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'Violent agitations of past replaced by movements for books, culture, sports in Assam'

CM attacks anti-CAA people at Nat'l Youth Day prog



GUWAHATI, Jan 12: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said violent agitations of the past have been replaced with movements aimed at promoting books, culture and sports in the state.

He added that the state's progress in recent times is evident in its recognition at various forums, including being listed among the top destinations by a renowned

international publication. Speaking at the National Youth Day programme organised by Bharatiya Janata Yuba Morcha (BJYM) here, Sarma said, "Since our government took over in 2021, we have been working relentlessly to make our state among the top in the country. To our delight, our state has found a place among top 52 global destinations for the year in a prestigious list by The New

York Times." "We are building an Assam of hope and dreams, and I am confident that our youth will lead the state to greater global recognition," he added.

Sarma maintained that the 'andolans' (agitations) of earlier times, involving strikes, picketing and violence, have been replaced by movements for promoting books, culture and sports.

The CM also hit out at people who had led the movement against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), claiming that their contention that lakhs of illegal Bangladeshis will benefit from the law held no truth.

"A section of intellectuals had claimed that lakhs of infiltrators will enter Assam. But BJP had asserted with confidence that nothing such will happen and it has proven to be true...Our government is pushing back infiltrators almost daily at the international border, but these intellectuals are now not even uttering (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Five miners still remain trapped, toll stands at 4

Rescue operations in Dima Hasao coal mine enter 7th day



GUWAHATI, Jan 12: Rescue operations at a flooded coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district continued for the seventh day on Sunday to locate trapped labourers inside the quarry.

Dewatering of the mine is being carried out with the process ex-

pected to reach the final stage soon, the state Mines and Minerals minister Kaushik Rai said.

Altogether nine workers were trapped inside the coal mine in Umrangsu area, around 250 km from Guwahati, after a sudden gush of water flooded the quarry

on January 6. Of them, the bodies of four labourers have been recovered so far.

The first body was recovered on Wednesday while three others were fished out on Saturday.

NDRF team commander Roshan Kumar Singh said the water level inside the flooded mine is receding with the dewatering process going on. "Today is the seventh day of rescue operations and four bodies have been recovered so far. The dewatering exercise is on and the water level is receding," he said.

Rescue operations are being carried out by multiple agencies, including NDRF, SDRF, army and navy personnel, with drones deployed for mapping of the area.

Rai oversaw the operations at the site on Saturday and said the final stage of dewatering is expected to reach within the next 36 hours. "Dewatering is going on. There was a lot of water to be pumped out (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ACA lauds Devajit Saikia's election as BCCI secretary

GUWAHATI, Jan 12: Assam Cricket Association (ACA) on Sunday lauded the election of Devajit Saikia as the secretary of the BCCI, expressing confidence that his experience will benefit the further promotion of the sport in the country.

"The Assam Cricket Association proudly extends its heartfelt congratulations to Mr Devajit Saikia on his election as the Secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). His unopposed election to this esteemed position is a reflection of the unwavering trust and confidence reposed in him by the member boards of the BCCI," the state's apex cricketing body said in a statement.

Saikia and Prabhjit Singh Bhatia were elected secretary and treasurer, respectively, unopposed at the BCCI Special General Meeting in Mumbai on Sunday.

Serving as the BCCI joint secretary previously, Saikia was performing the additional duties of secretary after Jay Shah took over as ICC chairman on December 1. Felicitating (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Medical students

NAGAON: Three persons, including two medical students, have been arrested in Assam's Nagaon district on theft charges, police said on Sunday. The accused was "involved in the theft of seven computers from Nagaon Medical College and Hospital on Friday", Nagaon Sadar Police Station officer-in-charge Debajit Das said. The two students were pursuing an MBBS course at the same college, while the third accused is a driver, who is also a member of a car-lifting gang in the district, he said. "The arrests were made on Friday and a case was registered. They were produced before a local court on Saturday and were sent to judicial custody," the OC said.

Drug peddlers

GUWAHATI: Special Task Force (STF), Assam has apprehended two alleged women drug peddlers from Sonapur in Guwahati, said an official statement on Sunday. The women peddlers were identified as Januka Sonari (32) and Niyati Sarkar (58). The arrest was made during a raid which was conducted following a specific input in two different places 14th Mile under Sonapur Police Station (PS) jurisdiction. "STF Assam on this afternoon (12.01.2025) has apprehended two notorious Women drugs peddlers," the official statement added.

Vocational Institute

GOSSAIGAON: Wilson Hasda, executive member of BTC's Education, Skill Development, Employment, and Entrepreneurship Development, and E-Office department ceremonially inaugurated the Vocational Institute 'SCIT International' here at Padmabil in Gossaigaon on Sunday evening. Wilson Hasda, EM BTC while inaugurating the Vocational Institute 'SCIT International' stated that in earlier times, those who couldn't read or write were considered illiterate.

Bangladesh summons Indian envoy over border tensions

DHAKA, Jan 12: Bangladesh Foreign Ministry on Sunday summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma over border tensions.

The development came hours after Dhaka alleged that India was trying to construct fences at five locations along the Indo-Bangla border, violating a bilateral agreement.

Verma entered the foreign ministry around 3:00 pm (local time). His meeting with Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin lasted about 45 minutes, the state-run BSS news agency reported.

While no official statement was released by the interim government regarding the discussions, officials confirmed that the envoy was summoned.

Talking to the media after



emerging from the meeting, Verma said Dhaka and New Delhi "have understandings with regard to fencing the border for security".

"Our two border guard enforcements - BSF and BGB (Border Security Force and Border Guard Bangladesh) - have been in communication in this regard. We expect that this understanding will be implemented and there will be a cooperative approach to

combating crimes along the border," Verma added.

Earlier in the day, Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd.) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said that India halted construction of barbed wire fencing along the border due to the strong opposition from the Border Guard Bangladesh and locals.

Addressing a media briefing, Chowdhury said that due to some (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP will demolish all slums if it comes to power in Delhi: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday claimed that the BJP would demolish all slums in Delhi if voted to power in the upcoming assembly elections.

Addressing a press conference in the Shakur Basti area here, the former chief minister accused the BJP of prioritising land acquisition over the welfare of slum dwellers.

"They want your votes first and your land after the elections," Kejriwal said, referring to the BJP. There was no immediate response from the BJP.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief further challenged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to withdraw all cases against people living in 'jhuggis' and resettle those displaced within 24 hours, vowing not to contest the elections if the BJP complies.

"I will not contest the elections if Amit

Shah withdraws all the cases against the slum dwellers or displaced people. If the BJP fails, I will contest and stand as a shield for the slum dwellers. Let's see who destroys them," Kejriwal claimed. He also criticised the BJP's 'Jahan Jhuggi Wahan Makaan' scheme, calling it an eyewash.

"In the past 10 years, they have constructed only 4,700 flats for slum dwellers. Delhi has 4 lakh 'jhuggis.' At this rate, it will take them 1,000 years to provide homes for all slum dwellers in the city," he said.

Kejriwal also alleged that the BJP has plans to take over the land currently occupied by slum dwellers without addressing their housing needs.

"They will demolish all the slums and acquire the land without any concern for the people living there," he added. Echoing similar sentiments, senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia said on X, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

71 people died due to drug abuse in Mizoram in 2024

AIZAWL, Jan 12: Seventy-one people, including 11 women, died due to drug abuse in Mizoram in 2024, according to the Excise and Narcotics Department.

The number of deaths was marginally lower than that reported in 2023. A total of 74 people had died due to drug abuse that year, it said. "Majority of them died due to heroin abuse," the department's spokesperson Peter Zohmingthanga said on Sunday. A total of 1,881 people, including 230

women, have died due to drug abuse in the state since 1984 when the first drug-related death was reported, government data showed. Mizoram, where alcohol is banned, has been grappling with drug smuggling from Myanmar. The tiny hilly state shares an 828-km-long border with Myanmar and Bangladesh. Spasmo-proxyvon and parvon spas were the main killer drugs in the state till 2015 when heroin took their place due to an increase in sup-

ply from Myanmar, officials said.

The highest drug-related deaths were reported in 2004 when 143 people died.

Over the last 10 years, 564 people have been killed due to drug abuse in the state, the data showed. The Excise Department seized 46.5 kg of heroin, 138.8 kg of methamphetamine tablets and 586.6 kg of ganja, among others, in 2024. It filed cases against 7,309 people in drugs and alcohol-related offences last year. (PTI)

'This holistic step would further cement the position of the inland waterways network'

ICC welcomes investment of ₹ 50,000 crore to boost national waterways

GUWAHATI, Jan 12: The Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) on Sunday welcomed Inland Waterways Development Council's decision to invest over ₹ 50,000 crore over a period of five years to boost infrastructure of national waterways.

In a statement, ICC chairman (NER) Mahesh Kumar Saharia lauded the council's decision taken at its meeting in Kaziranga last week.

"This holistic step would further cement the position of the inland waterways network and upgrade regional connectivity and trade," he said.

"Launch of 21 new inland waterway projects indicates



how dedicated the government is to modernising the country's waterway infrastructure. The launch of the National River Traffic and Navigation System is one of the major initiatives that en-

sures smooth, sustainable movement of vessels while always giving priority to safety and efficiency," Saharia added.

The ICC (NER) head maintained that the government's

investment of almost ₹ 7,000 crore over the last decade has already made inland waterways a reliable and cost-effective mode of transportation for goods and passengers.

The focus on promoting riverway tourism with a target to increase cruise passengers to 50 lakh is ambitious and inspiring as it will exhibit the country's rich cultural and natural heritage while providing economic benefits, he said. The ICC praised the efforts of Union ports, shipping and waterways minister Sarbananda Sonowal in augmenting and promoting waterways as a sustainable and efficient mode of transport. (PTI)

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Coal India looks to Argentina for lithium brine assets

KOLKATA, Jan 12: Coal India Ltd (CIL) has set its sights on Argentina as a destination in its strategic diversification into critical minerals, with a focus on lithium brine assets, an official said on Sunday.

Recognising the economic significance and strategic value of minerals like lithium (Li), nickel (Ni), cobalt (Co), and others, the Maharashtra company has initiated steps to explore opportunities in key resource-rich nations such as Argentina, Australia and Chile.

"The state-owned mining behemoth has invited expressions of interest (EOI) from experienced consultants to conduct technical due diligence on lithium brine assets in Argentina," a senior Coal India official told PTI.

The selected consultant will undertake due diligence, an initial review process to assess the financial, strategic, and geological viability of the identified assets, he said.

Lithium brine is a concentrated

India's coal import rises 2 pc to 182 MT in Apr-Nov period



NEW DELHI, Jan 12: India's coal import rose by two per cent to 182.02 million tonnes (MT) in the April-November period of the current fiscal year.

The country's coal import was at 178.17 MT in the year-ago period, according to data compiled by business-to-business e-commerce company mjunction services Ltd.

However, the country's coal import dropped to 19.57 MT in the month of November, over 22.30 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal.

"There was a drop in volumes, which was in line with market expectation. Ample availability in the domestic market reduced import demand from consuming sectors such as sponge iron and steel. Also, the comfortable stock position at power plants resulted in muted demand for imports," mjunction MD and CEO Vinaya Varma said.

This trend is likely to continue in the coming months, he said.

During April-November 2024, non-coking coal import was at 117.73 MT, lower than 118 MT imported during the same period last year. Coking coal import was at 36.93 MT during April-November period, down against 37.97 MT recorded in the year-ago period.

The government had earlier stressed on augmenting coal production and reducing the imports of dry-fuel.

As per the present import policy, coal can be freely imported by the consumers themselves considering their needs, based on their commercial prudence.

Coking Coal is being imported by Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) and other steel manufacturing units mainly to bridge the gap between the requirement and indigenous availability and to improve the quality.

Coal-based power plants, cement plants, captive power plants, sponge iron plants, industrial consumers and coal traders are importing non-coking coal. Coke is imported mainly by pig-iron manufacturers and iron and steel sector consumers using mini-blast furnaces. (PTI)

UK borrowing costs hit their highest level since banking crisis; economist explains what's happening

LONDON, Jan 12: UK borrowing costs have risen rapidly to their highest level since the banking crisis of 2007-08, with implications for the government's tax and spending plans. Yields on gilts, as UK government bonds are called, have been rising – and these yields are effectively the level of interest that the government pays on its borrowing.

The yield on ten-year debt hit 4.82%, the highest since 2008. And the yield on 30-year gilts rose to 5.383% on January 8, which is the highest for 27 years.

Yields rise when the price of bonds fall, so an increase in yields is another way of saying that the price of bonds has fallen. But why has this happened?

It's because of supply and demand. In general, when supply increases, buyers normally face lower prices. So, higher government borrowing has increased the supply of government debt, which means that the price of bonds falls. Since yields are inversely related to price, yields rise – pushing up the cost that the government has to pay to borrow.

The supply of government debt has been rising, particularly since the budget on October 30. That was when chancellor Rachel Reeves set out a significant amount of borrowing as well as tax increases in order to invest in stimulating growth and balance the books over the course of the parliament.

Government borrowing will reach 4.5% of GDP in this fiscal year. This is known as the budget deficit. And that's going to increase the overall amount of government debt, which is now close to 100% of GDP.

But it's worth mentioning that the cost of borrowing has increased for other major economies too, since they face similar levels of public debt.



salt solution that contains dissolved lithium and other minerals. Lithium is in great demand for its use in lithium-ion batteries, driven by the surging demand for electric vehicles.

CIL's foray into critical minerals is driven by the need to reduce its reliance on coal and align with global trends prioritising these minerals for clean energy technologies.

"Critical minerals are essential for electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, and advanced manufacturing, making them indispensable for India's future industrial strategy," a senior CIL official said.

The Centre, last year, listed 30 minerals, including lithium, nickel, titanium, vanadium and tungsten, as critical to drive the adoption of clean energy.

NFRA to release 7 papers to help stakeholders ask key audit questions

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: To enhance the quality and the level of interactions between auditors and companies' audit committees, NFRA chief Ajay Bhushan Prasad Pandey has said the watchdog plans to come out with six to seven papers having sets of questions that will cover various aspects of statutory audits.

"The papers will also help the stakeholders in asking the right questions related to audits," he told PTI. Constituted in October 2018, the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) has been making efforts to improve audit quality and has passed over 80 orders against various entities for auditing lapses.

"These papers will also act as a guidance for companies' audit committees, independent directors, and board of directors in un-

derstanding the nuances as well as critical aspects of auditing," the NFRA Chairperson said.

In the planned series, the first paper on 'Audit of Accounting Estimates and Judgments Part I: Expected Credit Losses (ECL) under Ind AS 109' was issued on January 10. "NFRA plans to come out with six to seven papers containing sets of questions that will cover various aspects of statutory audits in order to enhance the quality and level of interactions between auditors and audit committees/ board directors of companies," Pandey said.

In many cases, the regulator has noticed that the audit committees did not engage with auditors and did not ask the right questions to the auditors.

Some of the auditors also did not present many of the issues to

the committees concerned. Such communication failures also led to many red flags of possible corporate failures going unnoticed.

Auditing standards require auditors to have two-way communication with the members of the TCWG (Those Charged With Governance).

"In NFRA's experience of enforcement, review and monitoring activities, it has been noticed that there are audit quality issues which could have been addressed at the right time provided the auditors had paid due emphasis to these areas and audit committees and concerned had asked the right questions," Pandey said.

According to him, the overall efforts are to further improve the quality of audits which is also a key for ensuring high corporate governance standards. (PTI)

TCS expects margin benefits as BSNL deal tapers, says CFO Samir Seksaria

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: Tapering off in the BSNL deal expected over the next few quarters will aid TCS to expand profit margin, a senior company official has said. The country's largest software exporter is also looking at creating a capacity of over 25,000 seats in Bengaluru over the long term on a land parcel acquired recently, Chief Financial Officer Samir Seksaria told PTI here.

"The same program (BSNL) as it tapers down at a portfolio level, at an overall level, there would be a benefit which would come in (on margins)," Seksaria said replying a specific question on the impact of BSNL deal's tapering down on margins. He, however, declined to share a number on the positive impact on the operating profit front. For the December quarter, it reported operating profit margin at 24.5 per cent for December quarter and made it clear that it aims to expand on it. Seksaria added that there would be a tapering down in the BSNL contract till the September quarter of FY26. It can be noted that the over ₹ 15,000-crore deal to help BSNL roll out a country-wide 4G network has had a significant contribution in the Tata group company's revenue growth over the last few quarters.

