Shooting attack on bus carrying Israelis in occupied West Bank kills 3

Bangladesh's ICT issues second arrest warrant against ex-PM Hasina

Tamil Nadu Governor Ravi walks out of Assembly

Congress promises ₹ 2,500 to women per month if voted to power

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GUWAHATI, TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2025

THE HILLS

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Coal mine tragedy in Dima Hasao district • Rescue operations on

15 miners feared trapped in mine



a report of a deceased individual lo-

cated in the Greenwood Wildlife

Management Area in Manchester

detectives discovered a deceased in-

dividual in a state of advanced de-

According to a post-mortem ex-

amination performed by the Ocean

County Medical Examiner's Office,

the cause of the individual's death

was multiple gunshot wounds to the

chest, and the manner of death was

Kuldeep Kumar of India.

The individual was identified as

Initial investigation by the Ocean

County prosecutor's Office Major

Crime Unit and New Jersey State

Police Major Crime Unit revealed

that Kumar had been reported miss-

ing by family members on October

Following an investigation that

involved several law enforcement

agencies, it was determined that

Sourav, Gaurav, Nirmal and Gurdeep

acted together and in support of one

(CONTD ON DACE 2)

composition, the statement said.

Law enforcement authorities and

GUWAHATI, Jan 6: An unspecified number of workers were feared trapped inside a coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district on Monday, after a sudden gush of water flooded the

The incident took place at the Assam Coal Quarry, situated in the 3 Kilo area of Umrangso

According to employees of the quarry, there were around 15 workers inside the mine, though

the authorities did not confirm the number.

"Distressing news from Umrangshu, where labourers are trapped in a coal mine. The exact number and status are yet unknown. The DC, SP and my colleague Kaushik Rai are rushing to the site. Praying to God for everyone's safety," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in a post on X.

The army's assistance has been sought in the rescue operation, he said.

"The State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are also on their way to the incident site to aid in the efforts," the CM said.

Dima Hasao Superintendent of Police (SP) Mayank Jha told reporters that several labourers are feared trapped.

Eyewitness accounts and initial assessments suggest that the flooding occurred unexpectedly, leaving the workers unable to escape from the mine.

Rescue operations were launched immediately with teams consisting of local authorities, emergency responders and mining experts working to locate and free the trapped workers,

China says its world's biggest dam over Brahmaputra will not impact water flows to India

25 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

day reiterated its plan to build the world's biggest dam over the Brahmaputra River in Tibet near the Indian border, saying the planned project has gone through rigorous scientific verification and will not have any negative impact on downstream countries -- India and Bangladesh.

The project, estimated to cost around USD 137 billion, is located in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur frequently.

"On the hydropower project in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, China has made its position clear. Let me reiterate that the decision to build the project was made after rigorous scientific evaluation and the project will not have a negative impact on the ecological environment, geological



ests related to water resources of downstream countries," Foreign Ministry's new spokesman Guo Ji-

akun told a media briefing here. "Rather, it will, to some extent, help with their disaster prevention and reduction and climate response," he said, replying to a question that India has expressed its concerns over the dam and the issue figured in the Indian officials

talks with the visiting US National Security Advisor Sullivan.

Sullivan, currently visiting Delhi, held talks with External Affairs minister S Jaishankar on Monday broadly reviewing the trajectory of the India-US global strategic partnership in the last four years under the Biden administration. Sullivan is on a visit to India two (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Five Indian-origin men charged with murder of Indian man in US

Township.

homicide.

26, 2024.

LAS VEGAS, Jan 6: Five Indianorigin men have been charged with murder in the US in connection with the death of a 35-year-old man from

Sandeep Kumar, 34, of South Ozone Park, New York, was charged with murder and conspiracy to commit murder in connection with the death of Kuldeep Kumar in Manchester Township around October 22, 2024, according to a statement on Saturday by Ocean County prosecutor Bradley Billhimer and Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police Colonel Patrick Calla-

Investigation into Kuldeep's death revealed that Sandeep acted in concert with other defendants in carrying out Kuldeep Kumar's mur-

Other defendants in the case are Sourav Kumar, 23, Gaurav Singh 27, Nirmal Singh 30, and Gurdeep Singh 22, all from Greenwood, In-

On December 14, 2024, the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office

Do not hire illegal B'deshi labourers, Himanta to biz houses

MUMBAI, Jan 6: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday exhorted industrialists not to hire illegal Bangladeshi migrants in their units for "cheap labour".

Addressing a press conference here after meeting slew of industrial leaders from corporate houses including the Tatas, Adani Group and Mahindras, Sarma said there is a need to "strike at the roots" of the illegal migration from Bangladesh problem by not hiring such migrants.

He explained that there are middlemen hired by the industry to get cheap labour from Bangladesh, and the industry has to decide not to employ such labour.

When asked if the issue featured during his discussions with industry captains over the weekend, Sarma said there is no need to "remphasise" an issue on which Assam has been fighting since 1979.

The state is looking at investment commitments of ₹1 lakh crore



entities allied with it at the upcoming "Advantage Assam 2.0" investment summit to be held in Guwahati in February.

Attracting investments in sectors such as tourism, semiconductors and defence is the other focus area of the summit to be held on February 25-26.

He said the Tata group's mega ₹

conductor assembly plant is on schedule, and the first phase will be inaugurated in either November or December this year.

Apart from that, the Tatas have also evinced interest to set up a 500-MW solar capacity in the state, he said, adding that an industrial policy is in the works where fallow land being held by tea estates can be con-

21 terrorists arrested by Assam Police's STF since March 2023

GUWAHATI, Jan 6: The Special Task Force (STF) of Assam Police has arrested 21 terrorists, including 16 belonging to Islamic extremist groups, since March 2023, Special DGP Harmeet Singh said Altogether 16 Islamic extremist

group members, one each from ULFA and Maoist outfits and three others from Manipur-based extremist organisations have been arrested between March 1, 2023 and December 31, 2024, Singh said at a press conference here. The STF also recovered four ri-

fles, one 7.65 mm pistol, 31 rounds of ammunitions, one round of AK-series ammunition, 17 bullet pellets, a grenade with explosives, materials used for making IEDs, along with several other arms and ammunitions, he said.

In operations against drugs and narcotics, 59.41 kgs of heroin, 9,67,898 psychotropic tablets, 37,000 bottles of banned phensedyl cough syrup, 3999.68



and one kg of methamphetamine were also seized during the pe-

In operations against smugglers, 1.10 kgs of pure gold and 20,37 kgs of fake yellow metal were also recovered during the period, Singh said.

Two rhino horns, 14 ivory, two tiger teeth, 15 rhino hooves, 1.792 kgs of pangolin scales and one antler were also recovered.

The STF seized 134 vehicles and 361 mobile phones during operations, he said.

Altogether 254 operations were carried out while 137 people were arrested and 111 cases were registered by the STF during the same

BJP leader found dead in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, Jan 6: A BJP leader was found dead with his scooter lying beside him in Maligaon area of Guwahati on Monday, police

Family members of the deceased, BJP Jalukbari Mandal president Kamal Dey, raised suspicion of foul play, though the police said that prima facie, he died because of an accident.

Dey was a prominent social and political activist of Jalukbari, the assembly constituency represented by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

He was found lying on a road in Sankar Nagar area by morning walkers. Dey was taken to a nearby hospital where he was declared dead on arrival.

According to CCTV footage, it appears that the BJP leader died due to an (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)



HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 6: The long-awaited District Council Court (DCC) building was finally inaugurated on Monday by the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang in Karbi Anglong.

The DCC is tasked to deal with civil suits between tribal parties under the jurisdiction of Karbi An-Autonomous Council (KAAC).

"The construction of the building started in 2005 and after a long wait it is inaugurated on Monday. People like former EM of KAAC, Elwin Teron, and former MLA Dr Dharamsing Teron have significantly contributed to the commencement of the functioning of the Court. In DCC pity cases adultery, theft, marriage law, land and prop-



erty suits will be dealt," Ronghang

said while attending the event. The CEM also mentioned about the setting up of village police after the proposal was agreed upon by chief minister Himanta Biswa

"Very soon the KAAC will have its own police force," he reiterated. Along with Tuliram Ronghang, the event was attended by other dignitaries including KAAC Chair-

man, Raju Tisso; executive member (EM) and MP, Amarsing Tisso; other EMs, MACs, and Karbi traditional king Long Ronghang.

On the other hand, Amarsing Tisso stressed that a democratic country has different pillars for smooth functioning.

"For smooth governance, a democratic country needs four pillars: legislature, executive, judiciary and media. Now, without approaching the judicial courts (High Court and Supreme Court), trials between tribal to tribal parties can be taken up in DCC," he added.

Explaining the setting up of the court, the judge of the District Council Court, Karbi Anglong, Sarthe Ronghi said the DCC has been constituted in accordance with

HMPV enters India: 3 cases reported from Karnataka and Gujarat **NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** Three infants tested positive for the Human remain fully prepared to manage a lt is important.

Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in Karnataka and Gujarat on Monday, the first reported cases of the virus in India.

The Union health ministry sought to assuage fears, asserting that it was well-equipped to handle any potential increase in respiratory illnesses.

HMPV is a globally recognised respiratory virus that recently gained attention after its outbreak was reported in China. It is a viral pathogen that causes respiratory infections in people of all age

While the Karnataka, Gujarat and Maharashtra governments assured that there was no cause for paragraph 4 (CONTD. ON PAGE 2) alarm, the Delhi government di-

potential surge in respiratory ill-

Two of the three cases were detected in Karnataka by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) through routine surveillance for multiple respiratory viral pathogens.

A three-month-old female infant with a history of bronchopneumonia was diagnosed with HMPV after being admitted to Baptist Hospital in Bengaluru. She has already been discharged, the health ministry said.

An eight-month-old male infant with a history of bronchopneumonia tested positive for HMPV on January 3 after being admitted to

It is important to note that neither of the patients have any history of international travel, the ministry underlined.

A two-month-old boy admitted to a private hospital in Ahmedabad also tested positive for HMPV. The infant, who hails from Dungarpur in Rajasthan, was admitted to the hospital on December 24, 2024, with symptoms of respiratory infection.

Initially, the child needed ventilator support but his condition is stable now, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation medical officer Bhavin Solanki said.

The Union health ministry emphasised that HMPV is already in circulation globally, including in Baptist Hospital. He is now recov- India, and (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Private sector reluctant to invest in India as no-confidence in govt: Congress

reluctance to invest in India is a corporate motion of no-confidence in the Narendra Modi government, the Congress claimed on Monday. The opposition party also urged the govern-

ment to take measures in the upcoming Union

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: The private sector's

budget to stimulate and sustain domestic investment in the country that, it claimed, was on the decline. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the investment environment in India had been sluggish

in the "Modi decade" In a post on X, he said the Gross Fixed Capital Formation had fallen from an average of 32 per cent of GDP during Manmohan Singh's prime ministerial decade to consistently being below 29 per cent of GDP in the

past 10 years. "Investment is sluggish because mass consumption is not accelerating, tax and other authorities are threatening and intimidating businesses, and because of the growing perception that only four-five business groups

can grow in the Modi regime," he said. "Now comes fresh evidence of the private



sector's reluctance to invest in India under this government -- net foreign direct investment (FDI) fell to a 12-year low in April-October this year (2024). Gross FDI inflows have stagnated," he added.

Indian firms are increasingly choosing to invest abroad rather than at home, Ramesh claimed. "This is a corporate motion of noconfidence in the Modi government." Asserting that FDI was very important, he

said, "But more fundamental is DI -- Domestic Investment. How to stimulate and sustain DI has to be the central concern of the Union budget, to be present 26 days from today."

The Union budget will be presented on February 1. (PTI)



GUWAHATI, Jan 6: A total of 1500 tonnes of cement was successfully transported to Pandu port from Kolkata on Monday via the Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR), marking a noteworthy achievement for the Jalvahak scheme, said an official statement.

As per the statement, the consignment was transported by the scheduled freight service completing its maiden journey as the MV Trishul, with dumb Barges Ajay and Dikshu.

The shipment proved the efficacy of the scheduled freight service launched by the Union minister of ports, shipping & waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal under Jalvahak scheme from Kolkata

The 'Jalvahak' cargo policy incen-

tivises the movement of long-haul

cargo via National Waterways 1 (river

Ganga) as well as for National Waterways 2 (river Brahmaputra) and National Waterways 16 (river Barak).

The Fixed Day Scheduled Sailing Service ply vessels between Kolkata -



'The government is committed to transforming logistics through sustainable solution'

Maiden scheduled freight

Patna - Varanasi - Patna - Kolkata stretch of NW 1 and between Kolkata and Pandu on NW 2 via IBPR.

"The successful completion of MV Trishul's maiden voyage marks a sig-

nificant milestone for India's inland waterways and the Jalvahak scheme. This achievement highlights the tremendous potential of waterways as an economical, eco-friendly, and efficient mode of transportation, helping decongest rail-ways and roadways," the official statement quoted Sonowal as saying.

Hailing PM Modi's vision for enormous growth in the sector, he said, "Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government is committed to transforming logistics through sustainable solutions. The Jalvahak scheme incentivises long-haul cargo movement on National Waterways 1, 2, and 16, offering businesses a cost-effective and reliable al-

"The launch of regular scheduled freight services ensures timely delivery of cargo, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Govt mulls mandatory hallmarking for silver jewellery BIS to assess feasibility

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Monday asked the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) to consider implementing mandatory hallmarking for silver and silver artifacts following consumer demands.

"There is a demand from consumers for mandatory hallmarking of silver. You (BIS) can deliberate and take a call," Joshi said at the 78th BIS Foundation Day event.

The work in this direction has already begun and the government will take a decision after completion of stakeholder consultations and feasibility assessment by BIS, the minister told reporters on the sidelines of the event.

"I have asked BIS to work out feasibility and take reactions from consumers and ornament dealers. We will consult all stakeholders and start the process," he added.

Silver hallmarking, which certifies the purity of the white metal, is currently voluntary.

BIS Director General Pramod Kumar Tiwari told PTI that the Bureau could be ready to implement

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 6: Sonalika

Tractors completed its year 2024

journey by setting a new bench-

mark by recording its highest-

ever monthly overall market

share of 18% in December '24,

said an official statement on

This impressive feat was

driven by an extraordinary

10,639 overall tractor sales, a ro-

bust 33% growth over 7,999

tractors sold in Dec '23 and sur-

passing industry growth by an

Sonalika has maintained its

momentum in FY 25 with YTD

sales of 1,19,369 overall tractor

sales in April-December '24, it

modernising agricultural prac-

tices and empowering farmers in

more than 150 countries, the

company has continuously

pushed boundaries to redefine

excellence in the tractor indus-

From expanding its heavy

duty tractor portfolio as per

farmer's crop and soil needs, to

enhancing its service network,

staying as close as possible to

customers. Sonalika has consis-

tently positioned itself as a greetings for the New Year.

try", the statement read.

"With a relentless focus on

estimated 2.4x, it said.

further stated.

Monday.

Sonalika beats industry



mandatory silver hallmarking within 3-6 months, adding that the stakeholder discussions were un-

"Several rounds of discussions were held with stakeholders and they are in favour of it. The discussion on printing a unique six-digit alphanumeric code is going on," Tiwari said.

The move follows successful implementation of mandatory gold

trusted partner in the journey to-

Sharing thoughts on this un-

Raman Mittal, joint managing

director of International Tractors

Limited, said, "With every trac-

tor, we reinforce our commit-

ment to plant the seeds of

growth, resilience and hope for

our farming community. The

new milestone of highest ever

monthly market share of 18% in

Dec'24 has been a perfect cul-

mination of a year brimming

with benchmark performance

He further said, "With 33%

growth during the month, we

have beaten industry growth by

2.4x. Over and above this excit-

ing journey, our greatest reward

lies in spearheading farmers to-

ward a brighter and more pros-

He further asserted Sonalika

Tractors' commitment by saying

that, with their robust portfolio

of heavy-duty tractors, they are

poised to seize every new op-

portunity in the New Year 2025

and are committed to deliver on

farmer expectations and driving

agricultural prosperity."

