU is regarded by the people as an organisation taking up movement for the cause of indigenous people. The AASU is carrying out both education and sports movements. By launching the sports movement AASU is trying to open opportunities to youths in sports and games, he said.

McSweeney returns to Australia squad for Sri Lanka tour; Smith to lead squad in Cummins' absence

MELBOURNE, Jan 9:

Nathan McSweeney was recalled to Australia's test squad on Thursday to tour Sri Lanka, less than three weeks after being dropped from the top order.

Australia's selectors announced their squad Thursday for the two-test tour, with several fresh faces added to the group that played India in Sydney last week. Australia won the five-test series 3-1 and clinched a spot in the World Test Championship against South Africa at Lord's in June.

Steve Smith will lead the squad to Sri Lanka while regular skipper Pat Cummins is on leave as his wife awaits the birth of the couple's second child.

Australia's selectors concentrated on spin for the two Sri Lanka tests, with uncapped 21-year-old Cooper Connolly among the seven full or part-time slow bowling options in the 16-man squad.

Connolly, a left-arm all-rounder, has represented Australia in limited-overs cricket and has been called up for his maiden test campaign along with specialist



spinners Todd Murphy and Matthew Kuhnemann.

McSweeney scored 72 runs at an average of 14.4 in his first three tests against India, before being replaced by Sam Konstas for the Melbourne Cricket Ground test starting Dec. 26.

The 25-year-old McSweeney has batted at No. 3 for South Australia state this season — averaging 97 — but has previously batted further down the order.

Cricketer Australia also said Cummins was "focusing on an ankle issue which was managed through the test summer" and

fellow paceman Josh Hazlewood was continuing his recovery from a calf injury. Mitchell Marsh was omitted for the tour, joining Hazlewood in focusing on the 50-overs Champion's Trophy in Pakistan which immediately follows the test tour.

The first test begins Jan. 29 and the second Feb. 6, both at spin-friendly Galle International Stadium. A one-off one-day international is scheduled for Feb. 13, also at Galle.

"Sri Lanka is a challenging and exciting place to tour given the different conditions players may be presented with," selector George Bailey said. "This squad provides several ways to structure the XI depending on what type of wickets we may encounter in each match."

Australia squad: Steve Smith (captain), Sean Abbott, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cooper Connolly, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Matt Kuhnemann, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Nathan McSweeney, Todd Murphy, Mitchell Starc, Beau Webster. (AP)



CAPE TOWN, Jan 9: Sunrisers Eastern Cape skipper Aiden Markram says his side is pumped up to make it a hat-trick of titles at the SA20 as it faces MI Cape Town in its opening game.

Markram's team has won both the editions of the competition so far. The tournament begins days after South Africa blanked Pakistan in a Test series at home.

"Definitely still really pumped to try and get a third one this year. Obviously, (there are) no guarantees and it's a hugely competitive tournament, so hopefully in a month's time something cool can happen," Markram said during the Captains' Day press conference here.

Former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis said his side Joburg Super Kings haven't got the ideal weather to finalise its preparations as it has rained for the last few days in Johannesburg, but his players are surely up for a fight.

"From my side, the weather has been a bit of a downer down in Joburg, it's been pretty wet. But from a squad perspective, some great signings in Joburg too, and you know the likes of Jonny Bairstow, Devon Conway, (Matheesha) Pathirana," du Plessis said.

"Those three guys and (Tabraiz) Shamsi, obviously, have a lot of experience that comes

with them. So, all in all, our squad are looking very balanced. Two injuries, that wasn't ideal for our pace attack for Nandre Burger and Lizaad Williams. But we still feel we have enough options to put out a well balanced team," he added.

MI Cape Town's Rashid Khan said his side was determined to put a better show in the third edition.

"I think from the first year we had some really close games and it just didn't go our way. We had some great cricket last year as well, some wonderful cricket," he said.

"But it was just more about the result, it didn't come our way. In the fresh year, we'll go with a fresh mind. We have some new faces in the team. We're looking forward to the new challenges and hopefully this year it won't be the same in the last few years."

Paarl Royals' captain David Miller said the competitiveness in the league has benefited South African cricket to a major extent.

"It's been two special years for us, but also for the competition itself. Just playing with the competitive juices that we have, all the

games are really fun to be a part of, as well as having incredible overseas players, all the coaches are around," he said.

"The level of competitiveness is really up there which is great to be a part of and obviously playing in front of full houses with a lot of energy in the stadium is really good fun," Miller added.

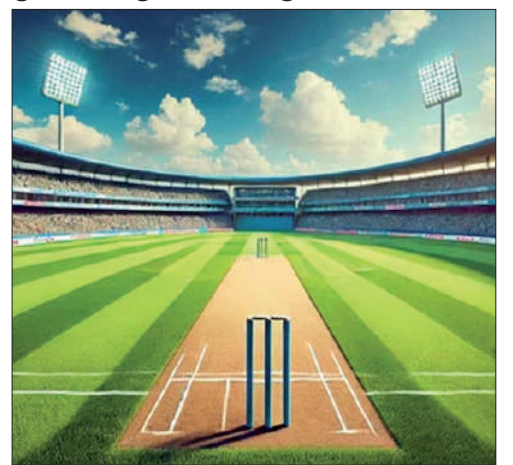
Durban Super Giants' captain Keshav Maharaj hoped that his side will be able to get over the line after finishing as the runner-up in the last edition.

"I think the energy and vibe in the camp has been phenomenal. Obviously, I haven't been there, but they've been watching through social media and just a few contacts with the coach," added Maharaj, who too was a part of South Africa's Test series.

Pretoria Capitals' Rilee Rossouw said his side has focussed on keeping it simple.

"I guess we want to play positive cricket (which is) not (only) my philosophy, it's the team's philosophy. We want to play good cricket at a good pace and always be competitive." (PTI)

South Africa urged by sports minister to boycott cricket game against Afghanistan



PRETORIA (SOUTH AFRICA), Jan 9: South Africa's sports minister has joined public calls for the Proteas to boycott the Champions Trophy game against Afghanistan next month and criticised the International Cricket Council for not upholding its own rules.

Gayton McKenzie said on Thursday he felt "morally bound to support" a match boycott because the Taliban government has banned women's sport and disbanded the national women's cricket team.

"It is not for me as the sports minister to make the final decision on whether South Africa should honor cricketing fixtures against Afghanistan. If it was my decision, then it certainly would not happen," McKenzie said in a statement.

"As a man who comes from a race that was not allowed equal access to sporting opportunities during apartheid, it would be hypocritical and immoral to look the other way today when the same is being done towards women anywhere in the world."

The Proteas are scheduled to play Afghanistan on Feb. 21 in a group match in Karachi, Pakistan.

England was also urged to forfeit its match against Afghanistan on Feb. 26 by more than 160 U.K. politicians on Monday.

McKenzie believed the ICC was also being hypocritical for not upholding its own mandates that member nations develop men's and women's cricket.

McKenzie noted Sri Lanka Cricket was suspended by the ICC from November 2023 to January 2024 for government interference.

"This does not happen in the case of Afghanistan, suggesting that political interference in the administration of sport is being tolerated there," McKenzie said.

"Cricket South Africa, the federations of other countries and the ICC will have to think carefully about the message the sport of cricket wishes to send the world, and especially the women in sports."

"I hope that the consciences of all those involved in cricket, including the supporters, players and administrators, will take a firm stand in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan." (AP)

Aiming for hat-trick of SA20 titles: Aiden Markram