Seksaria said the company will make up for the tapering BSNL revenue from other sources across all markets it serves. Asked if it will enter the aspi-

ration profit margin band of 26-28 per cent, which has been elusive for some time, in FY26, Seksaria refrained from a specific comment but added that levers exist for expanding the number from current levels. The company was able to post a sequential margin expansion of 0.4 per cent and maintain it on a year-on-year basis despite the 1.70 per cent wage

hikes earlier in the fiscal year.

The ongoing rupee depreciation against the dollar helps profitability, but the appreciation of the local currency against other world currencies has resulted in no margin gains, Seksaria said. He explained that its receivables are in multiple currencies and has an active hedging programme to limit any impact of currency volatilities on its finances. On the ₹ 1,625-crore land

buy deal from a Tata group company announced last week, Seksaria said the company is planning to put the capacity to expand in Whitefield, a prime area of the IT capital. The company already has about 70,000 employees in various offices across Bengaluru. Seksaria said the company adopts a mix of lease and build approach when it comes to setting up its units, and the effort in Bengaluru is part of the latter. It is building campuses or facilities across various pockets of the country, and the last of such centre to be inaugurated was in Coimbatore, the CFO added. (PTI)



CII suggests 10-point agenda on ease of biz reforms ahead of Budget

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: Ahead of the upcoming Budget, industry body CII on Sunday suggested a 10-point agenda to drive ease of doing business reforms, aimed at reducing compliance burden, simplifying regulatory frameworks, and improving transparency.

Among the "urgent policy interventions", the industry body has recommended that all regulatory approvals – central, state and local levels – must mandatorily be provided only through the National Single Window System. It has also pitched for expediting the process of dispute resolution by improving the capacity of courts and placing greater reliance on alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism. For streamlining environmental compliances, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said, a unified framework could be introduced, which consolidates all requirements into a single document.

Emphasising that easy access to land is important to facilitate new or expanding businesses, it said that states may be incentivised to develop an online integrated land authority with an objective to streamline land banks, digitise and integrate land records, provide information on disputed land and guide necessary reforms. To assist industry in land acquisition across nation, the India Industrial Land Bank (IILB), which provides information on land across majority of states, can be evolved into a national-level land bank, with dedicated central budget support, it said.

While India has over the last decade remained focused on improving ease of doing business (EoDB), there is a need to maintain the momentum, especially in certain specific areas, the CII stated.

CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said, "Simplifying regulatory frameworks, reducing compliance burdens, and enhancing transparency should continue to remain our focus agenda for next several years. Compliances for industry related to various

areas such as land, labour, dispute resolution, paying taxes and environment offer a vast scope for reduction, vital for boosting competitiveness, driving economic growth and employment generation." To ensure timely processing of industry applications and delivery of services from the central ministries, an Act, imposing statutory obligation on all public authorities for time-bound delivery of services and redressal of grievances, could be passed, with provision of deemed approval beyond the prescribed timeline, CII suggested.

It stressed that the scope of the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), which has been set up to identify, manage and reduce pendency of cases across the courts, needs to be expanded to include the data of tribunals, which constitute substantial chunk of pendency of cases in the system.

Arguing that labour compliances continue to be extensive and arduous and await the implementation of the four labour codes, it called for the scope of the Shram Suvidha Portal, which facilitates integrated compliances in just a few select central Acts, to be expanded to function as a centralised portal for all central and state labour laws compliances.

Asserting that improving trade facilitation is important, it said there is a need to make the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programme, which allows numerous priority clearances to members, could be made more attractive and easier to join, it noted as part of the 10-point agenda.

Flagging the "high and rising pendency of tax disputes" as a major issue, CII said there is a need to minimise income tax litigation by unblocking the pendency at the level of Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals) and improving the effectiveness of ADR mechanism such as Advance Pricing Agreement, Boards for Advance Rulings and Dispute Resolution Scheme, as part of the EoDB reforms. (PTI)

Air India to offer first class seats in A350-1000 planes

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: Air India will have first class seats in its large wide body A350-1000 planes, with the airline seeing opportunities in the airline's network where these seats will work well as the airline pursues efforts to have a larger pie of the global skies.

Air India's Chief Commercial Officer Nipun Aggarwal said first class is something that most of the top airlines still have a niche on some of the large and prominent routes.

"It is not a product that is going away. Many of the top airlines are building their next generation first class products. We are not the only ones doing it. We do feel that there are some opportunities in our network where that product will work well," he said at a media briefing earlier this week.

The fleet size of Air India now

is 202 planes, including 67 wide body ones. Among them, 27 are B777s, and 40 are B787s.

Of the 67 wide body planes, all legacy B777s and some leased B777s have first class seats.

"To compete with the best airlines you need to have first class, it is an aspirational product, it defines how you run and build an airline... we are putting it on A350-1000 aircraft... some of them will have the product.

"It takes time to develop the product," Aggarwal said.

The large wide body aircraft -- A350-1000s and B777Xs -- will have 325-400 seats. These planes are set to be inducted in the coming years and A350-1000 is anticipated in the next two years.

"It is important to have that product (first class) as it pulls the airline up... it will be mostly the

mega cities; London, New York are good first class markets. Even if you have a private jet, you cannot fly to the US without one stop. If you have a first class product you can fly direct and reach faster," he said.

Air India also has three other wide body planes. Medium wide body aircraft -- A350-900 and B787-9 -- that have 300-325 seats -- and small wide body plane -- B787-8 having 250-300 seats.

The retrofit of wide body planes, starting with Boeing 787s, will commence this year while the retrofit of 27 legacy Airbus 320 neos is expected to be completed by the middle of 2025.

Air India serves around 63 million passengers and most of them fly domestic or short-haul international. These flights are operated with narrow body aircraft. (PTI)

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CM attacks anti-CAA people

a word of support," he maintained. He exhorted the youth to be the agents of positive change and draw learnings from the life of Swami Vivekananda.

"When I think of revival, the first image that comes to my mind is that of Swami Vivekananda. Assam, which was once plagued by instability, is today moving towards progress with the energy of his principles," Sarma added. (PTI)

Five miners still remain trapped

as the shaft was interlinked with different wells. Within the next 36 hours, we expect to reach the final stage," he had said. Twelve pumps have been engaged in the dewatering process, including in clearing water from the arterial shafts.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said that the mine was abandoned 12 years ago and was under the Assam Mineral Development Corporation till three years ago.

"It was not an illegal mine but an abandoned one. The workers had entered the mine that day for the first time to extract coal," Sarma had said. The leader of the workers has been arrested and the police are conducting investigations into the case. (PTI)

ACA lauds Devajit Saikia's election

Saikia at Mumbai, a former first-class cricketer from the state, ACA president Taranga Gogoi said, "Saikia has been a steadfast pillar of the ACA, playing a vital role in conceptualising and executing groundbreaking initiatives for cricket in Assam. I am confident that his visionary leadership will further elevate the reputation and success of our beloved sport on both national and global platforms."

ACA secretary Tridib Konwar added, "I am certain that under his leadership, cricket will continue to flourish, reaching wider mass and achieving new milestones."

Saikia, who is also the advocate general of Assam, has previously served as vice-president of ACA from 2016 to 2019 and as secretary from 2019-2022.

"His election marks a historic milestone for Assam's cricketing journey, and the association is confident that under his guidance, cricket will continue to thrive and reach unprecedented heights," the ACA statement added. (PTI)

Bangladesh summons Indian

unequal agreements signed during the previous government's tenure, "several issues have arisen along the Bangladesh-India border".

"However, the efforts of our people and the BGB have forced India to stop certain activities, including the construction of barbed wire fences," Chowdhury said Bangladesh and India have four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) to govern border activities.

"Of these, the 1975 MoU specifies that no development with defence potential can take place within 150 yards of the zero line. Another MoU states that no development activities can occur within this boundary without mutual consent. Any such work requires prior agreement between the two nations," he said.

The adviser said India has already fenced 3,271 kilometres of the 4,156-kilometer-long border with Bangladesh, leaving approximately 885 kilometres unfenced.

He accused the previous government led by deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina of granting India unequal opportunities, which led to disputes over barbed wire fencing at 160 locations between 2010 and 2023. "Recently, conflicts have surfaced in five areas, including (northwestern) Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Lalmonirhat, and the Tin Bigha Corridor. Thanks to the strong position of the BGB and locals, India has been forced to halt its activities," he added.

He said that under the 1974 agreement, Bangladesh handed over Berubari to India after parliamentary ratification. In return, India was supposed to provide Bangladesh access to the Tin Bigha Corridor, but it failed to fulfil this commitment or ratify the agreement in its parliament, he added.

"They used to open the corridor for an hour and then close it for another hour. Finally, in 2010, an agreement was reached to keep the corridor open 24 hours. However, this agreement also allowed India to construct a border fence on the zero line at Angarpota, violating the 150-yard rule," he said. "Now, while we oppose this construction, we face challenges as Bangladesh is a signatory to the 2010 agreement," he said, adding that the foreign ministry took up the matter for diplomatic engagement. (PTI)

BJP will demolish all slums

"Arvind Kejriwal has exposed every lie and conspiracy told by Amit Shah to the people living in 'jhuggis.' The BJP has rendered 3 lakh people living in 'jhuggis' homeless in the last 10 years. Now, it is plotting to demolish every 'jhuggi' in Delhi. People living in 'jhuggis' of Delhi, remember, this is a bulldozer party. If you vote for the BJP, all these 'jhuggis' will be demolished within a year."

Kejriwal was accompanied by senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain, the party's candidate from the Shakur Basti constituency. Jain is seeking re-election from the seat for the fourth time, after winning it in 2013, 2015 and 2020.

Delhi will go to the polls on February 5 and the results will be announced on February 8. The AAP, which won 62 of the 70 seats in Delhi in the 2020 elections, is aiming for a third consecutive full term. (PTI)

Morigaon to host maiden Cabinet meeting

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Jan 12: The Assam Government decided to hold the Cabinet meeting in the Morigaon district on January 16, 2025, for the first time. The information was disclosed by the Minister of Information & Public Relations and Water Resources Piyush Hazarika while addressing the media after a meeting with the Morigaon district administration at DC's conference hall on Saturday.

Hazarika discussed the arrangements for the Cabinet meeting with District Commissioner Devashish Sharma, Morigaon MLA Ramakant Deuri, and Superintendent of Police Hemant Kumar Das during his visit to Morigaon district.

The Cabinet meeting will be a moment of pride and hope for the people of Morigaon. The minister said, "The cabinet meeting will be chaired by chief minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sharma from 10:30 am onwards. The Cabinet meeting will bring important and positive announcements for Morigaon. It will focus on the overall development of the district."

The Cabinet meeting will discuss about several important issues including reviewing the progress of the Tata Group semiconductor project under construction at Jagiroad in the district.

Alumni meet celebrated at Don Bosco

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 12: An alumni meet was held at the Don Bosco School for the batch of 2000 on Saturday. The batch celebrated 25 years of their graduation.

The event, held at the Mama Margaret Auditorium in Panbazar, brought back nostalgia for the alumni, who gathered to reconnect and relive the past memories. With a target to ensure maximum participation, a reach-out campaign was carried out to spread awareness among batchmates scattered across the globe through various mediums.

Organised with the enthusiastic support of the school, the reunion started at 2:30 pm. The agenda was packed with activities, including a meet-and-greet session, a nostalgic tour of the school, audio-video presentations, music, photo opportunities, and a delightful dinner. Participants were presented with exclusive memorabilia to commemorate the milestone event.

The staff (teaching/non-teaching) was also felicitated as a token of gratitude. Teachers including Promode Moral, John Karunakaran, and Ruth Gomez spoke fondly of the Class of 2000, calling them "one of the finest batches in the history of the school which excelled both academically and professionally."

The alumni too, reflected on their unique place in Assam's educational history. "We were the last batch to write board exams based on both the 9th and 10th-grade syllabi as part of the HSLC certificate. That challenge forged our resilience and unity," one alumnus shared.

With more than 100 participants, the reunion reflected the strong bonds that remained unbroken over the years.

Two held with Yaba worth ₹1 Crore in Tripura

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 12: In a major breakthrough against drug trafficking, Tripura Police seized Yaba tablets worth ₹1 crore during an operation in Agartala on Sunday morning. The contraband was found hidden inside a cement-laden truck, and two suspects were arrested in connection with the case.

West Tripura District Superintendent of Police (SP) Kiran Kumar revealed that the operation was launched following a tip-off received at around 6 am. A joint team comprising the Officers-in-Charge of West and East Agartala Police Stations, Rana Chatterjee and Paritosh Das, along with Sadar Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Debarasad Roy, conducted the raid.

The 12-wheeler truck, originating from Meghalaya and transporting cement, was en route to Sonamura in the Sepahijala district when it was intercepted. A thorough search of the vehicle uncovered 1,20,000 Yaba tablets concealed within the cargo.

"The seized drugs have an estimated market value of ₹1 crore," SP Kiran Kumar said.

The arrested individuals, identified as Jamal Hossen (43) and Mintu Barman (33), are residents of Bishalgarh in the Sepahijala district. Both suspects are currently in police custody, and authorities plan to seek their remand to facilitate further investigation into the trafficking network.

Guv attends Livestock and Poultry Expo-2025

'Milk production has surged by 57%, with annual growth of 6%'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 12: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the "Livestock and Poultry Expo-2025" held at Khanapara here on Sunday. Organised by the department of animal husbandry and veterinary, the expo saw the participation of farmers and young entrepreneurs from across the state.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Acharya said that expo of this type help the farmers and entrepreneurs to display and sell their produce and become self-reliant. "This expo will be truly meaningful which is being held synchronising the festivities of Bhogali Bihu," he said.

Highlighting India's leadership in milk production under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Governor said that over the last nine years, milk production in India has surged by 57.62%, with an annual growth rate of 6% compared to the global average of 2%.

He attributed this achievement to the National Gokul Mission, which



has cemented India's position as the global leader in milk production.

Acharya also lauded the state government's commitment to realising a self-reliant Assam, where farmers play a pivotal role. He noted, "Signif-

icant efforts are being made to empower farmers through supportive policies and financial assistance for innovative initiatives."

Acharya highlighted the goals of the "Assam Dairy Development

Scheme," which aims to produce 1 million litres of milk daily. "With the government's dedicated efforts, we hope Assam will soon achieve self-reliance in milk production," he said.

He on the occasion urged the farming community to take full advantage of government schemes, ensuring sustainable development and contributing to Assam's efforts in Viksit Bharat.

The Governor expressed his hope that the "Livestock and Poultry Expo-2025" will inspire the state's youth to embrace opportunities in this sector, contributing significantly to the vision of a self-reliant Assam.

The event was also attended by minister of public health and engineering, Jayanta Malla Baruah, minister of animal husbandry and veterinary, Krishnendu Paul, chairman of Assam livestock and poultry, Manoj Saikia, principal secretary of animal husbandry and veterinary, Manish Thakur, director of animal husbandry and veterinary, Anil Ch Deori, and a host of other dignitaries.

Arunachal deputy CM takes stock of Dibang power project

ITANAGAR, Jan 12:

Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein took stock of the 2880-MW Dibang power project and said it would enhance the state's energy infrastructure and push economic growth, an official said on Sunday. The project is a testament to what can be achieved through perseverance and collaboration, Mein said.

During a visit to the Dibang Multipurpose Project site near Dambuk in the Lower Dibang Valley district on Saturday, he said, "This marks a significant step forward in our efforts to harness the state's vast hydropower potential."

Under chief minister Pema Khandu's leadership, the state has terminated stalled projects and handed over them to the CPSUs, Mein said.

Highlighting the role of local communities and the youth in driving the project's development, he said their contributions were key to its success.

"This initiative is not just about energy—it's about creating opportunities. It will catalyse economic growth, boost

tourism, and improve connectivity, bringing long-term benefits to the people of Arunachal Pradesh," the deputy chief minister said.

Speaking on the infrastructure improvement associated with the project, he said boating from the dam site towards Anini, the headquarters of Dibang Valley district, and a bypass road from Roing, Pasighat and Gerukamukh in Assam have been proposed.

He said it will ease the movement of the heavy vehicles carrying construction materials. Later, the deputy chief minister inaugurated the newly constructed building of a police station at Dambuk.

Mein also laid the foundation stone for the 'Conservation of Bongal Yaggo War Memorial Heritage' project at Dambuk.

The Bongal Yaggo is a wall constructed of random rubble masonry and was built in the 19th century by Adi (Padams).