The statement ende

and new milestones.'

perous tomorrow.'

achievement,

ward agricultural prosperity.

precedented

hallmarking introduced in June 2021, which now covers 361 dis-

The existing system includes a unique six-digit alphanumeric code (HUID) certifying gold pu-

According to the minister, about 90 per cent of jewellery being purchased is now hallmarked. More than 44.28 crore gold jewellery items have been hallmarked with

Stakeholders from Gujarat, Karnataka and other states have requested the extension of mandatory hallmarking to silver, the minister added.

unique IDs since the launch.

BIS, established under the BIS Act in 1986, is an autonomous national body responsible for setting quality standards for products and

Listing out upcoming focus areas, the minister said the BIS is also developing standards for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and is at the forefront of shaping the future of innovation and technology.

"As we look to the future, let us remember that our journey is not just about meeting international standards, it is about setting them We are not just participants in the global market; we are leaders in the global world of quality," he added.

The minister launched BIS comic books, library and pensioners portals at the event, which was also attended by Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare and other senior BIS officials. (PTI)

listed NCDs to refinance MUML project performance by 2.4x in Dec '24

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Power transmission solution provider Sterlite Grid 32 Ltd (SGL32) on Monday announced securing ₹ 2,450 crore through listed non-convertible debentures (NCDs) to refinance its Mumbai Urja Marg Ltd project.

This is the first listed NCD issuance of Sterlite Grid 32 Limited after its joint venture with GIC of Singapore. The NCDs are rated AA+

The infrastructure business of Sterlite Power Transmission Ltd was demerged into Sterlite Grid 5 Limited (SGL5) effective October 8, 2024.

joint venture with GIC of Singapore, following which SGL5 is to execute through Sterlite Grid 32 Limited

nancing to debt capital market financ-

This precedent-setting transaction marks a significant achievement for the business, showcasing our ability to secure cost-efficient financing while maintaining strong investor confidence," he added.

The JV platform had won MUML project in June 2020 through tariffbased competitive bidding to execute the green energy corridor project on BOOM (build, own, operate, maintain) basis for a period of 35 years.

MUML project has established a transmission system covering western region and northeastern region spanning across Maharashtra, Gujarat, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh.

The project is critical for strengthening the transmission system in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region with the potential to carry more than 2,000 MW of additional power to Mumbai and Navi Mumbai.

According to SGL32, the closure of ₹ 2,450 crore funding manifests confidence in India's rapidly expanding renewable power sector. Even as India builds sizeable green capacity, it needs to be integrated seamlessly with the national grid.

MUML will play a critical role in this mega transmission project that will facilitate the evacuation of 20

Sterlite Grid 32 raises ₹ 2,450 cr via

The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) and India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL) have emerged as the successful bidders to the NCDs that have been listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), according to a state-

stable by CRISIL Ratings.

SGL5 has recently entered into a all its transmission projects in India

Pratik Agarwal, Director, Sterlite Grid 32 Ltd, said the joint venture now has access to stronger alternative source of funds and the transaction

Titagarh Rail delivers India's first driverless 'Make-in-India' trainset KOLKATA, Jan 6: Titagarh Rail Systems Ltd on mobility journey... With India now ranking third glob-

Monday handed over its first driverless, Made-in-India trainset to Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation's Yellow Line, marking a significant milestone in India's urban mobility journey.

The company built the trainset in its metro manufacturing facility in Uttarpara in West Bengal.

The automated train with a stainless steel body, designed for state-of-the-art performance, will operate on the 18-km stretch linking Electronics City to the rest of Bengaluru.

Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, Manohar Lal, who joined the celebrations virtually, commended Titagarh Rail Systems.

"As we inaugurate Bengaluru Metro's new trainset and surpass 1,000 kilometres of operational metro rail, we celebrate a significant milestone in India's urban

ally in metro rail, we aim to surpass the United States within five years," he said.

Titagarh Rail Systems' Managing Director, Umesh Chowdhary, said the train incorporates advanced automation that enables it to operate in driverless mode.

"It marks a significant milestone as the first Metro train completely manufactured in India for Bangalore Metro's Yellow Line and the first stainless steel trainset by Titagarh Rail Systems Ltd. It reflects India's strides in indigenisation and its growing role as a global rail manufacturing hub, aligning with the Prime Minister's vision of a Viksit Bharat," the company

Titagarh will deliver two more trainsets to the Yellow Line by April and ramp up production to deliver two trains a month by September 2025. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

China says its world's

weeks ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration as the 47th president of the US.

Last month, China approved plans to build a dam over the Brahmaputra River called Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet close to the Indian border.

As per the plan, the massive dam will be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh.

In its first reaction to the proposed dam on Jan 3, India urged China to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream areas.

"We will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect our interests," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told media in Delhi.

"As a lower riparian state with established user rights to the waters of the river, we have consistently expressed, through expert-level as well as diplomatic channels, our views and concerns to the Chinese side over mega projects on rivers in their territory," Jaiswal said.

These have been reiterated, along with the need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries, following the latest report," he said.

"The Chinese side has been urged to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream areas," he added.

On Dec 27, another Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Mao Ning, defended China's plan to build the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet, saying the project will not negatively affect lower riparian states and that safety issues have been addressed through decades of studies.

"The project will not negatively affect the lower reaches," she said, referring to the concerns in India and Bangladesh, which are the lower riparian states.

China will continue to maintain communication with countries at the lower reaches through existing channels and step up cooperation on disaster prevention and relief for the benefit of the people by the river," she

She said China's hydropower development in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River aims to speed up the development of clean energy and respond to climate change and extreme hydrological disasters. (PTI)

Do not hire illegal

solar power capacity. Sarma said given the state's proximity to the northeastern theatre which sees maximum deployment of Army, the state is also looking to attract investments into defence production and repair. This aspect has featured during his interactions with the Adani group and Mahindras, Sarma added. (PTI)

Five Indian-origin men

in carrying out the murder of Kuldeep Kumar. Sourav and Gaurav were charged with murder and conspiracy to commit murder on December 19. Nirmal and Gurdeep were charged with the same crimes on December 20. They were transported to Johnson County Jail in Franklin, Indiana, where they will remain lodged pending their extradition to New Jersey.

Sandeep was taken into custody on January 3 and processed at the New Jersey State Police Barracks in Holmdel. Kumar was later transported to the Ocean County Jail, where he is presently lodged pending a detention hearing.

HMPV enters India: 3 cases

cases of respiratory illnesses associated with it have been reported in various countries. Furthermore, based on the current data from the ICMR and the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme network, there has been no unusual surge in Influenza-Like Illness or Severe Acute Respiratory Illness cases in the country, it

The ministry said it is monitoring the situation through all available surveillance channels. The ICMR will continue to track trends in HMPV circulation throughout the year, it said.

The recent preparedness drill conducted across the country has shown that India is well-equipped to handle any potential increase in respiratory illnesses and public health interventions can be deployed promptly if needed, the ministry stated.

The Delhi government, meanwhile, directed all the hospitals in the capital to remain fully prepared to manage a potential surge in respiratory illnesses.

In a directive marked "most urgent", health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj instructed the Health and Family Welfare Department to closely monitor the situation, and remain in constant touch with the Union health min AAP supremo and former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal raised concern over the detection of HMPV

cases and urged the Centre to act swiftly to prevent a potential health crisis. Meanwhile, Karnataka health minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said there was no need to panic as the infections

detected are of old virus strains existing in the country and they are not life-threatening. The minister who chaired a meeting of health department officials said the two infected infants are doing "normal", and advised people to follow general precautionary measures.

"I don't think we should be pressing the panic button, because HMPV is not a new virus, it already exists... HMPV is an existing virus, and a certain percentage of people do get affected by this virus and it is not some-

thing new," Rao said. The Karnataka government also said the HMPV primarily affects children, causing infections similar to the common cold, and was "not as transmissible as Covid-19". Rao underlined that there was no need for Covid-

like protocols to be followed as of now as there have been no "unnatural developments". Gujarat health minister Rushikesh Patel assured people that the state government is prepared to tackle the

"As part of the precautionary measures, the health department held a meeting on January 4 and instructed every chief district health officer, civil surgeon, and superintendent of sub-district hospitals in the state to pay full attention to matters related to the infection of this virus," he said.

Arrangements will be made for the diagnosis of HMPV in various government hospitals, the minister said, adding that the people should understand the viral infection symptoms and take measures accordingly. Maĥarashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis said citizens must not panic amid the detection of HMPV

cases in some other states and asserted his government will soon issue a comprehensive advisory on the situa-The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, meanwhile, said no HMPV case has been found in the metrop-

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee also confirmed on Monday that no HMPV cases have so far

HMPV was first discovered in 2001 and belongs to the Paramyxoviridae family. It is closely related to the Respiratory Syncytial Virus. It spreads through respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing, as well as by touching contaminated surfaces or coming into direct contact with infected individuals. (PTI)

District Council Court building

of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and as per Mikir Hills Autonomous District Administration of Justice rule 1954 to have a District Council Court at the district level and subsequently the Subordinate and Vil-The DCC is constituted to deal with civil suits like marriage laws, land and property disputes, and title suits,

with punishment up to 5 years and below. The criminal cases carrying a punishment of 5 years and above can be tried if a conferment from the Governor of Assam is received. Besides Sarthe Ronghi, the KAAC has appointed an additional judge Dhonison Lekthe and two judicial officers

Micky Teron and Bilcham Teron.

BJP leader found dead

accident after hitting a speed breaker, Guwahati Commissioner of Police Partha Sarathi Mahanta told re-

While returning home in his scooter, Dey hit a speed breaker, Mahanta said adding that the CCTV recorded the incident at 2:47 am, he said.

"According to prima facie evidence, it is a case of accident. But as concerns have been raised from certain

sections about the nature of his death, we are examining all aspects of the case", Mahanta said. (PTI) Maiden scheduled freight service

fostering confidence among stakeholders about the readiness of national waterways. By empowering vessel operators and providing businesses with a sustainable logistics option, this initiative is a meaningful step towards the Prime Minister's vision of transformation through transportation as India sails towards becoming a developed nation." The Union minister added.

The cargo promotion scheme provides a direct incentive to the cargo owners to transport their goods via inland waterways for a distance of more than 300 kms.

This is a joint effort by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the nodal agency of waterways development in the country, as well as by the Inland & Coastal Shipping Limited (ICSL), a fully owned subsidiary of the Shipping Corporation of India Limited (SCIL). The 'Jalvahak' scheme encourages to reduce logistics costs, decongest road and railways, and adapting to a sustainable mode of transportation.

Sensex slumps over 1,250 pts on earnings growth concerns, HMPV scare

equity indices Sensex and Nifty crashed 1.6 per cent on Monday due to an across-the-board selloff, as concerns over third-quarter earnings growth and the continued flight of foreign capital sapped risk appetite.

Besides, traders said that the new HMPV scare, depreciating rupee and weak trend in Asian markets further weighed on sentiment. Extending loss for the second

straight session, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,258.12 points or 1.59 per cent to close below the 78,000 level at 77,964.99. During the day, it plunged 1,441.49 points or 1.81 per cent to 77,781.62. As many as 3,474 stocks de-

clined, 656 advanced and 114 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty slumped 388.70 points or 1.62 per cent to 23,616.05.

"Emerging markets are undergoing consolidation due to uncertainties surrounding new US economic policies, the Fed's hawkish stance on future rate cuts, potential upward revision for CY25 inflation, and a strong dollar, all of which are negatively impacting market sentiment. The primary catalyst for a sharp sell-off in the domestic market appears to be concerns over the human metapneu-

movirus (HMPV). "Additionally, the initial Q3 consensus earnings estimate suggests a potential gradual recovery in domestic corporate earnings, which could explain the domestic market's underperformance compared to global markets led by premium valuation," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial

Services, said. From the 30-share blue-chip



pack, Tata Steel, NTPC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndusInd Bank, Power Grid, Zomato, Adani Ports, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra and Reliance Industries were among the biggest lag-

Titan and Sun Pharma were the only gainers.

"The Indian equity markets witnessed a sharp decline today, with both Nifty and Bank Nifty slipping below their 200-day moving averages (DMA). The sell-off can be attributed to a rise in Foreign Institutional Investor (FII) selling and concerns surrounding the upcoming Q3 earnings season.

"Additionally, fears related to the new HMPV have added to the bearish sentiment, triggering fresh rounds of selling after the recent counter-trend pullback rally," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge cracked 3.17 per cent and the midcap index fell by 2.44 per

"Indian equities faced intense

selling pressure amid concerns regarding the outbreak of HMP Virus (Human Metapneumovirus) and sharp fall in banking stocks post lacklustre quarterly updates. Diagnostic stocks were in focus as the first two cases of HMPV were de-

tected in Bangalore. "There was broad-based selloff in the market with midcap and smallcap indices falling between 2-3 per cent each and all sectoral indices closing in the red," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

All BSE sectoral indices ended lower, with utilities tumbling 4.16 per cent, power (3.73 per cent), services (3.45 per cent), metal (3.15 per cent), oil & gas (3.15 per cent), energy (3.03 per cent), industrials (2.97 per cent) and commodities (2.74 per cent).

fence sector order is also ex-

pected to ramp up based on

recent approvals. We expect mar-

"In the capital goods sector, order inflows are anticipated to rise from 4QFY25 onwards. De-

cerns relating to the new virus ease out. We could see stock/sector-specific action on the back of pre-quarterly business updates and the start of the Q3 result season," Khemka said. The Indian Council of Medical

kets to remain volatile until con-

Research has detected two cases of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in Karnataka through routine surveillance for multiple respiratory viral pathogens, the Union health ministry said on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 4,227.25 crore on Friday after a day's breather, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul settled

and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended in positive territory on Fri-

higher while Tokyo, Shanghai

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.25 per cent to USD 76.32 a barrel. The rupee declined 4 paise to

settle at a fresh record low of

85.83 (provisional) against the

US dollar on Monday. Meanwhile, India's services sector growth touched a fourmonth high in December, supported by new business inflows on strong demand conditions and easing inflationary pressures, a monthly survey said on Monday.

seasonally adjusted **HSBC** India Services Business Activity Index, rose from 58.4 in November to 59.3 in December, highlighting the strongest rate of expansion in four months.

In the previous session, the BSE benchmark tumbled 720.60 points or 0.90 per cent to close at 79,223.11 on Friday. The Nifty tanked 183.90 points or 0.76 per cent to 24,004.75. (PTI)



Necessary initiative and measures have been taken while publishing the electoral roll

Final photo electoral roll published across state

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 6: Along with rest of the state, the final photo electoral rolls for five LACs in Kokrajhar and two LACs in Baksa districts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) have been published on Monday amidst the presence of representatives from various political parties in the district headquarters respectively.

In Kokrajhar, the Kokrajhar District Commissioner's Office has officially announced the publication of the Final Photo Electoral Roll for five Legislative Assembly Constituencies (LACs)-No 1 Gossaigaon LAC, No 2 Dotma (ST) LAC, No 3 Kokrajhar (ST) LAC, No 4 Baokungri LAC and No 5 Parbatjhora LAC under the district.

Speaking the reporters at a press conference held at the conference hall of DC office, district commissioner, Masanda Magdalin Pertin has stated that the final photo electoral roll was published officially on Monday.

She said that necessary initiative and measures have been taken while publishing the electoral roll.