This historic site commemorates the 1894 Anglo-Abor War, where Adi warriors valiantly resisted British colonial forces. (PTI)

BSF thwarts smuggling attempt; IG reviews border operations

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 12: The Border Security Force (BSF) stationed in Tripura has successfully foiled a significant smuggling bid and detained three Bangladeshi nationals in separate operations over the past 24 hours.

On January 12, alert Mahila Praharis (women personnel) of the BSF thwarted a large-scale smuggling attempt at the Border Out Post (BOP) Ashabari in Sepahijala district. The smugglers, armed with sharp-edged weapons, attempted to forcefully smuggle contraband across the border. In response, the BSF personnel fired two rounds from their service weapons under compelling circumstances, successfully preventing the smuggling operation. A

substantial quantity of sugar and other contraband items was recovered during the operation.

In a separate incident on January 11, BSF personnel from BOP Gaurnagar in Khowai district apprehended three Bangladeshi nationals who were attempting to cross into Bangladesh. The detainees, hailing from Brahmanbaria district in Bangladesh, disclosed the identities of Indian and Bangladeshi touts involved in facilitating illegal border crossings during questioning.

The BSF reported that by employing non-lethal strategies, troops also prevented several smuggling and infiltration attempts. The forces rescued 10 cattle and seized 1,000 kilograms of sugar, 16 kilograms of cannabis,

and large quantities of clothing, medicines, and other contraband valued at over ₹50 lakh.

Meanwhile, Inspector General (IG) Ashwani Kumar Sharma of Tripura Frontier BSF conducted a three-day operational review of the border areas under the Panisagar Sector. Accompanied by DIG Rajeev Vatsaraj of Sector Headquarters Panisagar, the IG visited BOPs in Kamalpur and Kailasbar in Unakoti district on January 11 and 12.

During the visit, IG Sharma was briefed by battalion commanders on the prevailing border security situation. He also visited the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Manughat, where he presented a fruit basket to personnel of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), reflecting cross-border goodwill.

Assam Rifles vacate camp destroyed by mob in Manipur

IMPHAL, Jan 12: A day after a makeshift camp of Assam Rifles

was vandalised by an irate mob in Manipur's Kamjong district, personnel of the paramilitary force vacated the premises on Sunday, officials said.

The mob on Saturday stormed into the camp located in Hongbei village and destroyed it over alleged harassment and restrictions on the transportation of timber.

An understanding was reached between both sides during a meeting in which representatives of Tangkhul Naga civil society groups and Assam Rifles, besides Kamjong district superintendent of police and deputy commissioner took part on Sunday, an official said.

"The situation remained calm and no untoward incident was re-

ported on Sunday," the official said.

Assam Rifles had established a checkpoint and constructed a temporary camp in Hongbei following which residents of neighbouring villages accused the paramilitary force of harassment and restricting their movement. Villagers from Kasom Khullen block in the Naga-majority district stormed the makeshift camp of the 40 Assam Rifles and dismantled it on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Assam Rifles dismissed allegations of harassment and restrictions and clarified, "On January 11, Assam Rifles personnel manning the post at Hongbei inspected a vehicle and discerned that the vehicle loaded with timber did not have mandated documents. Following

procedures, Assam Rifles personnel stopped the vehicle." The paramilitary force alleged that "nefarious elements instigated the local population to force Assam Rifles personnel to release the vehicle" and claimed "the crowd turned violent and Assam Rifles personnel used appropriate and calibrated response".

Assam Rifles personnel used tear gas shells and fired in the air to disperse the protesters. No casualty was reported in the incident.

The Assam Rifles is one of the central forces that were deployed in various parts of Manipur which has been in the grip of ethnic violence between Kukis and Meiteis, that left over 250 people killed and thousands homeless since May 2023. (PTI)

National Youth Day observed in KA

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, Jan 12: The National Youth Day 2025 was successfully celebrated by 'My Bharat: Nehru Yuva Kendra', Diphu, Karbi Anglong, under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India. The event, held at Navdeep Higher Secondary School, Kheroni Charali, West Karbi Anglong, was organised in collaboration with the Social Development Organisation.

The program commenced with the traditional felicitation of guests and dignitaries with garlands. The inauguration of the event was done by the Principal of Navdeep Higher Secondary School, Biresh Kr Prasad through a floral tribute and the ceremonial lighting of a traditional lamp in front of a portrait of Swami Vivekananda, paying homage to his inspiring legacy followed by other guests. Bharat Sahu, assistant teacher at Pub Garubat Hari Teron High School, spoke about the contributions and teachings of Swami

Vivekananda, emphasising his belief in the potential of youth to bring about positive societal change.

Dr Rajesh Kr Chauhan, head of the Hindi Department at Thong Nokbe College, Dokmoka addressed the gathering on the importance of National Youth Day and emphasised the crucial role young people play in shaping the future of society. CEO of KAT News, Biren Enghee, spoke on the religious contributions of Swami Vivekananda. At the same time, the vice principal of Kapili College, Jeetendra Harijan, focused on the philosophical thoughts and messages of the great spiritual leader. Sarkari Goanbura, Sebastian R Marak; Nangendar Thakur, and ex-NSV Dhanraj Harijan were present on the day as guests. The event saw active participation from over 150 youths and students from Navdeep Higher Secondary School, local clubs, NGOs, and various community organisations, making it a successful and engaging occasion.

Contributions of late Kro reminisced on death anniversary

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 12: Observing the eighth death anniversary of Ratan Kro, a prominent social worker and president of RSS, Lorchoi Seva Dham organised a lecture on the life and works of late Kro for his contribution to social upliftment in Karbi Anglong at Farmers Growth Centre, here on Sunday.

The family members of the late Kro including Rajib Kro a popular film artist, Augustin Kro, and Sorobhi Kropi offered floral tribute on the portrait of the late Kro.

The main speaker of the programme Assam Ketrot Boudhik Pramukh of RSS, Tirthakha Das Kalita; Middle Karbi Anglong Zila Sankha Salakh, Domboru Kro; president, Lorchoi Seva Dham,

Boloram Phangcho, and secretary Jemson Kro and RSS, Karbi Anglong president, Bien Hanse and secretary Binod Terang also offered floral tribute to late Kro.

Speaking on the life and contribution towards the society by the late Kro, Kalita said the late Kro was a true social worker who fully devoted his life to social cause.

"I have known Kro very well myself and he is a genuine person dedicating his whole life to society. For the promotion of education, Kro has donated land and set up schools for underprivileged children. He has also constructed temples and is also associated with socio-cultural reformation," Kalita said.

"Everyone should learn from

Kro about his philanthropy and immense contribution towards society," he said.

Kalita also spoke in length on the values of life, environmental consciousness, and the impact of globalisation. He stated, "With extensive use of plastics, polythene bags and tea served in plastic cups in hotels and dumping them on the ground the earth is being polluted. For commercial purposes and building cities and towns, hills are being cut. Trees are mercilessly being felled."

With the reduction of vegetation oxygen is being reduced, Kalita said and urged people to cultivate the habit of walking for a healthier life and avoid using plastic bags to reduce soil degradation.

NABARD sponsored training program held in Hojai

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 12: NABARD Regional Office in Guwahati sponsored a 3-day training programme for developing PACS (GPSS) as Multi-Service Centres (MSCs) in Hojai district from January 8 to January 10, 2025, here. The programme was successfully conducted by the Manpower Development & Management Institute (MDMI). Over 42 participants belonging to various GPSS & newly promoted MPACS have attended the training, wherein they have been taught about the assessment of business potential under farm & non-farm sectors, diversification of activities, self-analysis based on SWOT parameters, developing as Multipurpose PACS, non-fund business opportunities like storage, processing, marketing, etc. The programme was inaugurated by the MDMI director B K Thadani in the presence of their other officials as well as other faculty members.

During the event, the ARCS, Hojai Deepak Bathari, SRCS, Imdad Ali and others also shared their views as faculty support. The valedictory & certificate distribution ceremony was in the presence of DDM, NABARD, Rajendar Perna, the ARCS, Hojai, MDMI deputy director K K Kalita and assistant director G Choudhary. While addressing the participants, the DDM, NABARD stated that NABARD being the supervising entity for Rural Cooperative Banks, has been supporting the overall development of the cooperative sector through training of Cooperative Banks/GPSS personnel, introduction of various schemes like PACS as MSC, Rural Haats, JLG promotion, exposure visits to best performing Cooperatives, etc.

During the valedictory session, all the new MPACS have been provided with their Registration Certificates at the hands of DDM, NABARD, the ARCS, Hojai, the deputy director, MDMI & others

KA Rock band bags top award at Sünkotenem Beat Contest

Individual accolades were also presented to honour talent

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Jan 12: The Redeemer, a rock band from Diphu, Karbi Anglong, collected top honours at the prestigious Sünkotenem Beat Contest 2025, held at the picturesque Sünkotenem Park in Mopungchuket, Nagaland, on Friday.

The event, which drew a crowd of approximately 1,000 music enthusiasts, featured seven bands, including The Redeemer, the sole participant from Assam.

The Sünkotenem Beat Contest was first organized in 2001, and evolved into a quadrennial Clash of the Bands competition, showcasing a unique blend of tradition and modernity.

The Redeemer's outstanding performance earned them a cash prize of ₹80,000, while runners-up Sideline from Mokokchung took home ₹50,000.

Individual accolades were also awarded, with Sarsonong Ronghang



(The Redeemer) named Best Vocalist, Klarhjohn Bey (The Redeemer) as Best Guitarist, Atr (Sideline) as Best Bassist, and Imsongi (Sideline) as Best Drummer. Each winner received ₹5,000 in recognition of their exceptional talent.

The event was graced by retired IAS and advisor, law, and justice, and land revenue, chief guest TN Mannen.

Mannen praised the contest as a close contender to the renowned

Hornbill Festival emphasising the importance of nurturing young musical talent and promoting cultural tourism in Mopungchuket.

Mannen encouraged the integration of traditional and Western music, advocating for the preservation of Mopungchuket's rich cultural heritage.

The panel of judges, comprising renowned music experts Arenlong, Atsa Lang Roths, Chubawapang, and Arsalasi Ozüküm, brought their expertise to the evening's proceedings, ensuring a fair and exciting competition.

One of the band members and vocalist, Sarsonong Ronghang, said, "I thank the organisers of this event for the wonderful opportunity that we are so blessed to be a part of, and by the grace of God, we even won the battle. We also won the Best Vocalist and the Best Guitarist. And lastly, I thank the people who have supported us."

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Not life, but good life, is to be chiefly valued.
- Socrates

Denigrating women politicians

A woman's honour was one of the issues triggering the battle of Kurukshetra while the Rajputs of Chittor fought to the last man defending the honour of their queen Padmini and other womenfolk. Standing up to defend a woman's honour is thus not unheard of in India. Though Constitution has given equal rights to women, political misogyny continues to flourish seeking to reduce Mamata Banerjee or Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to objects of ridicule. The practice of sexist rhetoric and objectification of women can be traced back to the earlier years of the republic with firebrand Socialist leader dubbing Indira Gandhi a "gungi gudiya" (dumb doll) or his later day ideological successor and former Bihar chief minister, Lalu Prasad Yadav infamously commenting roads with Hema Malini's cheeks. Invectives hurled to the then principal Opposition leader of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee by leading lights of CPI(M) leadership were beyond the norms of parliamentary convention and political behaviour. Over the years, sexist remarks towards woman politicians have been made with impunity. Of late, Delhi BJP leader, Ramesh Bidhuri's recent slur made against Congress MP, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is aimed to demean individuals. Its other goal is perpetuating marginalisation of women in politics. Inaction against Bidhuri lends credence to this doubt.

Seeking to undermine the progress of women in public life, misogyny prevails in Indian politics. Not much protest is heard against it post the electoral triumphs of the BJP in different polling processes. Worse these sentences often find acceptance in the cultural milieu. It is normalised by a society conditioned to tolerate casual sexism. Political parties project themselves as champions of gender equality. They tout their commitment to women empowerment through various schemes and programmes. Schemes like Ladli Behna and Pyari Didi aim at women empowerment. But they ring hollow in the context of the views towards women and girls by the saffronites. It is time to end the disconnect between words and deeds. The question remains that how can a political party in India overlook comments of its members demeaning women in public forum after having launched schemes for their financial uplift. This is glaring. It also undermines the sincerity of these initiatives. The misogyny is more than a political issue. It is a social problem. There seems to be a cultural tolerance to sexism in our society. Inappropriate remarks are dismissed as harmless banter or political theatrics. No action has been taken against Bidhuri yet. He ought to have been suspended from the party as a warning. A swift and decisive action against offenders, regardless of their stature and influence.

It is unlikely that any action would be taken against him. Courtesy has taken a backseat in modern day politics especially when members of the saffron camp take on their political opponents. It is Priyanka Gandhi in this case. And she is the target owing to the family she comes from. Misogyny has no place in a democracy that aspires to represent and empower all its citizens. Time has come to consign sexist rhetoric to the past and create a political culture that respects women.

Trump's proposal to absorb Canada ignites sovereignty debate

By: MA Hossain

In a startling move that has sent shockwaves through political circles in the United States and Canada, US President-elect Donald Trump recently posted maps on his Truth Social platform showing Canada as part of the United States. These provocative posts, shared on January 7, have ignited debates on sovereignty, diplomacy, and national identity. Trump's actions come amidst his repeated claims that Canadians would benefit from becoming part of the United States—a notion that Canadian officials swiftly and emphatically rejected. Trump's first post featured a striking image of a unified North America, with Canada seamlessly integrated into the United States. The map depicted the absence of national borders, with the term "United States" emblazoned across the combined territories. This was followed by another map where both regions were painted in the colours of the US flag, captioned "Oh Canada."

These posts appeared just hours after Canadian officials publicly dismissed Trump's assertion that annexing Canada would be advantageous for its citizens. The timing added fuel to an already contentious debate, amplifying reactions across both nations. In a press conference on the same day, Trump doubled down on his stance, suggesting that economic leverage could be used to realize his vision. He threatened to impose severe tariffs on Canadian goods if Ottawa resisted. "You get rid of that artificially-drawn line," Trump stated, "and you take a look at what that looks like. It would also be much better for national security." This rhetoric aligns with Trump's long-standing emphasis on using economic and security arguments to justify controversial positions. However, his comments about erasing the border have drawn sharp criticism, raising concerns about escalating tensions between two nations that share one of the world's longest undefended borders. Canadian leaders were quick to denounce Trump's remarks. Outgoing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took to X (formerly Twitter) to assert Canada's sovereignty, stating, "There isn't a snowball's chance in hell that Canada would become part of the United States." Pierre Poilievre, leader of the opposition Conservative Party, echoed Trudeau's sentiment, declaring, "Canada will never be the 51st state." Both leaders emphasized the importance of Canadian identity and independence, rallying citizens against any notion of annexation.

While denouncing Trump's proposal, Canadian politicians also stressed the importance of preserving strong bilateral ties with the US. Trudeau, whose tenure has seen fluctuating popularity, recently announced his resignation as prime minister and leader of the Liberal Party, adding another layer of complexity to Canada's political landscape.

The idea of annexing Canada is not new. In the 19th century, some American factions championed the "Manifest Destiny" doctrine, which aimed to expand US territory across the North American continent. However, these ambitions never gained substantial traction, and the relationship between the US and Canada evolved into one of the most stable and mutually beneficial partnerships in modern history. The two nations are deeply intertwined economically. Canada remains one of the US's

largest trading partners, with bilateral trade exceeding \$700 billion annually. Agreements like the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) have further cemented this interdependence. Trump's recent comments, however, risk undermining these cooperative foundations. Trump's posts quickly went viral, eliciting a range of reactions. His supporters lauded the idea as a bold vision, suggesting that it could bolster US influence and resources. Critics, however, labelled the posts as reckless, imperialistic, and insensitive to Canada's rich cultural heritage and political autonomy.

In Canada, outrage was palpable. Hashtags such as #HandsOffCanada and #TrumpBackOff trended on social media platforms, with many citizens expressing their frustration and reaffirming their national pride. For many Canadians, Trump's proposal not only disregards their sovereignty but also undermines decades of peaceful coexistence.

Trump's comments have introduced an element of unpredictability to US-Canada relations. While disputes between the two nations have historically been managed through diplomacy, Trump's aggressive rhetoric risks destabilizing this dynamic. His threats of tariffs could disrupt critical trade flows, harming industries on both sides of the border.