She has urged the voters to ensure their details accurately recorded in the final electoral roll. She emphasised the importance of this verification for smooth participation in the democratic process.

Eligible voters are encouraged to check their information on the official websites eoassam.nic.in and voters.eci.gov.in.

Additionally, voters can reach out to the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) at their respective polling stations or contact the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) for each Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC) for any

The DC emphasized the importance of confirming the accuracy of voter details to ensure smooth participation in upcoming



In Baksa, the final voter list for the 41 No Manash Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC) and 42 No Baksa (ST) LAC in Baksa district was officially released on Monday by the District Election Officer.

According to the published data, 41 No Manas LAC has a total of 2,06,353 voters, which includes 1,03,735 male voters and 1,02,618 female voters

42 No. Baksa (ST) LAC has a total of 1,99,053 voters, comprising 98,405 male voters, 1,00,646 female voters, and 2 thirdgender voters.

Baksa district now has 4,05,406 voters for two LACs, consisting of 2,02,140 male voters, 2,03,264 female voters, and 2 third-gender voters.

Additionally, the district has a total of 486 polling stations, with 245 polling stations in the Manash LAC and 241 polling stations in the Baksa (ST) LAC.

The District Election Officer has urged voters to verify their details and actively participate in the democratic process in the upcoming elections.

Our Biswanath correspondent adds:

Our Jorhat correspondent adds: As per the directive of the Election Commission of India (ECI), along with other districts of the State, the final electoral rolls of Jorhat election district was published on Monday.

Addressing newspersons at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's office complex, the Jorhat District Commissioner Jay Shivani, who is also the district election officer, stated that total number of voters in 99-Teok Assembly constituency is 1,94,443 , out of which 95,365 were male and 99,078 were female, while there has been no third gender voters found. The number of polling stations in Teok constituency is 242.

The total number of voters in the 100-Jorhat assembly seat is 1,48,549, out of which 71,514 were male and 77,035 were female, while in the third gender category it was nil. The number of polling stations in the constituency is 176.

In the 101-Mariani Assembly constituency the total number of voters is 1,66,338, out of which 81,467 were male and 84,871 female and there was no third gender voters. The number of polling stations in the constituency is 196.

The total number of voters in the 102-Titabar Assembly constituency is 2,00,510, out of which 97,204 were male and 1,03306 female. In Titabar too there was no third gender voters. The number of polling stations in the constituency is 231.

The total number of voters in all the four Assembly constituencies of the district is 7,09,840, out of which 3,45,550 were male and 3,64,290 female.

Stating that the final electoral roll was available in the website:jorhat.assam.gov.in, Shivani said that people could also see it at the offices of the District Election Officer, Electoral Registration Officer and from respective Booth Level Officers (BLOs).

CEM Ronghang inaugurates road



HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Jan 6: Tuliram Ronghang, CEM, KAAC, Diphu, inaugurated the CC Pavers Block Road which runs from Taralangso Main Road to Believers Church in Diphu on Monday.

The construction of the road has brought relief and jubilation to the communities living in and around the area, a release stated.

Diphu Diocese of Believers Eastern Church Diphu appreciated and lauded the initiative by the CEM and the team for tirelessly working for the development of Karbi Anglong.

The program was graced by MP Amarsing Tisso, MLAs Bidyasing Engleng, and Dasing Ronghang.

The programme was attended by Rev. Fr. Ajay Tulsiary, Vicar General, Diphu Region; Rev. Fr. Thanghao Dimngel, Diocesan Vicar, Satgaon Diocese; Rev. Fr. Reuben Tokbi, Provincial Vicar, Diphu Province; Rev. Fr. Wilson Kumar Singh, Provincial Vicar, Deithor Province; Dn. Fr. Manoj Engti, Provincial Vicar, Chowkihola Province; Rev Fr Swapan Debbarma, Principal, Diphu Diocesan Seminary, priests, deacons, and

GIS remote sensing course launched

HT Correspondent

GOLAGHAT, Jan 6: A GIS remote sensing course along with 'Artificial Intelligence' and 'Drone Technology' were launched at Prayash Academy Senior Secondary School in collaboration with GIS Vision, a nodal training centre of IIRS, ISRO, for the greater interest of the students. These job oriented courses high on demand is said to help out students to meet the global opportunity for a lucrative career in future, said the organisers on Monday.

Academic Regitrar of Sati Sadhani State University Udayan Boruah, principal of Golaghat Polytechnic Goutom Borthakur among others was present on the occasion. Principal Jatindra Saikia and GIS Co-Ordinator Odyssey Saikia Presented the inaugural speech and welcomed the first batch of this course.

'Surokhit Axomor Babe Bator Nat' inaugurated

GUWAHATI, Jan 6: A street play-'Surokhit Axomor Babe Bator Nat' which is an awareness campaign on preparedness during disaster has been inaugurated in Dima Hasao on Monday. It has been inaugurated on the occasion of International Day of Disaster Reduction.

The awareness campaign is focused on disaster preparedness causes by landslides, lighting, floods and storms organised by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Dima Hasao, in collaboration with Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) at District Commissioner's Office, Dima Hasao, Haflong.

The programme began with a ceremonial performance of the street play and the flagging off of the Street Play van, inaugurated by DHAC Joint Secretary Rebecca Changsan in the presence of district commissioner cum chairperson of DDMA, Dima Hasao Simanta Kr Das

Addressing the gathering Das emphasised the importance of public awareness on disaster preparedness and response. He also highlighted the significant role and contribution of youth in disaster preparedness and response efforts. The van and the team will tour in different places of the Dima Hasao district, starting from district commissioner's office, Dima Hasao Haflong. The team will perform the Play on Market Day at Thaijuwari, Kalachand, Langthing, Haflong, Diyungbra, Mahur, Dihangi, Maibang and Hatikali of Dima Hasao.

Awareness campaign on road safety held

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Jan 6: An awareness campaign on road safety was successfully organised at Diyungmukh Higher Secondary School, highlighting critical aspects of traffic laws and citizen safety.

The event was spearheaded by Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Diyungmukh Police Station, Nilutpal Bhuyan, who addressed the gathering and shed light on the importance of adhering to road safety measures.

The campaign witnessed an overwhelming response with participation from women's organisations, youths, students, eminent personalities, Self-Help Groups, anganwadi workers, and members of the Nagarik (Samiti) Committee.

OC Bhuyan, along with his team, provided a detailed explanation of the new legal provisions aimed at enhancing the criminal justice system, streamlining traffic management, and ensuring the safety of

The interactive session concluded with a Q&A segment, where attendees actively engaged with the police team, raising queries and seeking clarity on road safety protocols and legal aspects. This initiative by Diyungmukh Police Station is a commendable step towards fostering an informed and responsible community, emphasizing the collective role of citizens in ensuring a safer road environment.

Workshop on theatre concludes in Kokrajhar **HT Correspondent**

KOKRAJHAR, Jan 6: A 20-day workshop on the 'production oriented theatre' was concluded on Sunday held at the Bodofa Cultural Complex, Chandamari in Kokrajhar with a closing ceremony.

The event was organised jointly by the department of Cinema & Theatre, government of Bodoland Territorial Region and eight cultural groups. The event was started on December 11 and held at several eight locations across the BTR districts that showcased diverse theatre performances on its workshop days.

As many as eight plays were performed by participating cultural troupes which was accorded presence of Sanjeev Kumar Brahma, general secretary, Lwrgi Theatre Group, Kokrajhar.

The closing ceremony, was attended by Phami Brahma, CHD, department of cinema and theatre, Govt of BTC, and Buddhiram Basumatary, assistant culture secretary of ABSU, as the guests

The culmination of the event of Production Oriented Theatre Workshop 2024-25 was marked by a grand finale held at Bodofa Cultural Complex, where eight theatre productions by the participants were showcased to a captivated audience. Each of the participants was given away certificates by the organisers.

The successful completion of the workshop marks a significant milestone in promoting theatre and cultural exchange in the region.

Wihu-Kuh celebrated with much fanfare

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Jan 6: The Tangsa community's traditional harvest festival, Wihu-Kuh, was celebrated on Sunday at Kharang Kong under the Khumchai Gaon Panchayat of the Margherita co-district.

Nayung Mossang, the president of the All Assam Tangsa Student Union Central Executive Committee, expressed that Wihu-Kuh is a significant event for the Tangsa community, celebrated with immense joy and unity across Assam.

In the Kharang Kong village, which is part of the 83rd Margherita Constituency and home to over 1,200 Tangsa community members, the festival holds deep cultural significance.

Nayung Mossang shared that the people of Kharang Kong have been celebrating the Wihu-Kuh harvest festival for centuries, continuing the tradition with great enthusiasm and harmony each year and on behalf of Tangsa community people I wish all the people of Assam a very happy and prosperous "Wihu-Kuh" harvest festival.

Assam Guv reviews developmental works, visits Jagannath Temple in Dibrugarh



HT Correspondent DIBRUGARH, Jan 6: Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, accompanied by his wife, paid a visit to the iconic Jagannath Temple

in Khanikar, Dibrugarh on Monday. The Governor offered prayers for the prosperity and well-being of the people of Assam during his first visit to the temple

Admiring the temple's magnificent architecture and peaceful surroundings, the Governor called it a spiritually enriching experience.

Prominent dignitaries, including Dibrugarh district commissioner Bikram Kairi, superintendent of police Rakesh Reddy, and former Union minister Pawan Singh Ghatowar, were present

Temple trust members, staff, and a large

number of devotees also gathered to witness the

Vijay Khemani, secretary of the temple trust, extended a warm welcome to the Governor and reflected on the contributions of former Governor Janaki Ballabh Patnaik in establishing the

In his address, the Governor expressed his desire to visit the temple regularly and pledged his support for its further development.

The Governor and his wife were felicitated by Vijay Khemani, Pawan Singh Ghatowar, Ram Sasoni, Dip Chasa, Atmaram Agarwal, Purno Bordoloi, Sunita Khemani, Mausami Bagchi, Vivek Singh, and Pankaj Sobor as a mark of respect.

Acharya further held a review meeting with the district Commissioner and all the departmental heads of Dibrugarh district today, in the presence of minister of cultural affairs Bimal Bora and minister of power Prashanta

During the meeting, district commissioner Bikram Kairi gave an overview of the various Central and State Government schemes being implemented in the district. The Governor took stock of the progress of several key departments, including panchayat and rural development (P&RD), health and family welfare, social welfare, fisheries, and horticulture.

The Governor asked the district officials to prioritize tree plantation efforts, stating that such initiatives should be integrated with Amrit Sarovars to Anganwadi Centres.

He asked the DC to place more importance in plantation of saplings as they are crucial for

enhancing green cover and protecting the envi-

The corrected and final voters list with pho-

tographs of the voter for three LACs under

Biswanath district 70 No Biswnath, 71 No

Behali (SC) and 72 No Gohpur have been

published on Monday, Munindra Nath Na-

gatey, district commissioner cum district

According to the final voters list there are

188908 voters in total. Out of it, 93595 are

male voters and 95313 are female voters. A

total of 1240 voters have been included. Sim-

ilarly, there are 157196 total voters in Behali

(SC) LAC. Out of it, 78108 are male voters

and 79061 are female voters. A total of 1212

are newly added voters in Behali LAC. On

the other hand, there are 172810 total voters

in Gohpur LAC. Out of it, 86830 are male

voters and 85980 are female voters. A total

of 869 voters have been newly added in the

It is pertinent to mention here that there are

a total of 229 voting centers in Biswanath

LAC while 182 voting centers in Behali and

205 in Gohpur LACs respectively. It is fur-

ther worth mentioning that the draft voters

list was published on October 29, 2024.

final voters list.

election officer, Biswanath stated.

Acharya also underscored the importance of tuberculosis (TB) eradication. He, therefore, asked the concerned officials to inspire the local population to become Nikshay Mitras, thus contributing to the national campaign against TB.

The Governor said that the initiative would play a vital role in achieving the goal of a TB-

During the meeting the Governor touched upon the potential of Amrit Sarovars as both an ecological and economic asset.

He noted that the water bodies created under Amrit Sarovar programme can foster employment opportunities and enhance the green cover in the region. He suggested that fisheries activities should be integrated into Amrit Sarovars. which would significantly improve the livelihood of villagers. He further pointed out that Assam, blessed with abundant water bodies, has the potential to emerge as a fish-surplus state in the country.

Acharya also took stock of the works of the Model Anganwadi Centres in the district. He urged the officials to expedite the completion or the remaining centres, emphasizing the need for timely completion to serve the community

The Governor also asked the DC to identify and rectify any gaps in the implementation of welfare schemes and address them.

He asked all officials to remain vigilant and ensure that no loopholes remain in the execution of government initiatives which are aimed

Drugs peddler in Marikolong police net

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Jan 6: Marikolong Police in Nagaon have arrested a notorious drug peddler from Dimaruguri area and seized a substantial quantity of heroin from his possession on

Acting on a tip off from a reliable source, a team of Marikolong Police launched a surprise raid at Dimoruguri area in Nagaon town on Monday afternoon. During the raid, they caught Gopal Dhali, a resident of Panigaon, red-handed with 7 containers of heroin weighing 10.46 grams.

The police have also seized Dhali's scooter, bearing registration number AS-02-AF-0662, which he allegedly used to transport and supply drugs in the area. According to police sources, Dhali has been involved in drug trafficking for a long time, using his scooter to supply heroin to local addicts. The police have been monitoring his activities for some time and finally managed to catch him in the act. The arrest and seizure are significant achievements for Marikolong Police, who have been working tirelessly to curb the menace of drug trafficking in the area.

The police have registered a case under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and are investigating further to unravel the network of drug suppliers and ped-

Renowned classical musician Mala Dey passes away

HT Correspondent DIBRUGARH, Jan 6: Mala Dey, a renowned classical music artist and a pioneer in the cultural world of Dibrugarh, passed away on Sunday at the age of 81 due to age-related ailments. She was a resident of Shantipara Bashbari, Dibrugarh.

Dey was born to Shashanka Shekhar Sarkar and Suhasini Sarkar in Guwahati on September 12, 1944. At the young age of 18, she married Anil Kumar Dey, an established businessman from Dibrugarh. At the age of 30, Dey began her journey into the world of Indian classical music. Under the guidance of her mentor, Prahlad Das, she earned her Bachelor's degree in classical music in 1975.

She was closely associated with organisations like "Sangeet Vidyamandir" and "Sadarang Kala Mandir" in Amolapatty, Dibrugarh. Under her mentorship, more than 250 students were trained in classical music and successfully established themselves in the field.

Inter -state youth exchange programme underway The five-day programme will feature educational ac-

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Jan 6: The inaugural ceremony of the five-day inter-state youth exchange programme was held on Monday at the Youth Hostel in Paltanbazar, Guwahati.

Yuva Kendra, Kamrup Metro, Assam was inaugurated by Lok Sabha MP Bijuli Kalita Medhi.

In her inaugural speech, Medhi emphasised the importance of national integration, communal harmony, and brotherhood among the youth. She expressed hope that the programme would foster these values among the participants.

The programme has brought together 27 youth delegates from three districts of Arunachal Pradesh and representatives from various ethnic groups in Assam.

change programmes.

Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan's altanbazar, Guwahati.