Furthermore, this proposal raises broader questions about the United States' commitment to respecting the sovereignty of its allies. Should such rhetoric translate into policy, it could alienate other nations, diminishing the US's standing in the global arena. Some analysts view Trump's controversial maps as a calculated political manoeuvre designed to energize his base and shift attention from domestic challenges. By presenting a provocative vision, Trump solidifies his image as a disruptor willing to challenge the status quo.

Others, however, see this as a reckless gambit with potentially serious diplomatic repercussions. The risks of alienating a close ally like Canada and jeopardizing decades of cooperation far outweigh the short-term political gains such rhetoric might yield. As Canada approaches its election season and the US transitions to Trump's leadership, the future of bilateral relations hangs in the balance. Canadian leaders have remained united in rejecting Trump's vision, using this controversy to rally citizens around their sovereignty and national identity. While the current uproar may fade, it serves as a stark reminder of the delicate balance between partnership and independence in international relations. Both nations must seize this opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to mutual respect and constructive dialogue. Trump's provocative maps and statements have thrust issues of sovereignty, diplomacy, and national identity into the spotlight. While his posts have sparked widespread condemnation, they also underscore the importance of maintaining strong, respectful relationships between neighbouring nations.

For now, Canada stands firm in defense of its autonomy, with its leaders and citizens united against any notion of annexation. Whether this controversy leaves a lasting imprint on US-Canada relations or fades into history as a fleeting political stunt remains to be seen. One thing is certain: the debate has reinvigorated discussions about borders, alliances, and the enduring significance of national sovereignty. (IPA Service)

Iran is the next target of Israel in the expanding West Asian conflict

Pro-Israel triumphalists are celebrating a trifecta: in the course of a little over a year, Israel has felled or significantly set back its three most troublesome enemies: Hamas, Hezbollah, and Syria's Bashar al-Assad. Another enemy, Iran, has been brought low by Israeli missile attacks, the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, and a Revolutionary Guard commander in Damascus. Its Iraqi Shia militia allies have reportedly promised, at least temporarily, to cease attacks on Israel.

Israeli military sources claim that its strikes inside Iran (precipitated by an Iranian missile assault on Israel) dismantled much of its air defense systems. These security officials note that this was a key mission: to eliminate Iran's air defenses in preparation for a future all-out assault on its nuclear program. The sources estimate it will take a year or more for Iran to repair the current damage and restore its capabilities. During this period, it will be most vulnerable, and an attack would be most optimal from an Israeli point of view. That would be the time frame within which such an assault would be expected.

In its weakened state, both Israeli leaders and Trump security advisors are urging such an attack on Iran. Former Israeli defense minister, Yoav Gallant, travelled to Washington, DC, last month. He lobbied US officials, telling them this is "a window to act against Iran." He favored either an Israeli or preferably a joint US-Israeli operation against Iran's nuclear infrastructure.

President Joe Biden does not favour such an attack. Thus it would be left to the incoming Trump administration, whose advisors are seriously considering this option. Though Trump has repeatedly expressed reluctance to commit US forces on behalf of foreign interventions, he is attuned to Israeli interests.

At the very least, he would instruct US intelligence agencies to share reports that could assist in targeting Iranian sites; he would also provide specialized munitions needed for such strikes as Biden has in Gaza and Lebanon.

For example, to destroy Iran's

most secure nuclear site, Fordow, would require a 30,000-pound GBU-57 bunker buster, which can only be flown in a B-2 bomber. It would require either a US or Israeli pilot to conduct the mission. Without this level of US participation, it would be unlikely Israel could do any significant damage to Fordow.

An example of a similar US-Israel intelligence collaboration is Israel's assassination of Hezbollah's former second-in-command, Imad Mughniyeh, enabled by a CIA reconnaissance team. The United States also helped pinpoint the locations of much of Hamas's senior leadership in Gaza, enabling the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to murder them. Similarly, we may expect a green light from the Trump administration for Israel to continue eliminating key Iranian security officials, as it has Hamas and Hezbollah senior leadership.

The new reality in Middle East affairs offers Israel far more latitude in attacking its rivals. Whatever restraints existed at one time are now gone. In its defiance of the Biden administration during the Gaza genocide, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has shown that Israel will act with impunity anywhere in the region to pursue its interests. Nor does it ever face consequences or accountability.

Israel's new strategic approach has been showcased in Gaza, where it has committed genocide despite the world's horrified response. It has stood by and offered little resistance. Even arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court for Gallant and Netanyahu have not deterred them from slaughtering nearly 50,000 Palestinians. Devi Sridhar of Edinburgh University, writing in the Guardian, estimates the toll could be as high as 335,000, including deaths caused directly and indirectly by the fighting.

Similarly, the IDF has depopulated much of southern Lebanon and completely destroyed entire villages that once were Hezbollah strongholds. It has turned the Beirut neighbourhood of Dahiyeh, where the militant group was based, into ruins. Much of its sen-

ior leadership has been killed, as they sheltered in what they believed were impregnable underground bunkers, by US-made bunker buster bombs. The success of these Israeli military operations, along with domestic political considerations, dramatically increases prospects of an intervention in Iran. Trump, who once ordered the assassination of Iran's supreme military commander, Qassem Soleimani, has no love lost for the Iranians. He also cancelled Barack Obama's 2015 Iran nuclear deal. The incoming president has little use for conventional diplomacy or agreements. He prefers a unilateral approach and, if necessary, the use of force. This adds to the likelihood he will green-light an Israeli operation.

Another militating factor is Netanyahu's political vulnerability. The only thing preventing early elections and a defeat for the unpopular leader — whose approval rating is 29 percent — is continued military conflict. Earlier this month, he testified for the first time in court, where he faces three corruption charges. A conviction of any of the counts would force him to resign.

Netanyahu has shown himself to be a wily political survivor, expert at manipulating the public, his own rivals, and political allies for his own benefit. He understands quite well that a successful attack on Iran, even if it portends blowback from a counterattack, could offer him enormous political benefit at home.

In December, Assad was toppled by an Islamic militant group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). In its earlier iteration as Al-Nusra, it was an Israeli proxy in the Syrian Golan, where it faced off against Hezbollah forces. After HTS assumed control this month, the IDF invaded Syria and occupied territory six miles into what had been a 1974 armistice line between the two countries. Netanyahu promptly abrogated the treaty agreement and announced Israel would occupy Syrian territory indefinitely as a "defensive barrier" on its northern frontier.

A Reuters report based on Syrian eyewitnesses declared IDF

commandos were operating sixteen miles from Damascus, in the city's suburbs. Though the IDF denied the story, it did acknowledge its forces were active outside the new Israeli buffer zone: "The IDF has deployed troops in the buffer zone and in a number of areas that are necessary to defend." In other words, it is not restricting itself to activity in the occupied territory. It will conduct operations in any Syrian territory it deems critical to its interests.

Though HTS may have toppled Assad and become the de facto power brokers inside the country, the two real powers are Israel and Turkey. Both have broader geopolitical ambitions. Turkey seeks to defeat Kurdish forces allied with the United States in northeastern Syria. It, too, has occupied a buffer zone inside northern Syria, as Israel has in the south.

The United States currently has 2,000 troops supporting its Kurdish allies. Will Donald Trump continue this operation? During his first term, he toyed with withdrawing our forces from Syria. But ultimately he was dissuaded by his generals, who persuaded him that Syria would fall into chaos and ISIS would return if he did.

Given that Trump has nominated key military and intelligence figures who are far more in tune with his isolationist views on US foreign entanglements, he may leave the Kurds, our allies for the past fifteen years, to their own devices. Turkey will likely then launch a major offensive, which could decimate them. That would leave an opening for ISIS to resume terrorist activity in eastern Syria. In Trump's first term, he boasted he had defeated ISIS. He may enable their reemergence.

Once Israel finds its Syrian position stable, it would be in a position to turn to Iran. An Israeli attack is almost a foregone conclusion. The question is not if, but when.

When Trump enters the White House, he will be confronted with whether to approve an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear, military, and intelligence infrastructure. Trump may resist direct US involvement. He is hesitant about any operation that involves a major military commitment. But he would no doubt

provide critical intelligence to the Israelis.

A massive strike against Iranian targets could ignite a regional war. Even with members of Iran's Axis of Resistance sidelined, there are others (Iraqi Shia and Houthi allies) who have the capability of inflicting damage on US and Israeli forces. It could be the first such widespread conflict since 1973.

Thus far, Iran has restrained its nuclear program. Its uranium enrichment has not surpassed 60 percent. It has not produced a missile delivery system. This process could take a year or more. It has chosen not to progress beyond these limits, since it doesn't want to give its enemies grounds for such a strike.

This week, Axios reported that a US national security advisor presented a plan to President Biden to attack Iran's nuclear facilities should it take steps like those mentioned above. This makes the nuclear option a very dangerous one for Iran.

Though a US-Israel attack would cause serious damage to Iran's nuclear infrastructure, experts have judged it will not destroy its capabilities. Iran going nuclear would considerably alter the balance of power in the region. Instead of Israel being the lone nuclear power, Iran would join this select club. The former would no longer have unfettered power and influence. As with North Korea, Iran would possess a guarantee of survival should enemies launch an all-out attack whose goal is annihilation or regime change.

During the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union maintained a policy of mutually assured destruction (MAD), which constrained each party from using their weapons. The Middle East is far less stable. Some, like Israel, are ruled by zealots engaged in genocide and harbouring visions of an apocalyptic war against Islam. The likelihood of nuclear war feels considerably higher than during the Cold War. Since October 7, 2023, Israel has transformed the region into a considerably more dangerous place. The new Trump administration may have neither the capability nor the will to prevent a conflict of catastrophic proportions. (IPA Service)

Veer Savarkar: Why the controversy over the name of the college?

By: Prof Mahesh Chand Gupta

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently laid the foundation stone of a new college in the name of the great freedom fighter Vinayak Damodar Veer Savarkar in Delhi University. With this, politics has started on the name of Savarkar. Congress has started protesting on the name of Savarkar. Congress is advocating to name this college after former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, while the leftists are in favor of naming the college after the country's first teacher Savitribai Phule. The big question is why does Congress get upset over the name of Veer Savarkar?

The Congress leaders, who enjoyed power for decades in the country, are very disappointed and frustrated after the formation of the Modi government at the Center. The more they are struggling to return to power, in reality power is going further away from them. When the Congress party was in power, it shaped the country's politics according to the Nehru-Gandhi family for a long time. Everyone knows how Congress promoted nepotism, showed favoritism in naming the institutions of the country and marginalized leaders like Sardar Patel, Ambedkar and Lal Bahadur Shastri. Earlier Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi dominated the Congress and now the dominance of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi is clearly visible. This has limited the opportunity for talented leaders to move forward within the party. In trying to do politics only in the name of the Gandhi family, Congress has not only been badly defeated but has also gone to the abyss.

As long as Congress was in power, all the institutions, schemes and programs of the country were named after the members of the Gandhi-Nehru family. If we look at these names only in Delhi, we find Jawaharlal Nehru University, Indira Gandhi Nehru University, Indira Gandhi Nehru Stadium, Kamala Nehru College, Indira Gandhi National Cultural Centre, Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Hospital, Indira Gandhi International Airport, Rajiv Chowk, Rajiv Gandhi Bhawan and many more roads, other buildings, squares, etc., which have been named after



Congress leaders. Many schemes of the central and various state governments have also been named after the Nehru-Gandhi family. This glorification of Congress leaders has been done by sidelining our great freedom fighters and other big leaders.

Although Congress gets irritated when any building, institution or scheme is named after any non-Congress leader, but Congress leaders get most upset when Veer Savarkar is named. In fact, Congress, which is an expert in the game of appeasement, has a special animosity towards Hindutva. This is the reason why Congress does not even like the names of those great revolutionaries and leaders who have become symbols of Hindutva. The situation is such that from a small Congress worker to Rahul Gandhi, everyone is busy criticizing Veer Savarkar. Congress has not hesitated to tarnish Savarkar's image by accusing him of apologizing to the British, flattering colonial officials and insulting women, but despite the venom spewed by Congress, the nationalist public pays homage to Savarkar who devoted his entire life for the freedom of the country. Congress has no answer to the question that if Veer Savarkar was not fighting for the freedom of the country, then why did the British sentence him to life imprisonment twice? Why was Savarkar sentenced to Kala Pani and kept in the dungeons of Andaman? Why were Savarkar subjected to ruthless atrocities? As long as Congress was in power, it did not let the saga of bravery of great leaders like Savarkar come before the public. It put all its efforts to prove Nehru as the 'Yug Purush'. But Congress has no answer to why

Nehru was never sentenced to Kala pani?

Congress never gave Savarkar and other great freedom fighters like him the respect they deserved and today when a college has been named after Savarkar, they are unable to digest this too.

The people of the country have now learnt to differentiate between Congress' appeasement and Veer Savarkar's great personality. People know that Congress has been opposing Hindutva and Hindu leaders only because of its policy of appeasement. People have not forgotten that in the year 2003, Congress had strongly opposed the installation of Savarkar's picture in the central hall of the old Parliament House. Congress had then argued that Savarkar was not an MP, so his picture should not be installed in the Parliament House. Whereas the reality is that before that, the pictures of Mahatma Gandhi and Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak had been put up in the Parliament despite them not being MPs. Clearly, Congress had an objection to the picture of a great Hindu leader being put up in the Parliament.

Congress and leftists believe that the purpose behind naming the college after Savarkar is to promote polarization in the current political environment. It is being said that by doing this, an attempt is being made to impose its ideology in the field of education. But the question is that if people in the country do not follow the nationalist ideology, should they follow the path of appeasement, which the Congress likes? It is also being said that educational institutions should be kept away from politics. Such naming will affect the objective of education. The question is

that when universities were named after Nehru and Indira Gandhi, would the objective of education not have been affected by it?

By blabbering over naming the college after Savarkar, the Congress is just doing politics. Naming the college after him is a tribute to Veer Savarkar as a freedom fighter and a token of gratitude towards him, which should be done repeatedly. Savarkar, who dedicated his life to the freedom struggle, should have received this honor long ago. Congress and the leftists may be doing politics on this issue, but the statement of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in this regard is worth noting. While addressing the first 'Samarpan Samaroh' of Delhi University Foundation, he rightly said that Savarkar was a great nationalist but a section of the society has a colonial mindset, which objects to the naming of a DU college after him. Pradhan said that we do not want to change history, but want to make history bigger. History is a mirror for the future and DU is playing a big role in it.

What the Union Education Minister has said is absolutely correct. If we take pride in great revolutionaries like Savarkar, then certainly our history will become bigger and its glory will increase. Why only one college, various universities, colleges, prestigious institutions, institutions, schools, airports, bus stations, railway stations in the country should also be named after Savarkar and other great men and freedom fighters. This will not only felicitate great personalities but will also give direction to our young generation. During the rule of Congress, history has been distorted by the leftists. Foreign invaders are called great. On the contrary, if today Savarkar is being given this honor under the BJP rule, then it is a matter of pride for the entire countrymen.

Certainly, the name of Veer Savarkar will inspire the students and make them aware of their history. Naming the college after Savarkar is a symbol of correct evaluation of historical personalities. It should not be made a subject of meaningless debate and controversy. (The author is a renowned educationist, thinker and speaker. He has been a professor at Delhi University for 44 years)

Magh Bihu: A symphony of Rituals, Feasts, and Cultural Vibrance

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Assamese term "Bihu" finds its roots in the Sanskrit word "visuvat," particularly associated with the mahavisvasamkranti, symbolizing the vernal equinox at the junction of the Chaitra and Vaisakha months (mid-April). Bihu, a generic term, encompasses three significant Assamese festivals: BohagBihu, MaghBihu, and Kati Bihu. BohagBihu, celebrated at the junction of the Assamese months of Chot and Bohag, is also known as RangaliBihu due to its association with joyous singing and dancing during the springtime. MaghBihu, occurring in mid-January at the junction of the Assamese months of Puh and Magh, is alternatively called BhogaliBihu, highlighting its main feature of enjoyment through feasting. Kati Bihu, falling in mid-October at the junction of the Assamese months of Ahin and Kati, is also known as KangaliBihu or Beggar's Bihu. This name reflects its lack of connection with feasting or merry-making, as it occurs when the year's grains are exhausted, and the traditional winter crop is yet to mature. According to P. Goswami, BohagBihu aligns with the Vernal Equinox, Kati Bihu with the Autumnal Equinox, and MaghBihu with the Winter Solstice. The term Bihu can be traced back to the Sanskrit word "visuvan," signifying equinox. The multifaceted nature of Bihu captures the essence of Assamese culture through diverse celebrations marking the changing seasons.

MaghBihu is intricately linked to a folk fire ceremony, but the essence lies in the significance of Uruka, the Bihu eve. This prelude to the festive day holds immense importance as womenfolk diligently prepare for the celebrations ahead. Uruka extends beyond a mere day, involving the gathering of fuel, procuring fish from ponds or streams, and if feasible, obtaining some meat. The meticulous preparations for Uruka include the creation of an array of snacks such as Chira, Pitha, laru, and curd. In tribal communities, women take on the task of crafting rice-beer, typically left undistilled.

The winter season adds an extra layer to this preparation, requiring four or five days for the beer to reach its matured state. Uruka, with its comprehensive preparations, sets the stage for the grand festivities of MaghBihu, reflecting the cultural richness and vibrant traditions associated with this Assamese celebration.

Another noteworthy aspect of this Bihu celebration involves the construction of temple-like structures in paddy or open fields, a task predominantly undertaken by young boys. These structures, known as "meji" or "Bhelaghar," are crafted using green bamboo, dried banana leaves, and hay or paddy stubble. The term "Bhelaghar" may trace its roots



to Sanskrit "Mesa-griha" (mesa = bhera/bhela = sheep), where some hairs of sheep or goat are traditionally burnt on the eve of DaulUt-sava associated with Krishnaism. In upper Assam, the term "meji" is utilized, potentially originating from Sanskrit "Medha" or "yajna." These linguistic connections suggest the preservation of ancient associations within the practice of burning Bhelaghar. An interesting observation in Assam reveals that people use firewood in the construction of meji. This tradition adds a unique and cultural touch to the Bihu festivities, connecting the present celebrations with ancient rituals and symbolism.

The Uruka feasting during MaghBihu can take on the form of a familial gathering or a communal celebration. As the evening descends, the men of the village come together, assembling in the Bhelaghar arena. Here, they engage in Nam-Prasanga, a vibrant exchange accompanied by the rhythmic beats of nagara kettle drums and the melodic tones of bhortals or cymbals. The atmosphere is further enriched by the presence of village cowherds who spend the night in the Bhelaghar. They warm themselves by a crackling fire, utilizing

the vegetables they've acquired, perhaps spirited away from the villagers' gardens. In this communal setting, the cowherds partake in the feasting, savoring the edibles offered to them. This amalgamation of music, warmth, and shared sustenance encapsulates the essence of MaghBihu's Uruka festivities, creating a memorable experience for all involved.

As the feasting evening concludes, the crack of dawn heralds the next day's rituals. A family member meticulously ties thin strips of bamboo, jute, or hay around fruit-bearing trees. Simultaneously, a call goes out to the dogs, and they are offered rice. Meanwhile, womenfolk busy themselves cleaning the house and cooking pans. The men and children of the household then proceed to the mejis and bhelaghars, where offerings of delectables are presented to Agni, the God of Fire. Echoing cries of divine names fill the air as the structures are set ablaze. The vivid red flames provide warmth to those who endured the cold night, and the bamboo tubes burst open like celebratory gunfire.

Following the fiery spectacle, Brahmins, elderly individuals, or xatola (among Mish-

ings) bestow blessings and mark foreheads with ash. The partially burnt sticks are scattered in the fields, and some pieces may be brought home to be placed near fruit-bearing trees. The belief underlying this ritual is that the ashes and the partially burnt bamboo enhance the fertility of fields and gardens. Drawing a parallel, Frazer notes that Europeans, engaging in similar fire rituals during Lent and midsummer, also held a belief in the potency of ashes and embers for fertility. This custom of tying bands of straw around tree trunks to promote fruitfulness, rooted in Indo-European traditions, resonates in these fire ceremonies, adding a layer of cultural depth to the festivities.

As the morning unfolds, following the burning of mejis and bhelaghars, people gather to partake in a serene session of hymn devotional Vaishnavite singing. Accompanied by the resonant beats of kettledrums and the melodic tones of large cymbals, a collective hymn-singing session takes place. This practice of nam-prasanga or hymn-singing, whether held in the namghar or within households, stands out as a notable feature during the month of Magh, considered auspicious for

religious endeavors. In this particular facet of the MaghBihu festival, the unmistakable influence of Vaishnavism becomes apparent. The harmonious blend of music and devotional singing creates a spiritual atmosphere, embodying the cultural and religious richness associated with this celebration.

On the Samkranti day, which follows Uruka, a dietary shift occurs with the exclusion of meat from meals. The lunch menu predominantly features chira, pitha, curd, and other vegetarian delights. A distinctive delicacy, tekeli-pitha, takes center stage, comprising salted rice powder steamed on the mouth of a small pitcher or kettle, reminiscent of the larger idli. Another delectable offering is sunga-pitha, created by placing moist rice powder in a green bamboo tube and roasting it over an open flame.

Traditionally seasoned with salt, some contemporary preferences lean towards a sweet variety. A variation called sungasaul emerges, featuring sticky bara rice steamed in a bamboo tube. Once prepared, the sticky roll is cut into pieces and enjoyed mixed with milk and Gur. Notably, in Sonitpur, a penchant for fried pithas adds a delightful twist to the culinary traditions associated with this festive period. These unique preparations not only satisfy the taste buds but also contribute to the distinctiveness of the MaghBihu celebration.

As the evening descends, the final meal of the day unfolds, featuring rice – potentially new if not consumed earlier in the Assamese month of Aghon. This is accompanied by a flavorful black gram curry and delectably fried yam, creating a satisfying and wholesome dinner. The following day at noon, a customary practice emerges – the indulgence in a dish known as "maghipanta." This dish comprises a small portion of leftover rice soaked in water, accompanied by remnants of dal. It is intriguing to note that the tradition of consuming soaked leftover rice might trace its roots to the tribal custom of imbibing rice beer, adding a cultural layer to this culinary ritual.

An intriguing facet of the MaghBihu celebration is the inclusion of various sports and traditional games across different locations. These engaging activities encompass a spectrum of events, ranging from wrestling, racing, and jumping to the unique competitions of buffalo fighting (mohjun), egg fighting (kanjun), chicken fighting (kukurajun), and bulbuli (a type of small bird) fighting. Notably, the buffalo fighting in Ahotguri, located in the Marigaon district, has gained renown for its fervor and intensity. This dynamic blend of sports and competitions adds an element of excitement and community involvement to the festive atmosphere of MaghBihu, creating a lively and vibrant celebration. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)*

Bhogali Uruka: Night of food and folklore

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Uruka, the grand prelude to Bhogali or Magh Bihu is a festivity that deeply resonates with the cultural ethos of Assam, culminating the harvest season. The feasting and narration night beyond being a social occasion is an expression about identity, agrarian gratitude, and community bonding for people of Assam. Steeped in folklore, traditional cuisine and collective joy, Bhogali Uruka is the cultural heartbeat of Assam, which unites food and stories to celebrate in harmony.

The festival finds its roots in the conclusion of the harvesting cycle, it embodies abundance, prosperity, and gratitude towards nature. Having toiled in the fields for months, farmers take solace and delight in this festival, as it marks the successful completion of their labor. This connection between agriculture and festivity is evident in the very nature of Uruka, where the feast is prepared from freshly harvested crops, thereby establishing a connection between land, sustenance, and community.

Bhogali Uruka celebrates feasting as a symbol of abundance and collective gratitude. The preparations begin well in advance, as families and communities gather to cook elaborate meals. Traditional Assamese delicacies dominate the feast, including pitha (rice cakes), ladoo, sunga pitha (rice cakes steamed in bamboo), roasted meats, maasor tenga (sour fish curry), and pork cooked with lai xaak (mustard greens). The use of freshly harvested rice, besides additional local ingredients, gives the celebration a further

sense of authenticity because it promotes self-sufficiency and respect for the yield of the earth.

The communalistic nature of the feast adds cultural content to Bhogali Uruka. Great numbers gather under open skies and cook and share a meal in temporary makeshift huts, often referred to as Bhelaghars, made of bamboo, hay, and leaves. These tarpaulin structures, functional spaces for the feast, hold symbolic values such as simplicity, unity, and sustainable living. Cooking together builds a sense of collective responsibility as tasks are divided without distinction by caste, class, or age, representing Assamese culture as all-inclusive.

Though food forms the central axis of Bhogali Bihu's Uruka, folklore and oral traditions equally enrich the night. The celebration is characterised by sessions of storytelling around the Bhelaghar or by the fireside. Elders share folktales, myths, and historical anecdotes that ensure the passage of cultural wisdom to the next generation. Most of these stories are about local legends, moral teachings, and agricultural folklore. They entertain while educating.

Folk songs and folk dances add glory to the gaiety of the festival. The Bihu Geet that speaks of the love, agriculture, and natures are also heard in those days. Dhol (Drum) played rhythmically beats in clapping hands and nice dhol plays which add flavour to the ceremony. Bihu Naas has a different level as it represents an artistic action which is conducted among the culture to strengthen community ties. Most of the tracks reflect seasonal changes, agricultural prosperity, and local tales, thus perpetuating oral history through music and performance.

The Bhelaghar, or place of feasts and celebration, was considered to be sacred as well. When the first light of dawn broke after the all-night celebrations, the Bhelaghar and Meji, a bamboo- and hay-structure towering over it, was to be set on fire. The Meji was burnt down at the culmination of Bhogali Uruka, which meant the harvest cycle was coming to an end and a new agricultural year was to begin. Flames that rose into the sky were considered offerings to the gods to seek prosperity and protection for the community. People gather around the fire and offer pithas and other food items to the flames and pray for health, happiness, and a good harvest.

The ritualistic burning also symbolizes purification. Here, the victory of light over darkness, of knowledge over ignorance, and prosperity over hard-

ship are symbolized through the fire. The sharing of food and prayer in this particular moment brings a sense of unity, renewal, and hope in the future as a community. The cultural significance of Uruka goes beyond the immediate sense of celebration. Rather, it is a poignant reminder of Assam's agrarian origin while inducing sustainability and an ecological balance. The festival thus represents a way of life where people live in harmony with nature and respect the land that supports them. This cultural wisdom, passed down through generations, underlines the relevance of environmental consciousness in modern times.

However, Uruka has its challenges in modern days. Urbanization and changing lifestyles have gradually decreased the communal elements of the festival, especially in urban areas where space and time constraints limit the scale of participation. Increasing commercialization of festivals with pre-packaged foods replacing traditional homemade dishes threatens the authenticity of the event.

All these aside, efforts to keep the spirit of Bhogali Uruka alive are going on relentlessly in the Assam valley. Cultural organizations and institutions often conduct community feasts and storytelling sessions and cultural performances that keep the traditions going. Schools teach the historical and cultural significance of the festival so that it does not fade away to mean anything less in younger generations' perception.

Uruka is more than just the feast; it is the epitome of the values it carries with it, such as thankfulness, unison, and cultural pride. It is a meeting point between generations, where food, folklore, and festivity blend together in a shared identity. The festival reminds people about community life where joy is shared, burdens eased collectively, and cultural roots are honored with reverence.

As the flames of the Meji rise into the morning sky each year, they symbolize not just the conclusion of a harvest but the burning away of past hardships, the renewal of hope, and the reaffirmation of cultural bonds. Bhogali Uruka, with its blend of food and folklore, remains a living testament to Assam's rich cultural heritage, reminding its people of the values of togetherness, gratitude, and the enduring strength of traditions. *(The writer is an Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

Dheraghar: The heart of Magh Bihu

By: Satyabrata Borah

Dheraghar, also known as Bhelaghar, holds a special place in the celebration of Magh Bihu, one of the most cherished festivals of Assam. This temporary structure, made of bamboo, straw, and leaves, is an integral part of the festival, symbolizing the communal spirit, cultural traditions, and the joy of harvest. The creation of Dheraghar is not just a ritual; it is a process filled with excitement, unity, and deep cultural significance.

The process of building a Dheraghar begins a few days before the main celebration of Magh Bihu. Members of the community, especially the young people, come together to collect bamboo, straw, and other natural materials needed for construction. These materials are usually sourced from nearby fields and forests, emphasizing the close relationship between the people and their natural surroundings. The act of gathering these items is an activity that fosters teamwork and camaraderie among the participants.

Once the materials are collected, the actual construction of the Dheraghar begins. It is built in an open field, often near a water body or in the middle of harvested fields. The structure is typically small and simple, resembling a hut, but its significance goes far beyond its physical appearance. The Dheraghar is a symbol of togetherness, as people from all walks of life contribute to its construction, regardless of their social or economic status.

The building of the Dheraghar is accompanied by a festive atmosphere. Laughter, songs, and conversations fill the air as people work together. Traditional Assamese songs are often sung, and stories about the festival and its customs are shared. This process allows people to bond with one another, strengthening their sense of community. It is a time when everyone forgets their differences and works towards a common goal.

On the night of Uruka, the eve of Magh Bihu, the Dheraghar becomes the center of activity. Families and friends gather around the structure to celebrate and feast. The Dheraghar is filled with warmth, joy, and togetherness as people enjoy a grand meal prepared from freshly harvested crops. The dishes include traditional items like pitha, laru, and various curries, which are not only delicious but also hold cultural significance. The meal is a way of thanking nature for its bounty and celebrating the hard



work of the farmers.

The Dheraghar also serves as a place for storytelling and singing. Elders share tales about the origins of Magh Bihu and the importance of the festival, passing on cultural values and traditions to the younger generation. Folk songs and dances are performed, adding to the festive spirit. The sight of the Dheraghar, illuminated by the soft glow of lanterns or bonfires, creates an unforgettable image of unity and happiness.

One of the most significant moments involving the Dheraghar comes on the morning of Magh Bihu. As part of the rituals, the Dheraghar is set on fire, along with the Meji, a large bonfire built nearby. This act is deeply symbolic. The burning of the Dheraghar represents the end of the harvest season and the beginning of a new cycle. It is a way of bidding farewell to the old and welcoming the new with hope and positivity. The flames of the burning Dheraghar are believed to purify the surroundings and bring good fortune to the community.

As the Dheraghar burns, people offer prayers and perform rituals. Offerings such as rice, betel nuts, and sugarcane are made to the fire as a mark of gratitude to the gods for a successful harvest. The fire is a central element of Magh Bihu, symbolizing warmth, light, and the triumph of good over evil. It also signifies the bond between humans and nature, highlighting the importance of living in harmony with the environment.

The significance of the Dheraghar extends beyond the rituals. It is a reflection of Assamese culture and heritage. The process of building and burning the Dheraghar showcases the values of hard work, unity, and respect for nature that are deeply ingrained in the community. It is a tradition that has been passed down through generations, preserving the cultural identity of the people of Assam.

In recent years, the celebration of

Magh Bihu and the construction of Dheraghar have adapted to modern lifestyles. While the traditional materials and methods are still preferred in rural areas, urban communities sometimes use alternative materials due to space constraints. Despite these changes, the essence of the Dheraghar remains the same. It continues to be a symbol of togetherness and cultural pride.

The role of the Dheraghar in Magh Bihu also highlights the importance of sustainability. The use of natural materials like bamboo and straw reflects the eco-friendly practices of the community. These materials are biodegradable and do not harm the environment, making the tradition of Dheraghar an example of sustainable living. It reminds people of the importance of preserving nature and using resources responsibly.

For the younger generation, the Dheraghar is a source of learning and inspiration. It teaches them about teamwork, cultural values, and the significance of traditions. By participating in the construction and celebration, they gain a deeper understanding of their heritage and develop a sense of pride in their identity. The Dheraghar thus serves as a bridge between the past and the present, ensuring that the spirit of Magh Bihu continues to thrive.

The Dheraghar or Bhelaghar is much more than a temporary structure. It is a symbol of unity, gratitude, and cultural heritage. Its construction and burning are integral parts of the Magh Bihu celebration, reflecting the values and traditions of the Assamese people. The Dheraghar brings people together, fosters a sense of community, and serves as a reminder of the importance of nature and sustainability. As the flames of the Dheraghar light up the sky, they illuminate not just the fields but also the hearts of the people, filling them with joy, hope, and a deep connection to their roots.



Los Angeles wildfires death toll rises as crews fight heavy winds to save homes, landmarks

LOS ANGELES, Jan 12: The death toll from the wildfires ravaging the Los Angeles area rose to 16 as crews battled to cut off the spreading blazes before potentially strong winds return that could push the flames toward some of the city's most famous landmarks.