The program, organised by Nehru as inaugurated by Lok Sabha MP Bi
To Warl. Marking Metro, Assam as inaugurated by Lok Sabha MP Bi
To Warl. Marking Metro, Assam as inaugurated by Lok Sabha MP Bi
To Warl. Marking Metro, Assam as inaugurated by Lok Sabha MP Bi
To Warl. Marking Metro, Assam as inaugurated by Lok Sabha MP Bi
To Warl. Marking Metro, Assam and Commissioner of 31 No Ward, Guwahati Municipal corpog state director, Dinabandhu Saha, and ration Rajib Das, general secretary of Netaji Sangha, social worker Rajshree Bora were present at the inaugural cer-

> Sayan Suklabaidya, youth officer, Kamrup NYK welcomed the participants and other invited dignitaries in very beginning of the inaugural session while Jiban Ch Doley, accounts and programme supervisor, Kamrup NYK mentored the entire programme, a press

tivities, yoga sessions, field trips, and cultural ex-

OBITUARY

amnath Mahato, a dedicated worker and office assistant of the Nagaon district Congress office, passed away during night hours on Sunday at the age of 55. He

was ill and undergoing treatment. Mahato, a resident of ITI Bazar in Nagaon, was also a skilled football player and actively involved in various social and cultural activities in the town here, His demise has cast a pall of gloom in Nagaon. He leaves behind his wife, son, daughter and a host of relatives. The Nagaon district Congress committee, Youth Congress, NSUI, Seva Dal, and Mahila Congress paid their last respects to Mahato at the district Congress office. His last rites were performed at Amulapatty cremation ground.

Several prominent leaders, including MPs Pradyut Bordoloi and Rakibul Hussain, MLAs Sibamoni Bora and Nurul Hoda, youth leader Mrinal Hazarika, sports organiser Pradeep Hazarika, Congress leader Adilur Rahman (Prince) expressed deep condolences over Mahato's demise.

Bid to promote local artisans NFR sets up 'OSOP' stalls over 142 stations

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Jan 6: The "One Station One Product" (OSOP) outlets have been thriving across 142 railway stations under the jurisdiction of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), transforming railway stations into vibrant hubs for promoting and selling local and indigenous products, a NFR state-

These outlets in the stations not only provide a platform to showcase the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the region, but also bring about a significant positive impact on the livelihood of local artisans & vendors. Apart from creating financial security and sustainable livelihoods, the OSOP scheme has become a catalyst for empowering communities and pre-

their products while promoting the #Vocal4Local mission. Train passengers can now explore the rich heritage of local handicrafts, handloom, cotton products, and other handmade artifacts at the OSOP outlets during their journey stopovers.

Under the jurisdiction of NF Railway, OSOP outlets are functioning at 142 stations as on Dewithin West Bengal, 13 stalls within Bihar, 4 stalls within Tripura, 2 stalls within Arunachal Pradesh and 1 stall within Naga-Collectively, these stalls are contributing to the economic up-

cember 31 across the five divisions

of NFR. These include 79 stalls

within the state of Assam, 43 stalls

liftment of numerous local artisans and vendors.

OSOP scheme are showcasing a wide variety of distinct and invaluable products, including Assamese pithas (rice cakes), traditional Assamese Gamosas, traditional indigenous dresses, Jhapi, local textiles, jute products (caps, dolls, Gamosa), bamboo and cane products, Darjeeling tea, locally made designer bangles, necklaces, earrings, hair clips, and other food items at the stations under NFR.

serving indigenous crafts. This initiative empowers local



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QUOTE OF THE DAY

There is little that can withstand a man who can conquer himself-Louis XIV

Trump and H-1B visa policy

s the US President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office on January 20, he faces a unique challenge. The issue of immigration and the H-1B visa has become a contentious point among the two key groups. He is trying to satisfy the conflicting interests of the billionaire tech community, who heavily fund his campaigns, and his 'America First' base. Trump's recent favourable statements on H-1B visas for foreign skilled workers have sparked renewed discussions on the future of this critical programme. Trump has backed Elon Musk and his other wealthy funders from Silicon Valley (South Africa-born Musk had an H1B visa himself). While tech leaders want a liberal H1B visa regime, 'America First' hardliners wish for stricter restrictions on immigration at all levels. In his first term, Trump prioritised protecting American citizens' interests, which had significant implications on the H1B visas. "America First" advocates argue that H-1B visas take jobs away from American workers. The looming question is, will Trump's second term prioritise American workers' jobs, or it could revert to the traditional Republican belief that immigration primarily benefits employers.

Debates arose over H-1B visas following Trump's appointment of India-born Sriram Krishnan as his advisor on artificial intelligence. It caused divisions within Trump's team—opponents of the H1B visa claim that the immigrants take away American jobs. Influential supporters like Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy argue that H-1B visas are crucial for addressing the shortage of qualified engineers in the USA.. Musk, who built his empire, and Vivek Ramaswamy have strongly supported the program. Musk expressed his readiness to go to war over it. They highlight a significant skills gap in the US labour market, particularly in STEM fields. What is an H-1B visa, and why is there such controversy surrounding it? Would India suffer if H-1B visas were eliminated? The visa system for skilled workers from other countries was introduced in 1990 by President Bush to work legally in the US. The visa is for three years. Applicants must have a job lined up with a US-based sponsoring company or institution. Since 2004, the United States has limited the number of new H-1B visas to 85,000 yearly. This cap includes 20,000 visas for international students with advanced degrees from US universities

The issue is more than just an economic concern; new developments in artificial intelligence and advanced computing technology make it vital for US defence and national security. India receives approximately 72% of H-1B visas, while Chinese citizens account for around 12%. Eliminating country-specific caps could increase job opportunities for Indians in the United States. It is a significant concern for many prospective applicants. Major employers in the tech industry, including Indian companies like Infosys, TCS, HCL, and Wipro, represent 35% of the top 10 beneficiaries of H-1B visas. Now many H1B visa seekers are hopeful after Trump has sided with Musk. He claimed that there was a need for skilled and intelligent workers. His promise of unprecedented job opportunities offers a positive outlook for those seeking H-1B visas. The Indian government closely monitors any backlash against Indian H-1B visa holders in the US.

The Maha Kumbh Mela: A spiritual and economic powerhouse for Uttar Pradesh and India

he Maha Kumbh Mela is arguably the largest and most significant social and cultural event in India. A festival of immense religious and spiritual importance, it brings together people from across the country and the world in a celebration of faith. However, what is often understated is the colossal economic impact this event has, not just on the local economy of Uttar Pradesh, but also on India as a whole. The Kumbh Mela, with its massive scale and intricate logistics, is a reflection of India's planning prowess and ability to host large-scale events seamlessly. The upcoming Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj is expected to draw around 400 million people over a period of 45 days, from January 13 to February 26, making it the largest gathering of human beings in the world, surpassing even the population of many countries. The Kumbh Mela is held every

12 years in one of four locations: Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain. While smaller gatherings occur periodically in these cities, the Maha Kumbh Mela, with its religious significance and global appeal, is by far the largest. The scale of the event is mind-boggling, not just in terms of the number of people involved, but also in the breadth of economic activities it generates. For the local economy of Uttar Pradesh, the Kumbh Mela is akin to a temporary, but immensely impactful, economic boom. It is a festival that creates its own temporary economy, touching multiple sectors and

One of the most striking economic aspects of the Maha Kumbh Mela is its ability to generate a massive flow of money, particularly in the areas of travel, hospitality, and tourism. Given that over 400 million people are expected to converge in Prayagraj, the economic transactions will be nothing short of staggering. Even if each person spends a modest ₹ 500 to ₹ 750 per day on travel, food, and miscellaneous expenses (excluding accommodation), the total expenditure for this 45-day festival could range between ₹ 20,000 crore and ₹ 30,000 crore. This does not even factor in the large number of families who



will participate in the festival, which will push the expenditure to much higher levels. Such a scale of expenditure has profound implications for local businesses, transport providers, food vendors, and countless other stakeholders in the ecosystem.

The hospitality industry, too, will see a remarkable boost during this period. To cater to the influx of pilgrims and tourists, over 2,000 luxury tents and more than 25,000 public accommodations will be erected in and around Prayagraj. These arrangements will cater to a wide spectrum of visitors, from budget travelers to high-end tourists. In addition to these temporary accommodations, hotels in Prayagraj and its surrounding areas, as well as homestays, are expected to witness a surge in business. The price range for accommodation will vary widely, from as low as ₹ 2,500 per night to as high as ₹ 25,000 per night, depending on the type of amenities provided. The overall revenue from the hospitality sector during the festival could reach anywhere between ₹ 1,500 crore to ₹ 2,000 crore, offering a significant boost to the regions economy.

Beyond the visible aspects of hospitality, the government has also made significant investments in softer infrastructure to ensure the smooth functioning of the event. Over 70,000 additional street lights will be installed to ensure proper lighting for pilgrims moving be-

tween the river and various accommodations. A massive security apparatus will also be in place, with 23,000 CCTV cameras installed to ensure the safety and security of attendees. The suppliers of such services and products will benefit greatly, as these investments not only improve the experience for visitors but also drive significant revenue for local businesses.

Transport infrastructure will also undergo a substantial expansion. The festival will see the deployment of over 7,000 roadways buses, 550 s h u t t l e

buses, and 3, 0 0 0 trains to ferry people to and

from Prayagraj. These arrangements are expected to generate substantial revenue, even if most of the vehicles are rented for the duration of the festival rather than purchased outright. The hiring of vehicles alone is estimated to cost around Rs 500 crore over the course of the event, offering a boon to transport service providers. The railways, which will play a key role in facilitating the movement of pilgrims, will also see a significant uptick in

revenue due to the massive footfall.

The travel and tourism sector will be among the biggest beneficiaries of the Kumbh Mela, and its impact extends beyond just the economic boost it provides. The scale of this event requires a large and diverse

workforce to ensure its smooth operation. To facilitate the event, over 1.5 lakh mobile toilets will be set up to meet the needs of the massive crowds. The construction, maintenance, and cleaning of these facilities will create significant employment opportunities, with over 10,000 staff hired specifically for this purpose. The total expenditure for maintaining hygiene and sanitation during the festival has been pegged at around ₹ 240 crore, benefiting manufacturers and service providers in the sanitation indus-

In addition to sanitation, the arts and crafts sector will also re-

ceive a substantial boost. Over 25,000 craftsmen have been recruited to create decorations, statues, and paintings to adorn the festival venues. This not only provides an income for artisans but also ensures that local culture and craftsmanship are showcased to a global audience. Moreover, the festival will offer significant opportunities for gig workers in both skilled and unskilled spaces, ranging from event coordination to customer support and logistics.

One of the more intriguing aspects of the Maha Kumbh Mela is its ability to create opportunities for small-scale micro enterprises. Street vendors selling food, religious artifacts, toys, decorations, and other

items will see a boom in business during the festival. The government has already made efforts to educate these vendors about the logistics of managing such large crowds while maintaining hygiene standards. This will ensure that they have a steady stream of customers, providing a lifeline for small businesses in the region.

In terms of long-term economic benefits, the Kumbh Melas impact goes beyond the temporary boost provided during the festival. The governments infrastructure upgrades, including the construction of new roads and bridges, will have lasting effects on the local economy. These new developments will enhance the overall transportation network in the region, benefitting not just the festival but also the daily lives of the residents of Prayagraj and Uttar Pradesh. The construction of permanent structures such as roads and bridges will further enrich the states infrastructure, positioning it for higher growth in the future.

From a broader perspective, the Maha Kumbh Mela is more than just a religious festival. It represents a microcosm of how large-scale events can drive economic growth and create lasting change in the regions that host them. Similar to the way the Olympics have provided a growth impetus to host countries, the Kumbh Mela is set to create a ripple effect that will benefit the Uttar Pradesh economy for years to come. The sheer magnitude of the event and the various economic sectors it touches—from transport to hospitality to sanitation—ensure that the Maha Kumbh Mela is not just a celebration of faith but also a powerful driver of economic

As Uttar Pradesh continues to attract tourists and pilgrims from around the globe, the success of the Maha Kumbh Mela will serve as a testament to Indias ability to manage large-scale events with efficiency and grace. For the state and the nation, the festival is not only a religious and cultural milestone but also a key economic event that promises to bring both immediate benefits and long-term growth. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)

India to witness labour reforms in 2025 in a big way Freedom of Expression Browbeaten

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

he year 2024 saw the Union Government of India meticulously preparing the ground for proposed labour reforms, including the four controversial labour codes, and Employment Linked Incentive (ELI), though could not roll them out because of a range of issues, including hesitant attitude of India Inc and opposition from the joint platform of the 10 Central Trade Unions (CTUs). However, preparations reached an advanced stage, and the Union Government is almost ready to implement labour reforms in a big way in 2025.

The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has been consistently working for harmonization of rules under the four labour codes – the Code on Wages 2019, Industrial Relations Code 2020, Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020, and Code on Social Security 2020, which have been resisted by the joint platform of 10 CTUs since 2020 even organizing all India strike actions, and are still demanding their withdrawal, alleging that they are anti-labour and procorporate, and their implementation would make workers suffer like economic slaves

Union Government on the other hand claims that implementation of these codes would bring much desired labour reforms which will benefit both the workers and employers. PM Narendra Modi has committed himself for implementation of these codes which he said the biggest reform in independent India.

During the year, 6 regional meetings were held between August and October, 2024 to facilitate State/UT Governments for framing the Rules within the ambit of Labour Codes, since labour is a state subject and rolling out implementation of the Codes legally require states own rules. Now, all 36 States/UTs are expected to complete harmonization and pre-publication of draft rules by 31st March 2025, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has said.

Not only that, the Union Ministry of Labour & Employment has identified four reforms in Labour Laws to be carried out viz. Single Registration, Single Return, Firm-based common license with 5 years validity. Further the Ministry is also moving for change of role of Inspector to Inspector-cum-Facilitator. These steps, the Centre expects, would act as a catalyst for Ease of Doing Business (EODB) by reducing compliance burden. EPFO has released the updated Manual for Inspector cum Facilitator describing entire spectrum of duties and responsibilities of an Inspector cum Facilitator.

As for ELI Scheme announced in July 2024 in the Union Budget 2024-25 is concerned, it could not take off last



year, again due to a range of issues, including the hesitations among the employing companies of the country in participating in the programme. Union Government had announced this programme as a major step towards incentivising job creation, promoting formalisation in job market, and improving employability. Three Schemes announced for large number of decent job creation under ELI and two other schemes as part of the five-package schemes had a total outlay of Rs 2 lakh crore and was expected to benefit around 4.1 crore young people over the next five years.

Part A of ELI was targeting first-time employees in the formal sector registered with (Employment Provident Fund Organisation) EPFO. This Part offers a one-month wage (up to Rs. 15,000) in three instalments. Part B was focusing on job creation in manufacturing. This Part incentivizes both employees and employers for the additional employment of first-time employees by reimbursing their EPFO contributions during the first four years of employment, as per scheme guidelines. Employees with salaries up to Rs. 1 lakh will be eligible. Part C was providing support to employers by reimbursing uptoRs. 3,000 per month for two years towards their EPFO contribution for each additional employee above the threshold, with a salary of up to Rs. 1

lakh per month.

EPFO was asked by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment to ensure that employers complete UAN activation and Aadhaar seeding by November 30 for new employees to avail ELI benefits which failed because of two reasons – first India Inc was unwilling to participate and secondly, Union government was also not ready with the details of the ELI scheme. Thereafter, on December 4, the date was extended to December 15. The deadline has been extended for the third time to January

Since, the Union Budget 2025-26 is expected to be tabled in the parliament of India on February 1, there is not much time left in implementation of the ELI Schemes announced in the Union Budget 2024-25. One year has already been lost. Nevertheless, Union Govern-

ment is trying hard to roll out the scheme in the current financial year 2024-25 ending on March 31, 2025 it-

EPFO is not even ready with its Centralized IT Enabled System (CITES 2.01) to have an integrated, centralized data-base, bringing efficiency in the process. The IT upgradation involving hardware and software upgrade, is targeted to be completed by January 2025.