Five of the deaths were attributed to the Palisades Fire and 11 resulted from the Eaton Fire, the Los Angeles County coroner's office said in a statement Saturday evening.

The previous number of confirmed fatalities before Saturday was 11, but officials said they expected that figure to rise as teams with cadaver dogs conduct systematic grid searches in levelled neighbourhoods. Authorities have established a centre where people can report the missing.

There were fears that winds could move the fires toward the J Paul Getty Museum and the University of California, Los Angeles, while new evacuation warnings left more homeowners on edge.

By Saturday evening, Cal Fire reported the Palisades, Eaton, Kenneth and Hurst fires had consumed about 62 square miles, an area larger than San Francisco. The Palisades and Eaton fires accounted for 59 square miles.

In a briefing posted online Saturday evening, Michael Traum of the California Office of Emergency Services said 150,000 people in Los Angeles County were under evacuation orders, with more than 700 people taking



refuge in nine shelters.

Crews from California and nine other states are part of the ongoing response that includes 1,354 fire engines, 84 aircraft and more than 14,000 personnel, including newly arrived firefighters from Mexico, he said.

With Cal Fire reporting containment of the Palisades Fire at 11% and the Eaton Fire at 15% on Saturday night, the fight is set to continue.

"Weather conditions are still critical and another round of strong winds is expected starting Monday," Traum said.

A fierce battle occurred Saturday in Mandeville Canyon, home to Arnold Schwarzenegger and other celebrities not far from the Pacific coast, where swooping helicopters dumped water as the blaze charged downhill. Firefighters on the ground used hoses in an attempt to beat back leaping

flames as thick smoke blanketed the chaparral-covered hillside.

Cal Fire Operations Chief Christian Litz said Saturday that a main focus was the Palisades Fire burning in the canyon area, not far from the UCLA campus.

New evacuations were ordered Friday evening after a flare up on the eastern side of the Palisades Fire.

The National Weather Service warned that strong Santa Ana winds could soon return. Those winds have been largely blamed for turning the wildfires into infernos that levelled entire neighbourhoods around to city where there has been no significant rainfall in more than eight months.

The fire also threatened to jump over Interstate 405 and into densely populated areas in the Hollywood Hills and San Fernando Valley.

The fires that began Tuesday

just north of downtown LA have burned more than 12,000 structures.

Firefighters for the first time made progress Friday afternoon on the Eaton Fire north of Pasadena, which has burned more than 7,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles. Most evacuation orders for the area were lifted, officials said.

No cause has been determined for the largest fires and early estimates indicate the wildfires could be the nation's costliest ever. A preliminary estimate by AccuWeather put the damage and economic losses so far between \$135 billion and \$150 billion.

Volunteers overflowed donation centres and some had to be turned away at locations including the Santa Anita Park horse racing track, where people who lost their homes shifted through stacks of donated shirts, blankets and other household goods.

Altadena resident Jose Luis Godinez said three homes occupied by more than a dozen of his family members were destroyed.

"Everything is gone," he said, speaking in Spanish. "All my family lived in those three houses and now we have nothing."

Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna warned residents against venturing back to destroyed homes to sift through rubble for keepsakes.

"We have people driving up and around trying to get in just to look

Stay away," Luna said, urging people to abide by curfews.

Officials on Saturday warned the ash can contain lead, arsenic, asbestos and other harmful materials.

"If you're kicking that stuff up, you're breathing it in," said Chris Thomas, a spokesman for the unified incident command at the Palisades Fire who warned the material was "toxic".

Residents will be allowed to return with protective gear after damage teams evaluate their properties, Thomas said.

LA Mayor Karen Bass faces a critical test of her leadership during the city's greatest crisis in decades, but allegations of leadership failures, political blame and investigations have begun.

Gov Gavin Newsom on Friday ordered state officials to determine why a 117 million-gallon reservoir was out of service and some hydrants had run dry.

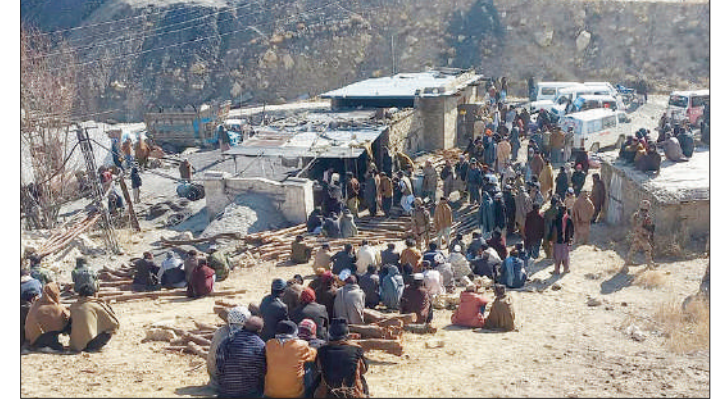
Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said city leadership failed her department by not providing enough money for firefighting. She also criticised the lack of water.

"When a firefighter comes up to a hydrant, we expect there's going to be water," Crowley said.

The level of devastation is jarring even in a state that regularly confronts massive wildfires. Traum of the state Office of Emergency Services said those impacted by the fires can apply online for immediate government assistance. (AP)

Toll in Pakistan coal mine collapse rises to 11

Twelve workers were trapped when the coal mine collapsed in the Sanjdi area



KARACHI, Jan 12: The death toll in a coal mine collapse due to a methane gas accumulation and explosion has left 11 workers dead after rescuers recovered seven more dead bodies, an official said.

Twelve workers were trapped when the coal mine collapsed in the Sanjdi area, about 40 kilometres from Quetta in the Balochistan province, on Wednesday evening.

In three days of rescue work, 11 bodies were recovered until Saturday night with rescue workers still searching for the last worker inside the collapsed structure, Abdullah Shawani, the head of the province's mining department, said.

"There are little chances of the last worker surviving for so long in the collapsed mine," Shawani said.

"The incident occurred due to a buildup of gas, which caused an explosion and the mine to cave in," Balochistan government spokesperson Shahid Rind said.

He said full-scale rescue operations were ongoing but the progress

was slow due to the presence of toxic gas and debris. An investigation is on to ascertain whether proper mining regulations were followed, he said. Pir Muhammad Kakar, one of the leaders of the mines workers association, said the incident resulted from non-implementation of mining regulations by the owner of coal mines and blamed officials at the mines department for the incident.

Kakar demanded strict action against these officials.

Coal mine collapses and death of workers happens frequently in the coal-rich western Balochistan known for hazardous working conditions and poor safety standards.

In March last year, at least 12 miners were killed in a gas explosion at a coalpit in Harmat.

In May 2018, 23 people were killed and 11 wounded after two neighbouring coal mines collapsed in Sanjdi while 43 workers also died in 2011 when gas explosions triggered a collapse in another Balochistan colliery. (PTI)

Germany says sanctions against Syrian war crimes suspects must stay but people need relief

RIYADH, Jan 12: Germany's foreign minister said Sunday that sanctions against Syrian officials responsible for war crimes must remain in place but called for a "smart approach" to provide relief to the Syrian population after last month's overthrow of President Bashar Assad. Annalena Baerbock spoke to reporters after arriving in Saudi Arabia for a conference on Syria's future attended by top European and Middle Eastern diplomats.

Germany is one of several countries that imposed sanctions on the Assad government over its brutal crackdown on dissent. Those penalties could hinder Syria's recovery from nearly 14 years of civil war that killed an estimated 500,000 people and displaced half the prewar population of 23 million. "Sanctions against Assad's henchmen who committed serious crimes during the civil war must remain in place," Baer-

bock said. "But Germany proposes to take a smart approach to sanctions, providing rapid relief for the Syrian population. Syrians now need a quick dividend from the transition of power."

Baerbock announced an additional 50 million euros (\$51.2 million) in German aid for food, emergency shelters and medical care, highlighting the ongoing struggles of millions of Syrians displaced by the war.

Last week, the United States eased some of its restrictions on Syria, with the US Treasury issuing a general license, lasting six months, that authorises certain transactions with the Syrian government, including some energy sales and incidental transactions.

The US has also dropped a \$10 million bounty it had offered for the capture of Ahmad al-Sharaa, a Syrian rebel leader formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, whose forces led the

oust of Assad last month. Al-Sharaa was a former senior al-Qaida militant who broke with the group years ago and has pledged an inclusive Syria that respects the rights of religious minorities.

The rebels led a lightning insurgency that ousted Assad on Dec 8 and ended his family's decades-long rule.

Much of the world severed ties with Assad and imposed sanctions on his government — and its Russian and Iranian allies — over alleged war crimes and the manufacturing of the amphetamine-like stimulant Captagon, which reportedly generated billions of dollars as packages of the little white pills were smuggled across Syria's porous borders. With Assad out of the picture, Syria's new authorities hope that the international community will pour money into the country to rebuild its battered infrastructure and make its economy viable again. (AP)

Bangladesh's Yunus asks UK to investigate graft scandal of Sheikh Hasina's niece

DHAKA, Jan 12: Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has called for an investigation into the properties of British minister Tulip Siddiq and her family, indicating that they may have acquired them through unlawful means during her aunt Sheikh Hasina's tenure as Bangladesh premier, reports said on Sunday.

In an interview with the Times newspaper, Yunus condemned the use of properties gifted to Siddiq and her family by "allies of her aunt's deposed regime". He demanded the return of the assets to Bangladesh if she is found to have benefited from "plain robbery".

"It's about plain robbery," Yunus said, accusing the previous government of embezzling funds through fraudulent practices that have had long-lasting effects on the country.

Siddiq, a member of Britain's Labour Cabinet, serves as the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and City Minister, responsible for addressing corruption within the UK's

financial markets.

A day after publishing Yunus' interview, the British newspaper on Sunday carried another report titled "(UK) PM urged to sack Tulip Siddiq after Bangladesh leader's rebuke".

It said the "anti-corruption minister is facing calls to resign after the leader of Bangladesh condemned the use of properties gifted to her and her family by its former regime".

According to the Sunday Times, Yunus' comments on the scandal engulfing Siddiq, 42, will add to the pressure on her to resign, though there are suggestions that Downing Street is already looking for a replacement.

Yunus' intervention came as a Sunday Times investigation found Siddiq spent years living in a Hampstead property bought by an offshore company named in the Panama Papers and connected to two Bangladeshi businessmen.

In his interview with the Times, Yunus said it was an "irony" that Sid-

diqu had been accused of corruption.

Yunus referred to a recent official report that found the people connected with the Awami League regime had taken billions of dollars a year out of Bangladesh, with some funds used to buy assets, including properties abroad.

"They pointed out how money is stolen, but it's not stealing — when you steal, you hide it. It's a robbery," he said.

Asked if it could apply to properties used by members of Hasina's family in London, Chief Adviser Yunus said, "Absolutely, it's about plain robbery. Nothing else".

"If a UK parliament member is involved, definitely it's a big issue... We got used to (the previous regime) taking away everything, so we feel relieved that you're bringing this [issue] to the attention of the world," he said.

Yunus also said that if feasible, the properties bought by the Awami League allies should be returned to Bangladesh. (PTI)

'Give your head a shake': Canada's former leader Chretien tells Trump

VANCOUVER, Jan 12: President-elect Donald Trump's remarks that Canada should become the 51st state drew condemnation and a patriotic outburst on Saturday from a former Canadian prime minister who offered blunt advice to the incoming US leader — "Give your head a shake!"

Jean Chretien, who was Canada's prime minister from 1993 to 2003, joined a chorus of officials from the northern US neighbour who say Trump's remarks are no longer a joke and may undermine America's closest ally.

Canada would never agree to become part of the US, Chretien wrote in an article published in The Globe and Mail newspaper, celebrating his 91st birthday.

He extolled his nation's love of independence and said Trump's remarks amounted to "totally unacceptable insults and unprecedented threats" to Canadian sovereignty.

"To Donald Trump, from one old guy to another, give your head a shake!" Chretien said. "What could make you think that Canadians would ever give up the best country in the world — and make no mistake that is what we are — to join the United States?"

Trump has tossed expansionist rhetoric not just at Canada but also at other US allies, with arguments that the frontiers of American power need to be extended to the Danish territory of Greenland, and southward to include the Panama Canal.

And while many European leaders have been measured in their response, Canadians have not held back.

"If you think that threatening and insulting us is going to win us over, you really don't know a thing about us," Chretien wrote in the article. "We may look easy-going, mild-mannered. But make no mistake, we have spine and toughness." (AP)

US gov't not involved in planning, managing 'National Prayer Breakfast' which invited BNP leaders

DHAKA, Jan 12: The US government and the Department of State are not involved in managing or influencing the invitations and participants in the IRF Summit or the National Prayer Breakfast, a spokesperson at the US Embassy in Dhaka has said.

The statements, comments, positions, and opinions of participants or former officials at the IRF Summit or National Prayer Breakfast should not be interpreted as representing the opinions, positions, or policies of the US government, Dhaka Tribune quoted the US embassy spokesperson as saying on Saturday.

He made the remarks when media personnel drew the spokesperson's attention towards a report saying President-elect Donald Trump invited Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman and two senior leaders to attend the National Prayer Breakfast.

"The United States is not hosting, organising, or funding the IRF Summit or National Prayer Breakfast," he said. "The IRF Summit is distinct from the International Religious Freedom Ministerial organised annually by the US and partner governments, which the German government most recently hosted in Berlin on October 10-11, 2024."

The United States welcomes government and civil society engagement in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms both at home and around the world, including the freedom of religion or belief, said the spokesperson. "Those seeking information on the purpose, opportunities for participation, plans, schedules, components, or any other aspect of the IRF Summit may be directed to the organisation's website at www.irfsummit.org. Information on the National Prayer Breakfast is available at www.npbfoundation.com," the spokesperson said. (PTI)

Croatia's President Milanovic overwhelming favourite to win reelection in runoff vote

ZAGREB (CROATIA), Jan 12: Croatia's incumbent President Zoran Milanovic was the overwhelming favourite to win reelection as he faced a candidate from the ruling conservative party in a runoff presidential vote on Sunday.

The left-leaning Milanovic comfortably won the first round of voting on Dec 29, leaving his main challenger, Dragan Primorac, a forensic scientist who had unsuccessfully run for presidency previously, and six other candidates far behind.

The runoff between the top two contenders was necessary because Milanovic fell short of securing 50% of the vote by just 5,000 votes, while Primorac trailed far behind with 19%. The election comes as the European Union and NATO member country of 3.8 million people struggles with biting inflation, corruption scandals and a labor shortage.

Milanovic, 58, is an outspoken critic of Western military support for Ukraine in its war against Russia. He is the most popular politician in Croatia, and is sometimes compared to US President-elect Donald Trump for his combative style of communication with political opponents.

Milanovic served as prime minister in the past with a mixed record. He has been a fierce critic of current Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and the pair have long sparred with each other. Milanovic regularly accuses Plenkovic and his conservative Croatian Democratic Union party of systemic corruption, calling the premier a "serious threat to Croatia's democracy". Plenkovic has sought to portray Sunday's vote as one about Croatia's future in the EU and NATO. He has labelled Milanovic "pro-Russian" and a threat to Croatia's international standing.

Primorac echoed this position as he cast his ballot on Sunday. He said the presidential vote was "very important" and "about the future of Croatia, about the future of our homeland, our citizens, and, really, the direction that

it would go from here". Political analyst Viseslav Raos said the increasingly outspoken Milanovic has no motive to "try to please someone or try to control himself".

"If there was no cooperation with the prime minister for the first five years (of his presidency), why would it be now?" he added.

Though the presidency is largely ceremonial in Croatia, an elected president holds political authority and acts as the supreme military commander.

Despite limited powers, many believe the presidential position is key for the political balance of power in a country mainly governed by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) since gaining independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. During a TV debate ahead of the Sunday vote, Milanovic and Primorac exchanged barbs while exposing deep political differences.

Primorac, 59, entered politics in the early 2000s, when he was science and education minister in the HDZ-led government. He unsuccessfully ran for the presidency in 2009, and after that mainly focused on his academic career including lecturing at universities in the United States, China and in Croatia.

Milanovic denied he is pro-Russian but last year blocked the dispatch of five Croatian officers to NATO's mission in Germany called Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine. He also pledged he would never approve sending Croatian soldiers as part of any NATO mission to Ukraine. Plenkovic and his government say there is no such proposal.