Under the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme, the Union government has asked all ministries and departments to link workers' Aadhaar numbers and their back accounts to take benefit from the social security benefits. It is under

Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has launched eShram as 'One-Stop-Solution" on October 21, 2024 for unorganized labour to have access to various social sector schemes as they register on eShram to access social security schemes and see benefits availed by them so far. Registration on eShram has crossed 30 crore in 2024. So far, 12 social security and welfare schemes have been integrated or mapped with eShram. Data sharing guidelines between states and UTs have been formulated and shared. A Platform Workers Module has also been developed under eShram.

oped under eShram.

MIS Portal for building and construction workers was launched on August 21, 2024. States and UTs have been requested to share data on the portal, and 10 states have completed integration process so far. The states have also been asked to integrate with PMJJBY and PMSBY. A total of 12 states have signed MoU with State Health Agency und NHA for extension of Ayushman Bharat PMJAY. Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) is also in the process of convergence with Ayushman Bharat PMJAY, which is expected to benefit over 14.43 crore ESI beneficiar-

ies.

The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment is also working towards Framework Development for Social Security Coverage to Gig and Platform workers under the Social Security Code, 2020. Extensive stakeholder consultations were carried out with states and UTs. A dedicated committee, chaired by the Central Provident Fund Commissioner (CPFC) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), has

also been constituted.

There are every indication that 2025 would be going to prove eventful and significant year for the workforce in India, though implementation of the four labour codes at one go would not be easy when the joint platform of 10 CTUs are still opposing it. The Centre is therefore planning to implement labour reform in a phased manner to keep the opposition from CTUs at manageable level. (IPA Service)

By: Asad Mirza

s if the new American President-elect, Donald Trump was not enough to handle for the world, now the world also has the tech czar Elon Musk, to deal with.

Musk, who seems to have been moulded from the same mould as that of Trump, is becoming an incessant irritation to global leaders and politicians, due to his social media barbs targeted at different countries.

This leads us to wonder, who gave Musk the right to criticise one and everyone? Being a tech czar does not entitle you to be the font of resentment on any global issue. The latest Musk tirade was targeted against the British prime minister and King Charles III, whom he has advised to shutdown Parliament and call for a new election.

Elon Musk's support for dissolving Parliament in the UK has led to backlash from officials, who criticised his understanding of local issues.

Apparently, the Tesla boss endorsed a social media post criticising the government's handling of criminal gang investigations in Manchester. "In the UK, serious crimes such as rape require the Crown Prosecution Service's approval for the police to charge suspects. Who was the head of the CPS when rape gangs were allowed to exploit young girls without facing justice? Keir Starmer, 2008 -2013," Musk posted on his social media platform X on New Year's Day.

"The King must step in. We can't have Keir heading the country, while he was the one heading the Crown Prosecution Service [CPS] while all this was happening," he added in the

Musk's involvement has obviously drawn expected criticism from the Labour Party. Responding to his comments, Health Secretary Wes Streeting said they were "misjudged and certainly misinformed." Labour Minister Andrew Gwynne echoed the sentiment during an interview with LBC radio, "Elon Musk is an American citizen and perhaps ought to focus on issues on the other side of the Atlantic."

Musk, who was born in South Africa but is also a naturalised US citizen, has also been known for getting involved in US politics and was a prominent part of Trump's presidential campaign, though earlier he was a vehement critic of Donald Trump, yet apparently, he changed heart and sides during the presidential campaign and donated close to 277 million dollars to Trump's campaign. Since then, he has become an appendage to Trump and rents a villa at Trump's Mar-a-Lago retreat, which gives him the chance to drop in at Trump's residence whenever he chooses. To counter his growing closeness and criticism to it, last

month Trump refuted claims that he had "ceded the presidency" to Musk.

UK politicians are not alone in being the target of Musk's increasingly eccentric interventions. He has described Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany as a "fool" and the country's head of state, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, as "an anti-democratic tyrant". He has also called Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada "an insufferable tool" who "won't be in power for much longer". He also mocked Ukrainian President Zelensky after a Trump-Putin spat. Apart from

The recent seemingly eccentric and uncalled for comments by X's owner Elon Musk against global leaders and governments, has once again brought the issue of setting the limits for Freedom of Expression, as per the democratic and decency norms of the society, not as dictated by an individual.

commenting on the US government's Visa policy and other issues.

Meanwhile Trump's latest social media comments criticised the UK government's decision to increase taxes on oil and gas firms working in the North Sea, in part to help fund renewable energy. On Trump-owned platform, Truth Social, Trump responded to a report about a US oil firm leaving the region, saying: "The UK is making a very big mistake. Open up the North Sea. Get rid of Windmills!"

the North Sea. Get rid of Windmills!"
BBC's Diplomatic correspondent,
James Landale rightly wonders whether
this was merely a familiar defence of a
US firm by Trump and a repetition of his
pro-fossil fuel instincts? Or was it evidence of a greater willingness by the
president-elect to intervene in an ally's
own domestic policies?

Landale goes on to say that the main difference - four years on - is that Trump is no longer alone at the keyboard; his increasingly powerful fellow traveller, Elon Musk, is even more prolific, using his own platform, X, to attack the British government across the board. He has criticised its handling of last summer's riots, the running of the economy and now especially its attitude towards child abuse scandals.

Landale says that British politicians cannot stem these posts from across the Atlantic. But they can control their reaction. During Trump's first term,

governments - and news desks learned to pause and take a moment before responding to - or reporting the latest electronic missives from the White House.

Thus far the Conservatives have chosen to engage with and echo Musk's agenda. The party leader, Kemi Badenoch, said a full national inquiry into organised grooming gangs was "long overdue".

In another article BBC's Marianna Spring says that ever since he acquired the social media site two years ago, Elon Musk has hailed Twitter as a bastion for freedom of expression. But over the course of 2024, X, as it is now called, has evolved from what felt like a communal town square into a polarised hub where views and posts seem even more controversial.

Certain profiles that have shared misleading takes on politics and the news, are some of which have been accused of triggering hate, and have re-

cently shot to prominence.

Marianna very aptly says that all this matters because X might not have as many users as some other major social media sites, but it does seem to have a significant impact on political discussions. Not only is it a place where certain high-profile politicians, governments and police forces share statements and views - but now its owner Mr Musk has directly aligned himself with Donald Trump, a relationship that could redefine how the bosses of other social media giants deal with the next US President.

During the last two years of Musk's ownership of X, people notices that it has become a sort of a hate platform, on which users with right-wing or extreme right-wing leanings are given more freedom to criticise their opponents, in the name of freedom of expression.

This also leads to another pertinent question that can you by virtue of ownership try to throttle the sentiments and voice of people who do not agree with you? Who has given you this right. X in its replies to different government and international bodies like EU has stuck to its now too old version that, "[X] strives to be the town square of the internet by promoting and protecting freedom of expression."

Given the latest salvos by Musk, the common social media user is bound to stand against his personal philosophy dominating the social media platform, as it certainly contains the seeds of hate or forcing one-sided views, which was not the intention of its creators and neither bodes well for the platform. (The author is a New Delhibased senior commentator on national, international, defence and strategic affairs, environmental issues, an interfaith practitioner, and a media consultant)



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Climate change, biodiversity loss amplify threats to child health: Study

By: Madhumita Paul

study has highlighted the escalating risks climate change and biodiversity loss pose to children's health worldwide. The review paper, published in the journal Nature, synthesised existing literature to demonstrate how biodiversity loss accelerates the health impacts of a warming planet, with wide-ranging implications for paediatric health.

Biodiversity has declined dramatically, with monitored wildlife populations decreasing by 69 per cent globally since 1970, the paper stated. This loss has profound effects on climate dynam-



affect children.

The review identified multiple pathways through which biodiversity loss impacts children's health, including the reduction of microbial diversity, diminished green spaces and increased vulnerability to heatwaves, flooding, vector-borne diseases and air pollu-

Microbial diversity — the variety of microorganisms like bacteria and fungi in ecosystems — has been linked to immune regulation by previous studies. Exposure to diverse microbes benefits children's immune systems, reducing the prevalence of allergies and inflammatory disorders. However, biodiversity loss undermines this protective mechanism, the review stated.

Access to green spaces has been strongly associated with improved mental health and cognitive development in children. A systematic review of 296 studies found that nature contact benefits attention, mood and mental health, particularly in children with conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and anxiety. Moreover, proximity to green spaces can enhance res-

Conversely, the absence of parks or green spaces has been linked to higher rates of obesity, physical inactivity and inadequate sleep in children, the review pointed out.

Heatwaves and flooding, intensified by climate change, pose significant risks to children. According to UNICEF, 820 million children are highly exposed to heatwaves, which increase the likelihood of heat stroke, dehydration and learning difficulties. The impacts of extreme heat can even begin before birth, with higher rates of preterm births and low birthweights reported.

Flooding further exacerbates health risks, with 240 million children globally exposed to coastal flooding. Extreme

weather events also heighten exposure to waterborne diseases and malnu-

A warming world has expanded the geographic reach of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue, putting 600 million children at high risk. Children, whose immune sys-

tems are less developed than adults', are particularly vulnerable to these infections.

Air pollution, closely linked to biodiversity loss, affects 2 billion children globally. It contributes to respiratory illnesses like asthma and is a leading cause of death for children under five. The World Health Organization (WHO) attributes 1.5 million child deaths annually to air and water pollution.

Biodiversity is crucial for medical innovation, with many modern medicines derived from natural sources, the paper stated. For instance, quinine, a treatment for malaria, originates from the South American cinchona tree.

Biodiversity loss threatens the availability of such resources, complicating efforts to combat diseases like malaria, which caused 597,000 deaths globally in 2023 — 76 per cent of which were among children under five in Africa.

The review underscored that biodiversity loss and climate change are not just environmental issues but also a child rights crisis. In August 2023, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child reaffirmed children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, urging immediate action to protect piratory health by reducing wheezing their future. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

Causes of dry eyes in winter and how to treat them

By: Hana Ames

ry eye is a common condition that can negatively affect a person's quality of life. According to the National Eye Institute, nearly 16 million people in the United States have dry eye.

There is some evidence to suggest that the seasons may impact the occurrence of dry eye.

Dry eyes in winter are common, but people can usually treat them with home remedies and self-care. Sometimes, however, dry eyes may require medical intervention.

Read on to learn about what people can do to treat symptoms of dry eyes at home. This article also covers when to contact a doctor.

Causes of dry eyes in winter

There are many reasons that a person may experience dry eyes throughout the year. However, some reasons are specific to the winter months.

These include factors such as weather and heating. For example, cold and high winds blowing in a person's face may cause their eyes to dry out. Indoor heating may also be a cause of dry eyes, and it is likely that people will use their heating more often in the colder months.

Some symptoms of dry eyes may include eyes that feel:

itchy

• sore gritty

• red

• sensitive to light A person with dry eyes may also ex-

perience blurry vision and eyes that are more watery than usual. Some general reasons that a person

may experience dry eyes include: • their glands not producing enough

tears to keep the eyes moist · their tears drying too fast • their tears not keeping their eyes

wet effectively enough Medications

Some medications may cause dry eyes. However, it is important that people do not stop taking their prescribed medications without medical advice.

There may be alternatives that may not cause a person to experience dry eyes. Alternatively, it could be that it is more beneficial to treat dry eyes than to change medications.

Regardless, people should speak with the doctor who prescribed their medication regarding any side effects they may be experiencing. Treatment

There are a variety of treatment op-



tions that doctors may recommend, depending on the cause and severity of a person's dry eyes.

Treatments may also vary depending on whether or not the dry eyes have a connection to a person's allergies. The sections below look at some treatment options for dry eyes in more detail.

OTC medications A doctor may suggest OTC medications such as artificial tears. People can get these eye drops, which mimic natural tears to help lubricate the eyes, without a prescription.

There are many different types of eye drops that a person can buy, and people should try a variety to determine which option works best for them.

There are also specific options for people who use contact lenses and for people who need to use eye drops very frequently throughout the day.

Prescription medications If a person finds themselves needing

to use eye drops more frequently than the directions on the label of OTC eye drops recommend, they may require prescription eye drops. A doctor or pharmacist can recom-

mend the right prescription eye drops for an individual's situation. **Indoor humidifiers**

Sometimes, people may find that their dry eyes are due to the lack of humidity in the air. Using a humidifier may help with this. However, people who use humidifiers should ensure that they clean them regularly to avoid bacteria building up, as this can cause irritation to the eyes.

If a person does not have access to a humidifier, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends putting a lubricating the eyes.

pan of water near a heater or radiator for a similar effect. Eve ointments

These ointments, which are an alternative to eye drops, are available either over the counter or with a prescription. Eye ointments are thicker than eye

drops and can, therefore, cause blurry vision in some cases. So, it may be best to apply them at nighttime.

Tear duct plugs

A person can also use specially designed silicon or gel plugs called punctal plugs to prevent tears from draining away too quickly. This can help keep the eyes moist for longer. Warm compresses

Another home remedy that a person can try to relieve their dry eye symptoms is a warm compress.

To use a warm compress, a person should soak a clean washcloth in warm, not hot, water and apply it to the eye area for 10 minutes or so.

Surgery

In some rare cases, a person may have lower eyelids that are too loose, which can cause the tears to drain too quickly. In these cases, a doctor may recommend that they undergo surgery to adjust the eyelids. In some cases, the doctor may recommend surgery to close the person's tear ducts perma-

There are some lifestyle changes and other methods that a person can try to help prevent dry eyes in winter. These

• Blinking often: People should make sure that they are blinking regularly to ensure that their tears are thoroughly

Avoiding hairdryers: Using hairdryers can increase the likelihood of a person's eyes becoming dry.

• Using indoor heating less often: People should try to keep their home as cool as they can bear so that the heating does not dry out their eyes.

• Avoiding smoking: People may wish to consider quitting smoking and trying to avoid being around people who smoke, as smoke from cigarettes can irritate the eyes and cause them to dry out.

• Wearing eye protection: Wearing wraparound glasses or goggles can help protect the eyes from the wind and other winter weather.

• Limiting screen time: Often, when people spend a long time looking at screens, they may blink less. This can cause the eyes to dry out.

• Drinking plenty of water: This helps keep people hydrated and, therefore, helps prevent dry eyes.

When to contact a doctor There are many things that a person can do at home to help relieve dry eyes without requiring medical intervention. However, a person should visit a

doctor if they: • have tried home remedies for a few

weeks and still do not experience relief • have any worrisome changes to their vision, such as loss of vision

· have dry eyes that are interfering with their day-to-day life

• suspect that they have an underlying reason for their dry eyes

There are many underlying reasons that can cause a person to experience

dry eyes. Some of these may include:

 Sjögren disease thyroid disease

meibomianitis

• lupus • vitamin A deficiency

• some eye infections, such as ble-

· certain medications The doctor will be able to look into any underlying causes and prescribe

stronger treatments that may be able to resolve a person's dry eye symptoms. Summary It is quite common for people to ex-

perience dry eyes in the winter months. There are many things that can cause this, including a lack of humidity, warm indoor air, and the wind. Most of the time, people are able to

use home remedies to help treat their dry eye symptoms. Occasionally, however, medical intervention may be necessary. (Courtesy: Medical News

'Literally blew my mind': Why the non-literal use of English is here to stay

New words so rile language purists as the use of the adverb "literally" in a figurative sense, as in, "That movie literally

blew my mind" But as a linguist who studies how English has changed over the centuries, I can promise that, while it might feel like nails screeching on a blackboard, the use of nonliteral "literally" developed as an organic and dynamic outgrowth of the very human desire to communicate emo-

tion and intensity.

The literal past The word literal first appeared in English in the late 14th century, borrowed from French. In turn, French "literal" came from Latin "littera", with the original meaning of "pertaining to alphabetic letters." It is this same root that delivered to English the words "literate" and "literature," both harking back to the idea of knowing one's "letters."

In early English use, literal referred to the straightforward meaning recoverable from reading a religious text, as in this example from the Wycliffe Bible dating to 1383, "Holy scripture hath iiij vndirstondingis; literal, allegorik, moral, and anagogik." The word literal as used here contrasts a direct - literal - reading of scripture's meaning to other more symbolic or metaphorical ones.

By the late 16th century, though, literal begins to be used not just in reference to a type of reading but also as a way to emphasise that one wants one's words to be taken liter-

This development is already a semantic leap in that, when used this way – as in, "John literally died of thirst" - the word provides no meaning contribution other than emphasising to a listener that a speaker means it precisely as said. After all, assuming John did indeed die owing to a lack of hydration, what does a speaker really gain by saying "He literally died of thirst" versus simply "He died of thirst"?

The advantage is that using "literally" signals that what was said was unusual, unbelievable or remarkable in some way, steering a listener toward a literal rather than a perhaps more likely figurative interpretation.

By: Valerie M Fridland After all dying of thirst is not tween spouses where one says "I something you hear about every day, though suffering from thirst to the point where one feels like dying is a more universal experience. Such pragmatic enhancement of the word's original meaning hints at how its modern marking of strong emphasis came into play.

Bleached beyond recognition The second piece of the puzzle of how "literally" became nonliteral requires a brief foray into how word meanings organically evolve over time as they are put to work by

A very germane example comes from "very", a word in which its most common meaning - "extremely" – is but a shadow of its original sense.

In Middle English, "very" carried the meaning of "actual" or "true," as in being "verray in worde and dede" - that is, true in word and deed. Yet, when something is true, particularly when used in its "actual" sense, it suggests that it embodies the highest degree of whatever quality is described as

So, for instance, if someone is a "true fool," they exhibit such a high degree of foolishness they are taken for an actual fool. Used this way, two distinct but related meanings – "true" and "to an extreme degree" come to coexist.

By the 16th century, intensity rather than trueness had become the word very's primary sense, through a process that linguists refer to as "semantic bleaching." Interestingly, words whose meanings involve truth, such as very, really and truly, are particularly prone to semantic bleaching. And "truth," as in "exactly as said or written," takes us back to "literally."

A little less literal Recall that "literally" once per-

versus metaphorical reading. But, as with "very," by the 16th century, its meaning shifts away from this purely referential meaning to a more rhetorical one: "Literally" had shifted to emphasising a speaker's literalness and flagging

tained only to contrasting a literal

it as remarkable in some way. At that point, providing expressivity rather than a true or literal reading had become its primary role. Just consider an argument beliterally called you three times." The purpose of "literally" here is really only one of underscoring the implication that calling three times was excessive and unusual.

From there to hyperbolically saying "I was literally dying of thirst" is just one step further down the road of semantic bleaching. The figurative reading becomes more and more possible, as speakers capitalize exclusively on the expressive force rather than the word's former shell of literality.

This is really no different than saying something like "I am truly dving over here" when one is frustrated, but is, in fact, not actually dying. It is intensity conveyed, not imminent death, as "truly" has moved from marking truth to marking emphasis.

But what of using "literally" to mean something seemingly contra-

rific" is absolutely intended in its opposed to our modern "fabulous"

unlike "terrific" or "very," its semantic past has not yet faded from collective memory. But for those who still cling to its literalness despite the fact that Frances Brooke. Charles Dickens and Mark Twain all embraced its figurative glory, it may simply be time to literally let go. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

23, 2024, in Mumbai at the age of 90. Known as the pioneer of the Indian parallel cinema movement, his remarkable contributions to filmmaking have left an indelible impact on the cultural fabric of the nation. With a career spanning over five decades, Benegal crafted stories that challenged societal norms, delved into the depths of human emotion, and presented an authentic portrayal of

India's socio-political landscape. Born on December 14, 1934, in the quaint town of Tirumalagiri in Hyderabad State (now in Telangana), Shyam Benegal's tryst with storytelling began at an early age. Raised in a family that encouraged intellectual curiosity, he grew up amidst the cultural diversity of Hyderabad, which deeply influenced his world-

Benegal pursued his higher education at Osmania University, Hyderabad, where he earned a Master's degree in Economics. However, his passion for cinema was evident even during his college days, as he established the Hyderabad Film Society to promote meaningful and artistic films. It was this initiative that exposed him to global cinema and inspired him to pursue filmmaking as a career.

Shyam Benegal's foray into filmmaking was not a conventional one. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not start as an assistant director in mainstream cinema. Instead, he began his career in advertising, working as a copywriter and later as a filmmaker for advertising films. His time in advertising helped him hone his visual storytelling skills and develop a keen understanding of audience engagement.

It was in 1973 that Benegal made his directorial debut with Ankur, a film that would become a landmark in Indian cinema. Set in rural Andhra Pradesh, Ankur explored themes of caste oppression, economic exploitation, and sexual autonomy. The film was lauded for its realistic portrayal of rural life and introduced audiences to the extraordinary talent of Shabana Azmi, who won the National Film Award for Best Actress for her role.

With Ankur, Benegal became one of the torchbearers of the parallel cinema movement in India, a genre characterized by its focus on realism, social issues, and artistic storytelling. His subsequent films, such as Nishant (1975), Manthan (1976), and Bhumika (1977), further cemented his reputation as a filmmaker who was unafraid to tackle complex and uncomfortable subjects. Nishant dealt with the abuse of power by the feudal elite and the

and received international acclaim being nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Manthan was a unique experiment in crowd-funded cinema. It told the story of the White Revolution and the empowerment of rural communities through dairy co-operatives. Manthan remains a powerful testament to the spirit of collective action. Bhumika is based on the life of Marathi actress Hansa Wadkar, Bhumika was an introspective look at the struggles of women in the entertainment industry. Smita Patil's performance as the protagonist earned widespread acclaim and showcased Benegal's sensitivity in portraying women's issues.

While Benegal is often associated with socially conscious cinema, his body of work is incredibly diverse. Films like Kalyug (1981), a modern-day retelling of the Mahabharata set in the world of industrial rivalries, and Mandi (1983), a satirical exploration of the lives of sex workers, demonstrated his ability to blend sharp social commentary with engaging narratives.

Benegal's storytelling was deeply rooted in Indian ethos, yet it resonated universally. His films often featured characters from marginalized sections of society, whose stories were seldom told in mainstream cinema. Through his nuanced and empathetic portrayal of their lives, he gave a voice to the voiceless and highlighted the complexities of human

In addition to his work in films, Shyam Benegal made significant contributions to Indian television. His 1988 television series Bharat Ek Khoj was a monumental adaptation of Jawaharlal Nehru's The Discovery of India. Spanning 53 episodes, the series traced the history and cultural evolution of India from ancient times to the modern era.

Bharat Ek Khoj was lauded for its scholarly depth, visual grandeur, and accessible storytelling. It became a cornerstone of educational programming in India and continues to be a reference point for understanding Indian history and heritage. Benegal also directed the television series Samvidhaan (2014), which chroni-

Constitution. The series provided a rare glimpse into the debates and discussions that shaped the nation's founding document and was praised for its meticulous research and attention to detail. Over the course of his illustrious ca-

cled the making of the Indian

reer, Shyam Benegal received numerous awards and honors, both in India and in-

plight of women in rural India. It featured ternationally. He won 18 National Film an ensemble cast, including Girish Kar- Awards across various categories, reflecthyam Benegal, a stalwart of Indian nad, Smita Patil, and Naseeruddin Shah, ing the consistent excellence of his work. In 1976 and 1991 he was honored Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India for his contributions to the arts. In 2005, he received Dadasaheb Phalke, India's highest award in cinema, recognizing his lifetime achievements. His films were regularly showcased at prestigious film festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, and Venice, earning accolades for their artistry and thematic depth.

Shyam Benegal was not just a filmmaker but also a mentor to many actors and technicians who later became stalwarts in their own right. He played a pivotal role in shaping the careers of talents like Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, and Om Puri.

He also collaborated extensively with

writers like Girish Karnad and Shama

Zaidi, who brought their literary sensibilities to his films, enriching their narra-Shyam Benegal was married to Nira Benegal, a creative partner in his journey. They have a daughter, Pia Benegal, who is an accomplished costume designer in the film industry. Despite his towering

stature in the world of cinema. Benegal

was known for his humility, warmth, and commitment to nurturing talent. The passing of Shyam Benegal marks the end of an era in Indian cinema. However, his legacy lives on through his films, which continue to inspire filmmak-

ers and audiences alike. Benegal's contribution to Indian cinema transcends entertainment. His films served as a mirror to society, reflecting its aspirations, contradictions, and struggles. He used the medium of cinema to foster dialogue and understanding, making it a

powerful tool for social change. Even in an age dominated by commercial cinema, Benegal's work remains relevant for its authenticity and depth. His films are studied in film schools around the world and serve as a benchmark for quality filmmaking.

Shyam Benegal was more than just a filmmaker; he was a visionary who believed in the transformative power of storytelling. Through his work, he not only redefined Indian cinema but also enriched the cultural and intellectual life of

As we bid farewell to this master storyteller, we celebrate a life dedicated to art, truth, and humanity. Shyam Benegal's films will continue to light up screens and hearts, reminding us of the enduring power of cinema to inspire, educate and transform. (The author is an Educationist)

Sign of the times

dictory to its original meaning? On that front, it is certainly far from the first word in English to have shifted toward its opposite. For instance, when in 1667's Paradise Lost John Milton writes, "The Serpent ... with brazen Eyes And hairie Main terrific", the word "teroriginal sense of "terrifying" as

Sometimes, conflicting senses even exist at the same time. Think of how "clipping" can be about cutting something away or pulling something together. Likewise, consider the often oppositionally employed verb "to cleave," with which one either tears apart or sticks together. In this bigger semantic picture, using "literally" nonfiguratively is really nothing to

get worked up over. The gist is that language changes because of how it finds itself most gainfully employed by speakers as it winds its way through time.

Literally's main problem is that,

The visionary who redefined Indian cinema By: Satyabrat Borah

Shooting attack on bus carrying Israelis in occupied West Bank kills 3

TEL AVIV, Jan 6: Gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Israelis in the occupied West Bank on Monday, killing at least three people and wounding seven others. Violence has surged in the territory since Hamas' Oct 7, 2023, attack out of Gaza ignited the ongoing war there.

The attack occurred in the Palestinian village of Al-Funduq, on one of the main east-west roads crossing the territory. Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service said two women in their 60s and a man in his 40s were killed, and the military said it was looking for the attackers

Palestinians have carried out scores of shooting, stabbing and car-ramming attacks against Israelis in recent years. Israel has launched near-nightly military raids across the territory that frequently trigger gunbattle with militants. There has also been a sharp rise in attacks on Palestinians by Israeli settlers, leading the United States to impose sanctions.

The Palestinian Health Ministry says at least 838 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza. Most appear to have been militants killed in battles with Israeli troops, but the dead also include participants in violent protests and civilian bystanders.

South Korean anti-corruption agency asks police to take over efforts to detain impeached Yoon

SEOUL, Jan 6: South Korea's anti-corruption agency has requested that police take over efforts to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol after its investigators failed to bring him to custody following a standoff with the presidential security service last week.

The agency and police confirmed the discussion on Monday, hours before the one-week warrant for Yoon's detention was to expire.

The Seoul Western District Court last Tuesday issued a warrant to detain Yoon and a separate warrant to search his residence after the embattled president defied authorities by refusing to appear for questioning over his short-lived martial law decree on Dec. 3. But executing those warrants is complicated as long as Yoon remains in his official

Yoon has described his power grab as a necessary act of governance against a liberal opposition bogging down his agenda with its to fight to the end against efforts to oust him. While martial law lasted only several hours, it set off turmoil that has shaken the country's politics, diplomacy and financial markets for weeks and exposed the fragility of South Korea's democracy while society is deeply



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to reach the despicable murderers behind Monday's attack and settle accounts with them and with everyone who assisted them. No one will be spared.

Hamas praised the attack in a statement but did not claim responsibility for it.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war, and the Palestinians want all three territories for their future state.

Some 3 million Palestinians live in the West Bank under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule, with the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority administerleast a third of whom are believed

Israel's air and ground offensive has killed over 45,800 Palestinians in Gaza, according to local health authorities, who say women and children make up more than half of those killed. They do not say how many of the dead were militants. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence.

Hamas has suffered major losses but has repeatedly regrouped after Israeli operations. Militants fired three projectiles into Israel from Gaza on Monday, one of which was intercepted, the military said. There were no reports of casual-

The war has destroyed vast areas of Gaza and displaced 90% of the territory's population of 2.3 million, often multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are enduring a cold, rainy winter in tent camps along the windy coast. At least seven infants have died of hvpothermia because of the harsh conditions, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Aid groups say Israeli restrictions, ongoing fighting and the breakdown of law and order in many areas make it difficult to provide desperately needed food and

Bangladesh's ICT issues second arrest warrant against ex-PM Hasina

DHAKA, Jan 6: Bangladesh's International Criminal Tribunal (ICT) on Monday issued arrest warrants against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 11 others, including former military generals and an ex-police chief, for their alleged role in incidents of enforced disappearances.

This was the second arrest warrant by the ICT against Hasina, who fled to India after her Awami League regime's toppling following unprecedented anti-government protests in August last year. The tribunal has so far recorded three cases against her.

"Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mojumdar, chairman of the tribunal, issued the arrest warrant after hearing a prosecution plea," an ICT official said.

The Inspector General of Police was ordered to arrest the twelve people, including Hasina, and produce them before the tribunal on February 12 in the case filed over complaints of enforced disappearances of several hundred people.

The deposed premier's then-defence adviser Major General (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique and former IGP Benazir Ahmed are among those named in the case. While Siddique is currently under custody, Ahmed is believed to be on the run.

ICT Chief Prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam did not disclose the names of most of the accused "in the interest of investigations and their arrest".

"The next hearing for this case is also scheduled for February 12. The tribunal has instructed that the investigation report be submitted on that day if completed," Islam later told reporters.

He, however, said if the investigation report could not be submitted by then, the law enforcement India. While New Delhi acknowl-



agencies would have to provide a ogress report on the arrests.

Islam told the tribunal that the ousted regime had established a culture of enforced disappearances under state sponsorship.

The chief prosecutor alleged that those involved in carrying out these disappearances were rewarded. He added that agencies like the elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the police's Detective Branch (DB), the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) were most frequently used for the purpose.

"Over the past 15 years, a culture of fear was established in Bangladesh through enforced disappearances and crossfires. Thousands of people were abducted by various forces, either in plainclothes or in uniform. Most of them never returned," Islam told

Last month, Dhaka officially sought Hasina's extradition from edged the receipt of the letter, it refrained from commenting on it.

The ICT issued the first arrest warrant against the ex-premier on October 17 on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity committed during the July-August protests and uprising.

After the fall of the Awami League government, at least 60 cases or complaints of enforced disappearances, killings, genocide, and crimes against humanity were lodged at the ICT, accusing Hasina, leaders of her party and its allies, and senior officials of different law enforcement agencies.

A commission formed by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's interim government last month submitted its provisional report alleging the involvement of Hasina, her officials and neighbouring India in incidents of enforced disappearance.

The commission said it recorded 1,676 complaints of enforced disappearances and so far examined 758, of which 27 per cent of the victims never returned. (PTI)

South Korea's military says North Korea fired missile into eastern sea

Over 500,000 settlers with Is-

raeli citizenship live in well over

100 settlements across the terri-

tory, ranging from small hilltop

outposts to sprawling communities

that resemble suburbs or small

towns. Most of the international

community considers the settle-

Meanwhile, the war in Gaza is

raging with no end in sight, though

there has reportedly been recent

progress in long-running talks

aimed at a ceasefire and hostage

The war began when Hamas-led

militants stormed across the border

in a massive surprise attack nearly

15 months ago, killing some 1.200

people, mostly civilians, and ab-

ducting around 250. Some 100

ments illegal.