Milanovic accused Primorac of associating with "mass murderers," referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's associates and the war in Gaza. He also claimed that Plenkovic was Primorac's sponsor, and dubbed Primorac "the last communist" — a reference to his membership of the former ruling Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the late 1980s. (AP)

Sri Lankan Navy arrests 8 Indian fishermen for alleged poaching

COLOMBO, Jan 12: The Sri Lankan Navy on Sunday said it has arrested eight Indian fishermen for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters and seized two fishing trawlers.

The arrests took place on Saturday night "during a special operation conducted in the sea area north of Mannar", it said in a press statement.

With this arrest, so far this year 18 Indian fishermen have been arrested and three trawlers confiscated, the statement said. The Navy said "in the dark hours of 11th January", the North Central Naval Command spotted a cluster of Indian fishing boats "engaging in illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters. In response, the Northern Naval Command deployed its Fast Attack Craft and North Central Naval Command's Inshore Patrol Craft to drive away those Indian fishing boats poaching in the sea area north of Mannar".

"The operation resulted in the seizure of 2 Indian fishing boats and apprehension of 8 Indian fishermen

who continued to remain in Sri Lankan waters," it said.

The seized boats together with the Indian fishermen were brought to the island of Irinativu and they will be handed over to the Assistant Directorate of Fisheries, Kilinochchi for onward legal proceedings, the Navy said.

The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters.

The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries.

Fishermen from both countries are arrested frequently for inadvertently trespassing into each other's waters. In 2024, the island nation's Navy arrested 529 Indian fishermen for allegedly poaching in Sri Lankan waters. (PTI)

Russia forms emergency task force as Kerch Strait oil spill continues to spread

MOSCOW, Jan 12: An emergency task force arrived in Russia's southern Krasnodar region on Sunday as an oil spill in the Kerch Strait from two storm-stricken tankers continues to spread a month after it was first detected, officials said.

The task force, which includes Emergency Situations Minister Alexander Kurenkov, was set up after Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday called on authorities to ramp up the response to the spill, calling it "one of the most serious environmental challenges we have faced in recent years".

The Emergencies Ministry said Saturday that over 155,000 tons of contaminated sand and soil had been collected since oil spilled out of two tankers during a storm four weeks ago in the Kerch Strait, which separates the Russia-occupied Crimean Peninsula from the Krasnodar region.

Russian-installed officials in Ukraine's partially Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia region said Saturday that the mazut — a heavy, low-quality



oil product — had reached the Berdyansk Spit, some 145 km north of the Kerch Strait. It contaminated an area 14 1/2-km long. Moscow-installed Gov Yevgeny Balitsky wrote on Telegram.

Russian-appointed officials in Moscow-occupied Crimea announced a regional emergency last weekend after oil was detected on the shores of

Sevastopol, the peninsula's largest city, about 250 km from the Kerch Strait.

In response to Putin's call for action, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry spokesman Heorhii Tykhyi accused Russia of "beginning to demonstrate its alleged concern" (only) after the scale of the disaster became too obvious to conceal its terrible conse-

quences."

"Russia's practice of first ignoring the problem, then admitting its inability to solve it, and ultimately leaving the entire Black Sea region alone with the consequences is yet another proof of its international irresponsibility," Tykhyi said Friday.

The Kerch Strait is an important global shipping route, providing passage from the inland Sea of Azov to the Black Sea. It has also been a key point of conflict between Russia and Ukraine after Moscow annexed the peninsula in 2014.

In 2016, Ukraine took Moscow to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, where it accused Russia of trying to seize control of the area illegally. In 2021, Russia closed the strait for several months.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to the head of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office, described the oil spill last month as a "large-scale environmental disaster" and called for additional sanctions on Russian tankers. (AP)

3 Naxalites killed in encounter

BIJAPUR, Jan 12: Three Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhatisgarh's Bijapur district on Sunday, police said.

The gunfight broke out in the morning at a forest in the Indravati National Park area when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj P said.

Personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Special Task Force (STF) and District Force were involved in the operation, he said.

After the intermittent exchange of fire stopped, bodies of three Naxalites clad in 'uniform' along with firearms, including the automatic ones, and explosives were recovered from the site, the official said.

Search operation was still underway in the area, he added.

With this, 12 Naxalites have been killed in separate encounters in the state so far this year.

During a three-day long anti-Naxal operation by security forces in Abujmahad on the border of Narayanpur-Dantewada-Bijapur districts that concluded on January 6, five Naxalites, including two women, were killed.

On January 9, three Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Sukma district.

Earlier, on January 3, a Naxalite was killed in an encounter with security personnel in Gariaband district, which falls in Raipur division.

Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters in the state.

On January 6 this year, Naxalites blew up a vehicle with an IED in Bijapur district, killing eight police personnel and their civilian driver. (PTI)

ISRO brings satellites within three metres in trial attempt

BENGALURU, Jan 12: ISRO on Sunday said the two satellites launched to perform space docking experiments were brought within three metres and then moved safely back in a trial attempt.

The space agency also said the docking process would be done after analysing the data further. "A trial attempt to reach up to 15 metres and further to three metres is done. Moving back spacecraft to safe distance. The docking process will be done after analysing data further," ISRO said in a post on X.

The Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) project has missed two announced schedules for docking experiments on January 7 and January 9.

ISRO launched the mission on December 30. (PTI)

Delhi polls: Congress highlighting achievements of Sheila Dikshit govt

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: As the Delhi Assembly elections draw near, Congress is focusing its campaign on two main aspects - highlighting the achievements of the 15-year rule under Sheila Dikshit and promoting new welfare schemes it plans to introduce if it wins, party leaders said.

Sandeep Dikshit, the party's candidate for the New Delhi constituency, emphasised that the party would showcase the development work accomplished during Sheila Dikshit's tenure as Delhi chief minister.

"We will focus on the achievements of the Sheila Dikshit government and the development work it had done during that time. Due to that development work, the national capital became world class. For that, we are going door to door and telling people about the achievements of our previous government," he said.

An hour before G20 Summit, PM asked Kant to evolve 'consensus' on Delhi declaration: Book

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: An hour before the start of the G20 Summit here on September 9, 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked Sherpa Amitabh Kant the status of the leaders' declaration and when told there were some issues, he asserted he just wanted to see the result - a "consensus" - very soon.

Kant immediately went into a huddle with fellow Sherpas and managed to secure the final agreement. These behind-the-scenes happenings find mention in Kant's new book "How India Scaled Mt G20: The Inside Story of the G20 Presidency".

India had pulled off a big diplomatic win after the G20 summit adopted a consensus declaration overcoming major differences on the Russia-Ukraine war.

Modi made the announcement about a consensus on the 37-page declaration and its subsequent adoption at the start of the second session on the opening day of the two-day summit of the grouping of major developed and developing countries.

Kant says the journey from the principles to the final draft of the NDL (New Delhi G20 Leaders' Declaration) was, however, far from smooth.

"The text continued to face constant revisions and objections after 300 hours of negotiations over 250 bilateral meetings. The weight and seriousness of the negotiations were felt by all participants, but the pursuit of a mutually agreeable out-

India's young will power its rise to becoming developed by 2047: PM

Achieving ambitious goals requires the active participation and collective effort of every citizen

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Sunday that the capabilities of India's young population will power the country's rise to becoming developed.

Addressing the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue here, he said some people may find the goal of India becoming developed difficult but it is not impossible.

No power can stop India from becoming a developed country if the spirit of 'Viksit Bharat' guides its every step, policy and decision, he said, highlighting the strength and numbers of the country's young population.

"Big targets have to be set for a country to march forward... This is what today's India is doing," Modi said, adding that the country is accomplishing numerous goals in different sectors ahead of time.

India has set the target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by 2030 and will meet the goal before that, he said.

The prime minister added that the government alone cannot drive the country forward and told youngsters drawn from across the



country that the ownership in 'Viksit Bharat' is not Modi's alone but also of them.

Their ideas will be part of the country's policies and give it direction, he said.

Achieving ambitious goals requires the active participation and collective effort of every citizen of the nation, he added.

The prime minister cited the rise of the USA following its economic crisis in the 1930s and Singapore's rise from a backward region lack-

ing basic facilities to a major economic power to stress the need for setting big goals and sincerely working towards them.

He noted how India became an open defecation-free country, manufactured Covid vaccines and inoculated its population against the virus.

Asserting that the 25 years till 2047 are India's golden period (Amrit Kaal), Modi said he has full confidence that the young population will realise the dream of

'Viksit Bharat'.

This is the time for a quantum jump, he said.

The country also hopes to host the Olympics in the next decade and is working towards it with full dedication, he added.

Swami Vivekananda had a lot of faith in the young generation and said the youth will find solutions to all problems, Modi said. He added that he has absolute faith, "blind faith" in his words.

The event was held on the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, which is observed as the National Youth Festival.

Stressing the role of high growth in India's development, Modi recounted how the country's capacity and budget in different fields have risen with the growth of its economy.

The budget for infrastructure has grown six times in 10 years, he said.

Asserting that the Indian economy is on its way to becoming the third biggest in the world, the prime minister said it will cross USD 10 trillion by the next decade. (PTI)

EAM Jaishankar to represent India at Donald Trump's swearing in



NEW DELHI, Jan 12: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent India at the swearing in of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States on January 20.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Sunday that Jaishankar will also have meetings with representatives of the incoming Trump administration during his visit to the US.

Trump had defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in the presidential election held in November.

Last month, Jaishankar said Trump has had a positive political view of India and it is in a much more advantageous position than many other countries to build "deeper" relations with his administration and take the bilateral ties forward.

"On the invitation of the Trump-Vance Inaugural Committee, External Affairs Minister S

Jaishankar will represent the Government of India at the swearing-in ceremony of President-Elect Donald J Trump as the 47th President of the United States of America," it said.

JD Vance will be the new US Vice President.

"During the visit, the external affairs minister will also have meetings with representatives of the incoming administration, as also some other dignitaries visiting the US on that occasion," the MEA said in a statement.

There have been concerns in many countries over the Trump administration's policy over a range of sensitive issues including tariff, climate change and overall foreign policy priorities against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in West Asia.

It is for the second time Trump will be the US President. He served as the 45th President of the US from January, 2017 to January 2021.

There have been concerns in many countries over the new Trump administration's likely policy approach over a range of sensitive issues including tariff, climate change and overall foreign policy priorities against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in West Asia. (PTI)

5,000 youths have shunned Naxalism to join mainstream: Gadkari

MUMBAI, Jan 12: Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Sunday said Naxalism has declined significantly in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli, as nearly 5,000 youths have quit the outlawed movement, joined the mainstream and many of them have got employment.

In the next five years, Gadchiroli will become the highest revenue-generating district in Maharashtra, he said at the BJP's state-level convention at Shirdi in Ahilyanagar district.

Gadkari appealed to the BJP workers to channel the party's electoral success into meaningful societal transformation.

The victory in the last year's state assembly polls should lead to the establishment of "surajya" (good governance), he said.

Highlighting the progress made in Naxal-affected Gadchiroli, he said there was a time when visiting some areas in the district was difficult even for public representatives.

"Today, nearly 5,000 youths have shunned Naxalism and come

back to the mainstream. Many have got jobs like drivers, fitters, among others," the senior BJP leader said.

Engineering and polytechnic colleges have been established, and garment manufacturing for exports has begun in the district, he said.

The area, once backward, has now generated employment for 10,000 tribal youths, Gadkari said.

"In the next five years, Gadchiroli will become the highest revenue-generating district," he added. Gadkari also emphasised the importance of addressing the issues of unemployment, malnutrition and lack of education.

"The soul of our party is to create a powerful nation that can guide the world," he said.

He highlighted the need for transformation in rural areas and the uplift of labourers and the poor.

Drawing inspiration from historical figures, Gadkari said, "It is our responsibility to demonstrate, like Shivaji Maharaj, how to transform the state. Many people become

ministers, but not all are remembered. Babasaheb Ambedkar lost a Lok Sabha election, yet his name is renowned globally. Electoral victories alone do not define greatness."

The Union minister criticised those attempting to create communal discord for political gains.

"We believe no individual is significant because of their caste, race or faith, but because of the values they uphold," he said.

On Maharashtra's contribution to the automobile sector, Gadkari said, "In the next five years, India will become the top country globally in the automobile industry, generating 4.5 crore jobs, with maximum GST collection from Maharashtra in the sector. Most of the companies are based in Maharashtra."

He reminded the BJP workers that their responsibility extends beyond defeating the rival Congress.

"If we fail to bring transformation, people will question us. Good governance and development must remain our mission," he said. (PTI)

Silver Notice 'more effective' than MLATs for info on offshore illicit wealth: CBI Director



NEW DELHI, Jan 12: Terming the recently introduced Interpol 'Silver Notice' a "more effective" tool than the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) for gathering information on illicit assets parked offshore, CBI Director Praveen Sood has said it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's idea, which has now been realised.

In an exclusive interaction with PTI, he said Prime Minister Modi had proposed in 2015 a system under the Interpol to trace money laundered offshore, and it has now taken shape as the Silver Notice.

The Notice, aimed at locating illicit assets laundered across borders, is the newest addition to the Interpol's suite of eight colour-coded Notices and Diffusions, which enable countries to share alerts and requests for information worldwide.

Conventionally, the information on illicit assets is gathered through MLATs which are treaties between two countries whereby they cooperate to provide and obtain formal assistance in the prevention, suppression, investigation, and prosecution of crime.

Common complaints under MLAT include requests being transferred from one agency to another or one bank to another. Sometimes difficulties arise in obtaining a response because of a large number of requests.

India has MLATs with 45 countries, according to data on the Ministry of Home Affairs website.

"From MLAT, the stature has been increased to In-

terpol notice, which has a higher degree of emphasis than MLAT. The sanctity of this process has increased; now it is through Interpol notices that are more acceptable to member countries. Possibly more information will come," the CBI chief said.

He, however, added that MLATs will continue to be an effective tool as they are easier and country-to-country level than Interpol notices which have a wider reach but are sparsely used.

Under the Interpol mechanism, states and central agencies can use the recently introduced Bharatpol to seamlessly send their requests for information through the CBI, which is designated as the National Central Bureau of India for all matters pertaining to the global organisation.

Addressing the Global Focal Conference on Asset Recovery in 2015 hosted by the CBI and Interpol, the Prime Minister had said, "Targeting the proceeds of crime is an important element in this fight against crime. Hence, there is an imperative need to focus our efforts on enhancing international cooperation in the field of Asset Recovery to fight crime, corruption, and terrorism."

"The new Interpol Notice could add value to asset tracing investigations and facilitate real-time information sharing in complex cases," Modi had said.

The proposal took concrete form during the 2022 Interpol General Assembly hosted by India, where it was adopted as the first resolution.

The resolution recommended that an expert working group be established to assess various proposals devoted to exchanging financial information and "tracing and recovery of criminal assets, including the 2015 General Assembly resolution to create a new Interpol notice named Silver Notice."

Interpol's 91st General Assembly, held in Vienna in 2023, outlined the development and implementation of the Silver Notice and Diffusion pilot through another resolution.

The 2023 resolution tasked the Expert Working Group on Asset Tracing and Recovery, in collaboration with the General Secretariat, with designing the pilot's scope, format, conditions, and safeguard measures.

India was part of the expert group, which was led by Italy. A pilot phase of the Silver Notice involving 52 countries and territories was launched on Friday and will run at least until November 2025. (PTI)

Bihar co-op bank probe: ED arrests 4

PATNA, Jan 12: The Enforcement Directorate has arrested four people, including a former CEO, as part of a money laundering investigation linked to alleged embezzlement of funds at a Bihar cooperative bank promoted by an RJD MLA, official sources said on Sunday.

The federal agency launched raids against RJD MLA from Ujjiarpur Alok Kumar Mehta (58) and some others allegedly linked to him in Bihar on January 10 as part of the probe into alleged bungling of funds in the Vaishali Shri Vikas (VSV) Co-operative Bank.

Those arrested are former bank CEO Vipin Tiwari, his father-in-law Ram Babu Shandilya, Nitin Mehra and Sandeep Singh.

The accused were produced before a PMLA court here and remanded to judicial custody, the sources said.

They said Mehta, former state revenue and land reforms minister, is among the promoters of the bank, apart from some other linked entities.

The money laundering investigation stems from some state police FIRs filed against the bank and its office-bearers for alleged embezzlement of funds worth about ₹ 85 crore.

According to an ED official, the alleged fraud was committed through an estimated 400 loan accounts and disbursement of funds was done based on "fake or forged" warehouse receipts.