SEOUL, Jan 6: North Korea on Monday fired a ballistic missile that flew 1,100 kilometers (685 miles) before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, South Korea's military said, extending its heightened weapons testing activities into 2025 weeks before Donald Trump returns as

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the midrange missile was fired from an area near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang and that the launch preparations were detected in advance by the US and South Korean militaries. It denounced the launch as a provocation that poses a serious threat to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The joint chiefs said the military was strengthening its surveillance and defense posture in preparation for possible additional launches and sharing information on the missile with the United States and Japan.

Japan's Defence Ministry said the missile landed outside its exclusive economic zone and that there were no reports of damage to vessels or aircraft. The launch came as U.S. Secretary of State Antony

Blinken was visiting Seoul for talks with South Korean allies over the North Korean nuclear threat and Blinken's visit comes amid political turmoil in

South Korea following President Yoon Suk Yeol's short-lived martial law decree and subsequent imeachment by parliament last month, which experts say puts the country at a disadvantage in getting a steady footing with Trump ahead of his return to the White House.

In a news conference with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, Blinken said they condemn North Korea's latest launch, which violates UN Security Council resolutions against the North, and reiterated concerns about the growing alignment between Pyongyang and Moscow over Russian President



Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine.

According to US, Ukrainian and South Korean assessments, North Korea has sent more than 10,000 troops and conventional weapons systems to support Moscow's war against Ukraine. There are concerns that Russia could transfer North Korea advanced weapons technology in return, which could potentially enhance the threat posed by leader Kim Jong Un's nu-

Blinken described the military cooperation between Russia and North Korea as a two-way street, saying Russia has been providing military equipment and satellite technology.

Blinken and Cho both dismissed concerns about damage to the U.S.-South Korea alliance in the aftermath of the political turmoil in Seoul. Experts had warned that Yoon's martial law decree - which lasted only hours but has rattled politics, high-level diplomacy and financial markets for weeks - exposed the fragility of South Korea's democratic system in a di-

China protests US sanctions for its alleged role in hacking

BANGKOK, Jan 6: China has slammed a decision by the US Treasury to sanction a Beijingbased cybersecurity company for its alleged role in multiple hacking incidents targeting critical US infrastructure, while the Chinese cyber security agency complained Monday of attacks on Chinese networks.

Asked about the sanctions against Beijing-based Integrity Technology Group, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said the country has cracked down on cyber attacks and that Washington was using the issue to "defame and smear China.'

"For some time now, the US side has been playing up so-called Chitiated illegal unilateral sanctions against China," Guo said. "China firmly opposes this and will take necessary measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests."

Integrity Technology Group said the move by Washington had "no factual basis.' The company firmly opposes

the U.S. Treasury Department's unwarranted accusations and Illegal unilateral sanctions on the company," the company, also known as Yongxin Zhicheng Technology Group, said in a statement Monday to the Shanghai Stock Exchange.

The China National Cyber Security Information Center said it had discovered attacks from various malicious websites and foreign IP addresses, including some in California and Florida. It also reported attacks from the Netherlands, Singapore, Mexico, Turkey and Vietnam using Trojan programs, botnets, phishing, theft of intellectual property and violations of pri-

"They pose a major threat to China's domestic networked units and internet users and some activities have been suspected of criminal offenses," the center said in a notice on its WeChat social media site. On Friday, the Treasury's Office

of Foreign Assets Control hit Integrity Technology with sanctions that block access to US property and bank accounts and prevent the targeted people and companies from doing business with Americans. It cited alleged multiple hacks against US victims, including incidents attributed to Flax Typhoon, a Chinese state-sponsored campaign that targets US critical infrastructure.

The sanctions did not appear to be related to an incident in which the Treasury Department reported that Chinese hackers had remotely accessed several of its workstations and unclassified documents in a major breach of cybersecurity.

The Treasury Department said it learned of that problem on Dec. 8, when a third-party software service provider, BeyondTrust, flagged that hackers had stolen a key "used by the vendor to secure a cloud-based service used to remotely provide technical support" to workers.

US officials are grappling with the fallout from a massive Chinese cyberespionage blitz known as Salt Typhoon that they say gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans.

Late last month, officials said at least eight telecommunications companies, as well as dozens of nations, had been affected by Salt Ty-

Malaysia's jailed ex-leader Najib wins appeal to pursue bid to serve corruption sentence at home

PUTRAJAYA (MALAYSIA), Jan 6: Malaysia's imprisoned former Prime Minister Najib Razak on Monday won an appeal to pursue his bid to serve his remaining corruption sentence under house

In an application in April last year, Najib said he had clear information that then-King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah issued an addendum order allowing him to finish his sentence under house arrest. Najib claimed the addendum was issued during a pardons board meeting on Jan 29 last year chaired by Sultan Abdullah that also cut his 12-year jail sentence by half and sharply reduced a fine. But the High Court tossed out his bid three months later.

The Court of Appeals, in a 2-1 ruling on Monday, ordered the High Court to hear the merits of the case. The decision came after Najib's lawver produced a letter from a Pahang state palace official confirming that then-Sultan Abdullah had issued the addendum

We are happy that finally Najib has got a win, his lawyer Mohamad Shafee Abdullah said. He is very happy and very relieved that finally they recognized some element of injustice that has been placed against him.

The lawyer said Najib gave a thumbs-up in court when the ruling was read.

He said it was criminal for the government to conceal the addendum order. Shafee noted that a new High Court judge will now hear

OTTAWA, Jan 6: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is expected recently to the Prime Minister, said ship issues, plans to meet this week, Trudeau, 53, realises he needs to likely after the caucus session, the

Canada PM Trudeau likely to resign as Liberal Party leader this week: Report

to resign as the leader of the Liberal Party this week amid internal party dissent and low public opinion ratings, according to a media report.

The Globe and Mail newspaper citing sources said it is unclear when exactly Trudeau, who has been Canada's prime minister since 2015, will step down, but a resignation is expected to come before a national caucus meeting on

One of the sources, who spoke make a statement before he meets the Liberal caucus so it doesn't look like he was forced out by his own MPs.

The sources said they are unsure about what the Liberal Party's national executive plans to do to replace Trudeau as leader. They said it remains unclear whether he will leave immediately or stay on as Prime Minister until a new leader is selected. The Liberal Party national

report said. On Friday, The Globe reported that Trudeau's advisers are looking at how he can remain Prime Minister while a new Liberal leader is selected. A source said on Sunday they believed that Trudeau would stay in his position until a new

leader was chosen.

The party has two options: appoint an interim leader on the recommendation of the national ship contest. A leadership contest would require the Prime Minister to request that Governor-General Mary Simon prorogue Parliament, which constitutional experts say is not guaranteed, the paper said. Another source said it makes

sense for Trudeau to remain as Prime Minister until a leader is chosen so he can deal with the incoming US administration of Donald Trump and his threat of 25-per-cent

US Congress ready to certify Trump's election win

WASHINGTON, Jan 6: As Congress convenes amid a winter storm to certify President-elect Donald Trump 's election, the legacy of Jan 6 hangs over the proceedings with an extraordinary fact: The candidate who tried to overturn the previous election won this time, and is legitimately returning to power.

Lawmakers will gather noontime Monday under the tightest national security level possible. Layers of tall black fencing flank the US Capitol complex in a stark reminder of what happened four years ago, when a defeated Trump sent his mob to "fight like hell" in what became the most gruesome attack on the seat of American democracy in 200

No violence, protests or even procedural objections in Congress are expected this time. Republicans from the highest levels of power who challenged the 2020 election results when Trump lost to President Joe Biden have no qualms this year after he defeated Vice President Kamala

And Democrats frustrated by Trump's 312-226 Electoral College victory nevertheless accept the choice of the American voters. Even the threat of a massive snowstorm barreling down on the region wasn't expected to interfere with Jan. 6, the day set by law to certify the vote.

"Whether we're in a blizzard or not, we are going to be in that chamber making sure this is done," House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican who helped lead Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election, said Sunday on Fox News.

The day's return to a US tradition that launches the peaceful transfer of presidential power comes with an asterisk as Trump prepares to take office in two weeks with a revived sense of authority. He denies that he lost four years ago, muses about staying beyond the Constitution's two-term White House limit and promises to pardon some of the more than 1,250 people who have pleaded guilty or were convicted of crimes for the apitol siege

What's unclear is if Jan 6, 2021 was the anomaly, the year Americans violently attacked their own government, or if this year's expected calm becomes the outlier. The US is struggling to cope with its political and cultural differences at a time when democracy worldwide is threatened. Trump calls Jan 6, 2021 a "day of love."

"We should not be lulled into compla-



cency," said Ian Bassin, executive director of the cross-ideological nonprofit Protect Democracy.

He and others have warned that it is historically unprecedented for U.S. voters to do what they did in November, reelecting Trump after he publicly refused to step aside last time. Returning to power an emboldened leader who has demonstrated his unwillingness to give it up "is an unprecedentedly dangerous move for a free country to voluntarily take," Bassin said. Biden, speaking Sunday at events at the White House, called Jan. 6, 2021 "one of the toughest days in American history.' "We've got to get back to the basic,

normal transfer of power," Biden said. What Trump did last time, Biden said, "was a genuine threat to democracy. I'm hopeful we're beyond that now." Still, American democracy has proven

to be resilient, and Congress, the branch of government closest to the people, will come together to affirm the choice of Americans. With pomp and tradition, the day is ex-

pected to unfold as it has countless times

before, with the arrival of ceremonial mahogany boxes filled with the electoral certificates from the states — boxes that staff were frantically grabbing and protecting as Trump's mob stormed the building last time. Senators will walk across the Capitol

which four years ago had filled with roaming rioters, some defecating and menacingly calling out for leaders, others engaging in hand-to-hand combat with police — to the House to begin certifying

Harris will preside over the counting, as is the requirement for the vice president, and certify her own defeat — much the way Democrat Al Gore did in 2001 and Republican Richard Nixon in 1961. She will stand at the dais where then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi was abruptly rushed to safety last time as the mob closed in and lawmakers fumbled to put on gas masks and flee, and shots rang out as police killed Ashli Babbitt, a Trump supporter trying to climb through a broken glass door toward the chamber.

There are new procedural rules in place in the aftermath of what happened four years ago, when Republicans parroting Trump's lie that the election was fraudulent challenged the results their own states had certified.

Under changes to the Electoral Count Act, it now requires one-fifth of lawmakers, instead of just one in each chamber, to raise any objections to election results. With security as tight as it is for the Super Bowl or the Olympics, law enforcement is on high alert for intruders. No tourists

will be allowed. But none of that is expected to be nec-

Republicans, who met with Trump behind closed doors at the White House before Jan. 6, 2021 to craft a complex plan to challenge his election defeat, have accepted his win this time.

Rep Andy Biggs, R-Ariz, who led the House floor challenge in 2021, said people at the time were so astonished by the election's outcome and there were "lots of claims and allegations.'

This time, he said, "I think the win was so decisive.... It stifled most of that.'

Democrats, who have raised symbolic objections in the past, including during the disputed 2000 election that Gore lost to George W. Bush and ultimately decided by the Supreme Court, have no intention of objecting. House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries has said the Democratic Party is not "infested" with election denialism

"There are no election deniers on our side of the aisle," Jeffries said on the first day of the new Congress, to applause

from Democrats in the chamber. "You see, one should love America when you win and when you lose. That's the patriotic thing to do," Jeffries said.

Last time, far-right militias helped lead the mob to break into the Capitol in a war-zone-like scene. Officers have described being crushed and peppersprayed and beaten with Trump flag poles, "slipping in other people's blood."

Five human traffickers

arrested in Tripura

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2025

Cross-border smuggling curbed

SHILLONG, Jan 6: Troops of BSF Meghalaya thwarted a major smuggling attempt along the India-Bangladesh border on Sunday. The troops also apprehended one Indian national in AOR of BOP Nongkhen in the area of village Riyazlong, under West Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya while seizing various items worth more than ₹ 9.5

The seized items included garlic, cattle, sugar, panipuri, blankets, Gillette blade, and an Alto car used to carry smuggled items in East Khasi Hills intended for smuggling into Bangladesh, a BSF source said on Monday.

The apprehended individual and confiscated goods were handed over to customs authorities for further action.

"This operation highlights the Border Security Force's unwavering dedication to securing India's borders and combating cross-border illegal activities, including smuggling and infiltration," it

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 6: Tripura Chief

Minister Manik Saha on Monday

said that the state government is

working on a priority basis to

strengthen the health care system in

the state, as the government has

taken an initiative to build a health

further strengthen the health system

in the state of Tripura, with the ini-

tiative to build a health hub. In order

to speed up health services, nurses

must establish a good relationship

with the patients' families while pro-

viding services to the patients," said

in the lamp lighting and oath-taking

ceremony of the second batch of

Agartala Government Nursing Col-

lege at the IGM Hospital Complex

Additionally, the chief minister in-

augurated the IT lab at the Nursing

College. At the event, Dr Saha, who

is also the health minister of the

state, said the topic of nursing re-

minds him of Florence Nightingale.

fession as a service-oriented voca-

tion rather than merely a profession.

She healed the seriously injured and

dying soldiers in the Crimean War

through her dedicated service. Some

people are born in this world who are

forever remembered through their he added.

Arunachal records increase

of 0.99 per cent electors

ITANAGAR, Jan 6: Arunachal Pradesh recorded a 0.99 per cent increase

in voters compared to last year's final electoral rolls, officials said on Mon-

In a statement, joint chief electoral officer Liken Koyu said, "According

The total number of electors in the state now stands at 8,91,518, includ-

'The newly published electoral rolls have also been shared with all po-

litical parties in the state," he added. Koyu highlighted that the main ob-

jective of the revision was to include the names of young voters who had

turned 18 years old by January 1, 2025, and to remove duplicate entries in

Accelerate highway projects:

Manipur Guv asks NHIDCL

to the final electoral rolls 2025, there has been an overall increase of 0.99

per cent in the number of electors compared to last year's records."

accordance with Election Commission guidelines. (PTI)

IMPHAL, Jan 6: Manipur Gover-

nor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Monday

told the National Highways and In-

(NHIDCL) to accelerate the pace of

the ongoing highway projects in the

state and to complete it within the

stipulated time frame, a Raj Bhavan

It said, "M S Deval, executive di-

rector, NHIDCL called on the Gov-

ernor of Manipur, at Raj Bhavan in

Imphal today and briefed him on

statement said

ing 4,37,609 men, 4,53,905 women, and four third genders, he added.

"She established the nursing pro-

in Agartala on Monday.

Saha said this while participating

'The state government is trying to

hub in Tripura.

Dr Saha.

Govt strengthening health care

system on a priority basis: Tripura CM

work. One such person was Florence

The chief minister emphasised

"Alongside doctors, nurses can

that the nursing management of any

enhance the reputation of the institu-

tion through their service. There is

no substitute for hard work. The stu-

dents of this nursing institution must

move forward, guided by the ideals

of Florence Nightingale. One must

remember that the work entrusted to

me must be done with utmost dedi-

cation. Every word of the oath you

took today must be upheld and ful-

filled with sincerity," said Dr Saha.