The bank employees and other private persons, who are alleged beneficiaries of the proceeds of crime and worked in connivance with Mehta and his associates, are also covered in the search operations, the sources said. (PTI)

14 people remanded to judicial custody in minor girl rape case

PATHANAMTHITTA (KERALA), Jan 12: Fourteen people have been arrested and remanded to judicial custody in connection with the alleged sexual abuse of a Dalit girl in the district, police said on Sunday. All the 14 accused were sent to judicial custody by a court here for 14 days. Several others have been taken into police custody in the rape case, he said.

Investigation is underway and more arrests will be recorded, an official said.

Meanwhile, nine FIRs were registered in two police stations in Pathanamthitta district, sources on Sunday said.

The girl, who is now 18 years old, has alleged in her complaint that she was sexually abused by 62 individuals since the age of 13.

The police said that they received evidence indicating that the girl was exploited by her sports trainers, fellow athletes and classmates. (PTI)

NAME CORRECTION

I, Paras Rabidas, S/O. Late Ramsundar Rabidas, a resident of Uttar Matikhula, P.O. Siliiguri Basti, P.S. Hojai, Dist. Hojai, Assam do hereby solemnly affirm and declare via an affidavit before Executive Magistrate, Hojai, that my actual and correct name is Paras Rabidas. But, in some records it has been inadvertently recorded as Budhu and Budhua instead of my actual and correct name i.e Paras Rabidas. I hereby declare Budhu, Budhua and Paras Rabidas are the names of one and same person i.e. me.

NOTICE

This informs are hereby the general public that 106 pieces of Teak Timber (approx 612.057 Kb) seized in connection with Golakganj PS case no-246/24 U/S- 61(2)/316(3)/318(4)/303(2) BNS.

Auction will be held on 19-01-25 as per the court order. Interested buyers were hereby informed to attend the auction by attending the following places in due course on the said day.

Auction Date: 19-01-2025 from 11 AM to 2 PM
Auction Venue:- Chagolia Police Out Post Premises.

Police Station- Golakganj, District- Dhubri, Assam

Sd/-
In-charge
Chagolia Out Post
P.S. Golakganj, Dist. Dhubri (Assam)
Date 11/01/2025

Australian Open: Olympic champ Zheng Qinwen starts her bid for another final on a rainy Day 1

MLEBOURNE, Jan 12: Zheng Qinwen's tennis resume is quite different from what it was when she showed up at the Australian Open a full year ago. No matter everything she accomplished in 2024 — a runner-up finish at Melbourne Park; an Olympic gold medal for China — she felt jitters before entering Rod Laver Arena on Sunday. After overcoming some hiccups late in the opening set of her first-round match on a stormy Day 1 at the season's first major tennis tournament, Zheng came through with a 7-6 (3), 6-1 victory against Anca Todoni, a 20-

year-old qualifier from Romania who has won one Grand Slam match in her career. "Actually, I feel really nervous," said Zheng, who is seeded No. 5. "I started to feel nervous already since yesterday, 'cause I felt special emotion for the Australian Open. ... I really like it here."

As well she should. It was 12 months ago on Melbourne's hard courts that Zheng made it all the way to the final before losing to Aryna Sabalenka. The two-time champion was due to begin her title defense as the No. 1 seed on Sunday

night against 2017 U.S. Open title winner Sloane Stephens, before Alexander Zverev, the men's No. 2 seed, faced Lucas Pouille.

Two of the first three men's contests to conclude both went five sets. Kei Nishikori, the 2014 U.S. Open runner-up, saved a pair of match points in the third set and came all the way back to beat qualifier Thiago Monteiro 4-6, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-3, 6-3, while No. 6 Casper Ruud, a three-time finalist at majors, defeated Jaume Munar 6-3, 1-6, 7-5, 2-6, 6-1. Nishikori, competing in Melbourne for the first time in four years

after a series of hip, ankle and knee injuries, raised his arms and threw his head back, causing his black hat to fall off, after improving to 29-8 in five-setters, including 8-1 at the Australian Open. Before her run in Australia last January, Zheng had only played in eight major tournaments, making one quarterfinal. Her big-hitting breakthrough opened a season in which she wound up with a gold draped around her neck at the Paris Games in August. The 22-year-old Zheng's power-based game is best suited for hard courts, and playing indoors doesn't hurt, either, so

she eventually was quite comfortable against Todoni under a closed retractable roof, while thunder and lightning and a serious downpour suspended action on the courts that can't be covered.

Still, Zheng frittered away set points while serving for the opener at 5-4, then was forced to save set points for Todoni later. Afterward, Zheng said that being nervous usually makes her focus better, but this time, it didn't make "me play my best tennis out there."

Maybe that's because it was her first

match of the season. Still, she was good enough on this day.

The second set was more one-sided, and Todoni took a medical timeout for treatment on her lower back after three games. Zheng was among only a handful of players able to complete matches in the early going at what is now a 15-day tournament after a Sunday start was instituted last year.

Other winners Sunday afternoon included No. 14 Mirra Andreeva, a 17-year-old from Russia; No. 18 Donna Vekic. No. 20 Arthur Fils finished his opener in four sets. (AP)

2ND WOMEN'S ODI: INDIA VS IRELAND

Jemimah's maiden ton sets up 116-run win and seals series for India



RAJKOT, Jan 12: A collective batting performance headlined by Jemimah Rodrigues' maiden hundred formed the cornerstone of India's commanding 116-run win against Ireland in the second women's ODI here on Sunday as the hosts took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

India scored a massive 370 for five riding on three half-centuries and a ton before restricting Ireland to 254 for 7 in the stipulated 50 overs.

It was the elegant skipper Smriti Mandhana, who was first off the blocks with an attacking 73 off just 54 balls, while Rodrigues' first hundred (102 off 91 balls) ensured a smooth finish for the hosts.

Newcomer Pratika Rawal (67 off 61 balls) and seasoned Harleen Deol (89 off 84 balls) also made merry on a sub-par bowling attack.

Ireland batted steadily but never had the firepower to surpass a gigantic Indian total. Save Christina Coulter Reilly's 80, there wasn't much fight from the other batters as off-spinner Deepti Sharma emerged as the pick of the Indian bowlers with figures of 3 for 37. Seamer Titus Sadhu got 1 for 48 in 10 overs.

Earlier, India's total was based on two big stands -- 156 off 19 overs between Mandhana and Rawal and 183 off 28 overs

between Rodrigues and Deol.

In all, Indian batters smashed an astounding 44 boundaries and three sixes in 50 overs.

As far as Rodrigues was concerned, her record has been one that flattered to deceive with just six half-centuries across 40 games.

But once she got the boundary off medium pacer Arlene Kelly, the relief was palpable as she did a mock guitar-playing act with her willow.

"It has been a long wait to get this hundred. Glad that the team gave me a role at No. 4 and I could deliver," Rodrigues told broadcasters Star Sports at the innings break.

"Today, the important thing for me was to be till the 50th over. Getting runs is not a problem, I am good at that, but being till the end was important and glad I could do that."

She said during their 183-run stand, it took some time for her and Deol to assess the nature of the track.

"Having Harleen there, initially we took time to assess the conditions. I know I can accelerate but while I took time, Harleen spoke to me to keep believing."

"We can't take any team lightly, we have followed domestic cricket here, 390 has been chased," she said. (PTI)

Kho Kho World Cup set to begin today

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: Teams competing in the Kho Kho World Cup, beginning here on Monday, are thrilled to be a part of the action with competitors saying the event will bring out the best in them not just in terms of effort but strategic thinking as well. A total of 23 teams in men's and women's section will compete in the tournament with the final to be held on January 19.

On Sunday, the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, the venue of the competition came alive with the participating teams receiving a taste of India's hospitality.

"Kho Kho is a very beautiful yet taxing sport, where you get to run around freely while still engaging your mind," said Konrad, a member of the Polish men's team. "There's a wonderful balance between physical activity and strategic thinking," he added. His counterpart in the women's section, Karolina, said the Polish players will make up for their relative inexperience by playing energetically.

"While we are newcomers to Kho Kho, our energy is boundless. It's been incredible watching the other teams in action — especially India — and these past few months of training have enhanced our strategic understanding of the game," said Karolina. (PTI)

Guwahati Jr Tennis Tournery from Jan 28

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 12: The eighth edition of the Guwahati Open Junior Tennis Championship-2025, organised by Guwahati Tennis Association (GTA), will be held at RG Baruah Sports Complex, Nehru Stadium here from January 28-31.

The championship will be held for both Boy's and Girl's Singles - under 12, 14, 18 years and Boy's/Girl's (Combined) Singles - under 10 years respectively.

All the winners will be awarded with cash scholarships.

The championship will carry a total of ₹ 2,20,000/- only as cash scholarship.

The Boy's and Girl's Singles - under 18 years category winner will receive ₹ 10,000/- and finalist will receive ₹ 8,000/-, in the under - 14 years winner will receive ₹ 8,000/- and finalist will receive ₹ 6,000/-, in the under- 12 category the winner will receive ₹ 6,000/- and finalist will receive ₹ 4,000/- while in the under - 10 category winner will receive 3,000/- and finalist will re-

ceive 2,000/- as cash scholarship respectively. Cash scholarships will be awarded to the players from the quarter-final stage in all categories. The signing-in will be held on January 27 from 2.00 pm to 6.00 pm. Participants who signed-in will be considered for draws only. The tournament is being sponsored by Pride -East Entertainment Private Limited and Oil India Limited.

An organising committee has been formed with Rinihi Bhuyan Sarma as chief advisor, Pronoy Bordoloi, Anirban Das and Kishore Jayanta Madhab as advisors, Kalyan Kumar Das as chairman, Bhaskar Sarma as organising secretary.

Dr. Madhuryya Hazarika as tournament director, Debangshu Ranjan Borah as treasurer, Rupam Gogoi as chief referee and Sahidul Islam as assistant referee to run the championship smoothly and successfully.

Interested participants may send their entries to the Tournament Director (7896008890), an official press release stated.

SAIKIA, BHATIA ELECTED UNOPPOSED

MUMBAI, Jan 12: Devajit Saikia and Prabhatej Singh Bhatia were on Sunday elected secretary and treasurer, respectively, unopposed at the BCCI Special General Meeting here.

They both were elected unopposed after being the only ones to file nomination for the posts vacated by Jay Shah and Ashish Shelar.

Shah had to leave the secretary's post after becoming the ICC chairman last month while Shelar resigned after taking oath as a cabinet minister in the Maharashtra government.

Saikia hails from Assam and Bhatia from Chhattisgarh. Saikia was performing the ad-

ditional duties of secretary after Shah took over as ICC chairman on December 1. He was the joint secretary and now that post lies vacant.

"The Two (02) Elective Posts of the Office Bearers - Secretary and Treasurer

were Uncontested, and it was not necessary to conduct a Poll in respect of these Two (02) Posts," stated electoral officer A K Joti in his declaration of results.

Shah, who was felicitated by the BCCI on Saturday night, was also feted at the SGM.

Speaking to reporters after the SGM, BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla said apart from the election nothing was tabled in the meeting.

"There was single point

agenda (for the election of treasurer and secretary post). So nothing else was discussed at the SGM," Shukla.

Following the SGM, Shukla was also part of Women's Premier League Committee meeting.

"The WPL venues have been almost finalised. They will be declared soon," said the BCCI vice-president.

Shukla added that the selection meeting for the Champions Trophy will be held on January 18 or 19.

The selectors had announced the squad for the five-match series against England on Saturday but did not name the squad for the following three ODIs against England as well as the Champions Trophy beginning February 19.

India play their Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh on February 20. Under the hybrid model, India will all play their games in Dubai while the other league games will be played in host country Pakistan. (PTI)



Karun slams fifth ton as Vidarbha enter semifinals; Haryana in last four

VADODARA, Jan 12: Vidarbha outclassed Rajasthan by nine wickets, while Haryana edged out Gujarat by two wickets to move into the semifinals of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Sunday.

In the semi-finals, Haryana will be up against Karnataka on Wednesday, while Vidarbha will face Maharashtra on Thursday here. Karun Nair continued his red-hot form in this edition of the Vijay Hazare Trophy, striking his fifth hundred 6a whirlwind unbeaten 82-ball 122 (13x4, 5x6) 6 which was also his fourth ton in the last five innings.

Karun had able support from fellow centurion Dhruv Shorey (118 not out, 131b, 10x4, 3x6) as they added 200 runs for the unbroken second wicket in just over 29 overs, propelling Vidarbha past the target of 292 in 43.3 overs.

The 33-year-old now has 664 runs from eight matches at an astonishing average of 664. He is now on par with former Karnataka teammate Devdutt Padikkal, former Sri Lankan skipper Kumar Sangakkara and ex-South African batter Alviro Petersen as batters with four successive List A hundreds.

The record for most consecutive List A hundreds currently stands in the name of Narayan Jagadeesan, who smashed five centuries on the trot in the 2021-22 edition of the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Coming in at one down, Karun just had to build on the splendid 92-run start to the chase given by Shorey and Yash Rathod (39) and he did that job to perfection.

Earlier, several Rajasthan batters made start but none of them actually converted into a bigger score.

Kartik Sharma (62, 61b, 2x4, 4x6), Shubham Garhwal (59, 59b, 5x4, 4x6) were the main run-getters and then there were scattered scores such as a 31 (14b) by Deepak Chahar, a 45 (49b) by Deepak Hooda and a 32 (45b) by skipper Mahipal Lomror.

Medium pacer Yash Thakur (4/39) helped Vidarbha restrict their rival to a sub-300 total.

Haryana survived a fine spell by India leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi (4/46) as they made a heavy weather of the chase of a seemingly easy 197 set by Gujarat.

Earlier, Hemang Patel made 54 (62b) but Anuj Thakral and Nishant Sindhu took six wickets among them equally between them to derail Gujarat.

Himanshu Rana, who made 66 off 89 balls, anchored Haryana's chase and they then rode on bits and pieces contribution from the rest of the batters to reach home. However, Gujarat skipper Axar Patel, who is in the India squad for the T20I series against England, had a poor outing, making just three with the bat and going wicketless in 10 overs in which he conceded 41 runs.

Brief scores: Gujarat: 196 all out in 45.2 overs (Hemang Patel 54, Chintan Gaja 32; Anuj Thakral 3/39, Nishant Sindhu 3/40) lost to Haryana: 201/8 in 44 overs (Himanshu Rana 66, Parth Vats 38; Ravi Bishnoi 4/46) by 2 wickets.

Rajasthan: 291/8 in 50 overs (Kartik Sharma 62, Shubham Garhwal 59, Deepak Hooda 45, Deepak Chahar 31; Yash Thakur 4/39) lost to Vidarbha: 292/1 in 43.3 overs (Karun Nair 122 not out, Dhruv Shorey 118 not out) by 9 wickets. (PTI)

Gavaskar, Kambli felicitated at opening event of MCA's 50th anniv celebrations of Wankhede

MUMBAI, Jan 12: Some of Mumbai's cricketing heroes, including legendary batter Sunil Gavaskar and former player Vinod Kambli,

were on Sunday felicitated by the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) on the opening event of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Wankhede Stadium.

The main event will be held on January 19 at the Wankhede Stadium.

Gavaskar was the first Mumbai captain to be felicitated on Sunday. He was presented a memento by MCA

President Ajinkya Naik.

"It is indeed a very big honour for me to be here at this iconic venue that has given

Indian cricket so much, the 2011 Cricket World Cup being the icing on the cake. And to be part of the start of the celebrations of 50 years of Wankhede Stadium," Gavaskar said.

"As an opening batter, I couldn't miss the start so I am here. I want to wish the MCA all the best and also want to express my deepest sense of gratitude for giving me opportunities since school

cricket.

"I am what I am because MCA lifted me and helped me to take those steps and subsequently supported me even when I was playing for India...I want to thank you all for having me here."

Former India batter Vinod Kambli, who was recently discharged from a local hospital after being admitted to the ICU on December 21 due to health complications, was also present on the occasion. He was seen being escorted by other people as he is still recovering from his ailments.

After his felicitation, Kambli spoke about his playing days at the iconic Wankhede Stadium.

"I remember I smashed my first double hundred here

against England and then went onto score many more hundreds in my career," he said.

"If anyone wants to play for India like me or Sachin (Tendulkar), then I would advise that you should keep working hard and never leave doing that because that's what Sachin and me did since our childhood days."

Former India opening batter Wasim Jaffer was seen greeting Kambli. Former MCA President Vijay Patil was also felicitated.

Other cricketing legends like Sachin Tendulkar, Rohit Sharma and Dilip Vengsarkar will also be part of the MCA's grand celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the Wankhede Stadium.