He mentioned that this year, 49

students have joined the nursing in-

stitution, compared to 48 students

B.Sc. Nursing course was a signifi-

cant achievement. Today, the college

has started with about 50 seats. Pre-

viously, there was one dental seat

and only 5-7 seats for medical

courses. Now, the state offers around

400 MBBS seats. The Tripura Med-

ical College authorities have applied

for 50 more seats. If approved, the

number of medical seats will in-

crease to about 450. An increase in

medical students will benefit the

state. The IT lab being inaugurated

today will also benefit the students,'

the various national highway proj-

ects that are currently under con-

struction in various parts of the

state." Deval also gave a compre-

hensive data on the key challenges

faced in executing the tasks, it said.

tient hearing to the director asked

him to accelerate the pace of the on-

going projects and to complete

within the stipulated timeframe as it

will improve the state's connectiv-

ity," the statement added. (PTI)

"The governor while giving a pa-

"Earlier, securing a seat for a

the previous year.

Nightingale, who spread nursing

practices worldwide," he said.

institution must be robust.



31,372 of 32500 forms were accepted for corrections



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 6: Tripura

Power Minister Ratan Lal Nath

has urged the state's residents

to become self-sufficient elec-

tricity producers by installing

solar panels, which could lead

Speaking at a special camp

for the PM Surya Ghar Mufti

Bijli Yojana held at the Tripura

State Electricity Corporation

Limited's corporate office on

Monday, Nath highlighted the

importance of transitioning to

solar energy for a sustainable

The camp aimed to facilitate

registration for the Surya Ghar

scheme in the Agartala Munic-

ipal Corporation area, offering

residents access to bank loans

and vendor selection for proj-

ect implementation. Nath em-

phasised the vision of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi, who

he praised for his foresight in

addressing future energy chal-

ning for a future where tradi-

tional energy sources like coal

and gas are no longer suffi-

cient. With this in mind, he has

launched the PM Surya Ghar

"The Prime Minister is plan-

to zero electricity bills.

laya has a total of 22,69,512 voters as of January 6, 2025, indicating an increase of 52,412 new voters compared to last year's total electors at

Of this, 11,50,599 are female voters, 11,18,907 male voters and 6 third gender voters, Meghalaya chief electoral officer (CEO), BDR Tiwari told reporters on Monday.

He said there are 3,764 service voters of which 3,673 are males and 91 are females adding that the EP ratio as of January 6 is 645 while the elector's gender

East Khasi Hills has the high-

Yojana to help citizens produce

their own electricity with gov-

ernment subsidies, even earn-

ing money by selling surplus

energy back to the power cor-

that the opportunity to partici-

pate in the initiative will not

last beyond 2026 and urged

Also present at the event

were power secretary Ab-

hishek Singh and various cor-

porators from the Agartala

Municipal Corporation. The

PM Surya Ghar Yojana,

launched by Narendra Modi on

February 13, 2024, aims to

generate 500 gigawatts of elec-

people to take action now.

The Power Minister stressed

poration," said Nath.

est number of voters at 3,20,553 while South West Khasi Hills has the lowest with 38,742 voters. Further, electors of the age group 18-19 are 72,941, 85+ electors are 10,398 and persons with disabilities (PwD) electors

Also, names of over 8,936 voters have been deleted from the electoral rolls due to death, 7,775 due to shifting and 385 due to duplicate entries.

31,372 of 32500 forms were accepted for corrections.

The CEO also informed that now there are 3551 polling stations when compared during the 2024 general elections to the

Tripura, which shares an 856-kilometer-long border with Bangladesh, Tripura power minister urges to install has been a critical point for such illegal activities. Addressing the media, Tapas Das, a Government Railway Police solar panel for zero electricity bills (GRP) official, revealed that the arrests

tricity by 2030. As of now, 200

gigawatts have been secured,

Nath explained that the proj-

ect allows homeowners to in-

stall solar panels on their

rooftops or land, helping them

reduce electricity costs and

contribute to the national goal.

Additionally, those who gener-

ate surplus electricity will be

able to sell it to the Tripura

State Electricity Corporation

Limited. The state's special

category status ensures that

Tripura and other states re-

ceive increased subsidies, fur-

encouraging

participation in this energy

meeting 40% of the target.

Railway Station.

"Yesterday, we detained five human traffickers from Harihar Dola Market border crossings.

followed the detention of illegal

Bangladeshi nationals at the Agartala

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 6: In a significant

breakthrough, security forces in

Tripura have apprehended five human

traffickers accused of facilitating ille-

gal crossings of Bangladeshi and Ro-

hingya nationals over the international

in Sepahijala District. During the investigation, their involvement in aiding Bangladeshi nationals to cross the international border was confirmed. Based on this, we registered two cases and coordinated with the BSF, Tripura Police, and other agencies to ensure their arrest. They have been produced

The arrested individuals have been identified as Jayanta Das (30), Sameer Das (38), Jakir Hossain (35), Mobin Mia (34), and Gaur Chand Debnath, also known as Sanu. All hail from Tripura's Sepahijala District.

before the court," Das stated.

Authorities continue to investigate the case, focusing on dismantling the network responsible for such illegal

Two drug peddlers, one extortionist held in separate operations in Manipur

IMPHAL, Jan 6: Security forces arrested two persons for allegedly possessing WY tablets and brown sugar in Manipur's Churachandpur district.

The drugs were carried in a fourwheeler from Khuga, Matta village under Churachandpur Police Station on Sunday, according to a police report.

The arrested were identified as Thangkhanlam and Mangliankhup (32), the police report also said. From their possession, 60 soap cases

of brown sugar weighing 776 gm, 537 WY tablets weighing 60 gm, and one four-wheeler were recovered, police further said In a separate incident, Manipur Po-

lice arrested one-armed man who was allegedly involved in carrying out extortion activities in the Kakching area of Kakching district. A police report identified the arrested

as Johnson Singh from Kakching. On Sunday, security forces continued search operations and area domination in the fringe and vulnerable

areas of hill and valley districts.

Over 2,350 mln tn cement

arrives in Manipur's Khongsang

Movement of 331 vehicles carrying essential items along National Highway 2 was ensured, Manipur Police also said in a report.

Strict security measures are taken up in all vulnerable locations and security convoys are provided in sensitive stretches in order to ensure free and safe movement of vehicles, it said.

A total of 106 checkpoints were installed in different districts of Manipur, both in the hills and the valley and no one was detained by police in connection with violations, the police report

4 tourists fall in frozen Sela Lake while attempting to walk



ITANAGAR, Jan 6: Four tourists fell into the frozen Sela Lake in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh, while attempting to walk on its icy surface, an official said on Monday. However, they were safely pulled out of the

icy water, the district official said. The incident took place at the scenic lake, located at an altitude of 14,000 feet on Sunday, when the four tourists from Assam, including one woman, ventured onto the frozen surface despite clear risks. Fortunately, their companions acted quickly, pulling them out of the icy water and preventing a tragedy, the official

"The incident occurred around 10 am when

the tourists ventured onto the frozen surface of the lake. There was no casualty reported all of them are fit and fine," additional deputy

commissioner (ADC) Hakraso Kri said. Local authorities had previously issued warnings against such activities. In December last year, Tawang Deputy Commissioner Kanki Darang advised visitors to avoid walking on high-altitude frozen lakes, including Sela Lake, Shongetser Lake, PT Tso Lake, and the lakes around Bumla Pass.

For the local community, these lakes hold deep cultural and spiritual significance.

According to tradition, tampering with or polluting these sacred water bodies is believed to invite misfortune.

Meanwhile, Union parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju who hails from the state has cautioned tourists to remain careful while walking in such frozen lakes.

"Enjoy mountains but be careful of snow avalanche, icy roads, and ice lakes," Rijiju said in a post on X.

"At Sela Pass in Arunachal Pradesh. My advice to tourists: Walk on the frozen lakes with experienced people, drive carefully on slippery snow roads and be aware of snow avalanches. Temperatures are freezing so wear warm clothes and enjoy. Your safety is important," he added. (PTI)

was transported to the Khongsang railway station by a goods train, Chief Minister N Biren Singh said. Khongsang in Tamenglong district, located around 109 km from Imphal,

IMPHAL, Jan 6: In a boost to supply

of essential commodities in Manipur, a

total of 2,390 million tonnes of cement

has the state's only railway station in the hill districts.

"A total of 2,390 MT of cement arrived at Khongsang Railway Station. With more goods steadily being transported by train, this development is set to significantly ease the supply of essential commodities in Manipur.' Singh said in a post on X on Sunday

The cement would be loaded onto trucks and transported to different parts of the state, officials said. With frequent disruptions along the

transportation route from Imphal to Dimapur in Nagaland via National Highway-2, rail connectivity is becoming vital to the supply chain of essential goods to Manipur from other parts of the country, they said. (PTI)

Dated:-28/12/2024

Tripura likely to get trains running on electricity by February

running on electricity are likely to begin operations in Tripura by February this year, with the completion of a key electrification project in the northeastern state, officials said on Monday. The state at present has

diesel-powered train engines. The Rs 46-crore electrification project, which was launched in 2022, will connect Tripura with the national railway grid. The Tripura State Electric-

ity Corporation Ltd (TSECL) will be ready to supply power to the electric transmission line of the Railways in the state by February, the officials

The North Eastern Railways (NFR) has already completed electrification work from Badarpur to Agartala via Dharmanagar in the north-



eastern state.

"We had undertaken work for the erection of three traction power substations - Kumarghat in Unakoti district, Teliamura in Khowai district and Udaipur in Gomati district. The erection of Kumarghat substation was completed in March last year," assistant general manager (Transmission), TSECL,

Nirupam Guha, told PTI. He said the substation at Udaipur is set to be completed by this month and the one at Teliamura by February.

"After the completion of the three traction substations, the TSECL will be ready in all respects to energise the railway electric transmission line from Dharmanagar to Agartala and elsewhere," Guha

Guha said the Railways has sought 5 MW power for each substation on a daily basis, and if required, more power

could be supplied.

"We are confident once this project is completed, more advanced and faster trains will be introduced in the northeastern state. It will play a crucial role in boosting infrastructure and the economic growth of the state," Guha said.

According to Kapinjal Kishore Sharma, Chief Public Relations Officer of NFR, the electrification work has been completed from Badarpur to Agartala via Dharmanagar, barring the hilly stretch of the Lumding-Badarpur section.

"Steps have been taken to complete the electrification work from Lumding to Agartala as early as possible," he said. (PTI)

No.GDB/SOPD/75/2022-23/512

TENDER NO.11 OF 2024-25 INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

Selected tenders affixing Non-refundable court fee stamp of RS.8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty Five Paisa) only with at validity period of 180 (One Hundred Eighty) days which will subsequently to be covered and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the intending Registered Contractors of all categories of the Assam PWD (Bldg. & Roads) for submitting tender for the work below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2;30 PM 28-12-2024 to 17-01-2025 and will be opened on the date 09-01-2024 at 2:30 PM.

SI. No.	Name of Work	Apporx Estimated value of work	Tender Value	Earnest money 2% for GNL & 1% for ST/SC/OBC/MOBC	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
1	Const. of Sukali Sarfang Biyab Bathou Thansali under SOPD T/A. fund for the year 2024-25	13,53,000.00	13,39,470.00	Rs . 14,000/- & Rs. 7,000/-	Rs.300/-	3(Three month)
2	Const. of guest room at uttar betna borowari Durga Mandir at Maharipara, under GAD fund for the year 2024-25	20,00,000.00	19,80,000.00	Rs .20,000/- & Rs. 10,000/-	Rs.350/-	3(Three month)
3	Const. of Community Hall at Maharipara, under WPT & BC T/A (P) fund for the 2024-25.	10,00,000.00	9,90,000.00	Rs .20,000/- & Rs. 10000'/-	Rs.300/-	3(Three month)
4	Const. of Community toilet Chirahundi jame masjid under 15 th -FC (Tied Grant) fund for the 2023-24 during 2024-25.	10,47,960.00	10,37,481.00	Rs .21,000/- & Rs. 10500/-	Rs.300/-	3(Three month)
5	Const. of Community toilet at pub Begapara Mujari Masjid, under 15 th -FC fund for the 2023-24 during 2024-25.	10,47,960.00	10,37,481.00	Rs .21,000/- & Rs. 10500'/-	Rs.300/-	3(Three month)

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the Office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up to 11:30 AM in all working days from 28-12-2024 to 17-01-2025 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker Cheque/Bank Draft/ Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the BDO Goreswar Development Block.

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/1258

Sd/- Block Development Officer Goreswar Development Block

per month if voted to power in Delhi



NEW DELHI, Jan 6: The Congress on Monday announced 'Pyari Didi Yojana', promising a monthly financial assistance of ₹ 2,500 to women if voted to power in Delhi. The scheme would be rolled out on the lines of the model adopted by the Congress government in Karnataka.

Announcing the scheme, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said it aims to financially empower women, promising that it would be implemented at the first Cabinet meeting of the new government.

"Today, I have come here to launch the Pyari Didi Yojana. We are confident that a Congress government will be formed in Delhi, and on the first day of the new Cabinet, we will implement the scheme to provide ₹ 2,500 to every woman in the capital," Shivakumar

"Whatever and wherever Congress has promised in the nation or state level, we have delivered and we are going to deliver," he said.

Within three months after coming to power, all the guarantees were implemented in Karnataka.

Women in the entire state travel free in buses, 10 kg of rice is being given to every household, about ₹ 3.000 given to the unemployed youth, 200 unit of electricity, and

₹ 2,000 is being to every women. Additionally, 1.22 crore women are getting ₹ 2,000 every month, he said.

While addressing media, Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said that their tag line would be "Hogi har jarurat puri, Congress hai jaruri" (every need will be fulfilled, Congress is needed).

Yaday claimed that there is an an impostor in Delhi who is is continuously working to show people

It is been 11 years and the condition of Delhi is deteriorating, he

"I am happy that we have announced the scheme through Shivkumar. In coming days, we will come with many such schemes which are very important for Delhi," the Congress leader said.

Yadav later concluded his address to media by saying that "Karnatak ne ki hai umeedein puri, Delhi ne kaha hai Congress hai jaruri" (Karnataka has fulfilled all the expectations, Delhi said that Congress is needed).

Elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due in Febru-

Yadav, the party's Delhi incharge Qazi Nizamuddin, and other senior leaders were present

BJP MLA fires fresh salvo at Dhananjay Munde

PUNE, Jan 6: BJP MLA Suresh Dhas has alleged that a meeting to discuss an extortion deal in Beed was held between Maharashtra minister Dhananjay associate Walmik Karad and officials of a firm at Munde's residence in June last

Dhas made the allegations during a morcha held by a Maratha outfit here on Sunday to condemn the murder of Santosh Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed district, and the death of Somnath Suryawanshi in judicial custody following violence in Parbhani.

Karad was arrested last week after he surrendered before the state Crime Investigation Department (CID) in Pune in the extortion case linked to the murder of sarpanch Deshmukh.

The march, organised by the local unit of Akhand Maratha Samaj, started from Lal Mahal at Sunday noon and culminated at the district collector's office.

Family members of the deceased sarpanch, senior Congress leader and former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan, NCP (SP) MP Bajrang Sonawane, BJP MLA Suresh Dhas, Maratha activist Manoj Jarange, along with leaders from various parties, and office-bearers were present dur-

ing the march. The protesters shouted slogans

Ladki Bahin scheme affecting govt's

farm loan waiver plans: Minister

MUMBAI, Jan 6: Maharashtra Agriculture

Minister Manikrao Kokate has said the Ladki

against NCP minister Munde. Addressing the morcha, Dhas claimed, "A meeting was held on June 14 between Walmik Karad and officials of a renewable energy company at Dhananjay Munde's residence in Parli (in

senior officials of the company." "Meetings also took place at the official residence of Munde in Mumbai. A deal of ₹ 3 crore was finalised in the meeting," he

Beed district). Simultaneously,

Munde's PA spoke with some

The BJP MLA from Beed said he had given the evidence (to po-

Karad alias 'aak and his PA use 17 mobile phones. The Beed superintendent of police and the CID IG can recover more evidence from these phones," Dhas said.

Deshmukh was abducted, tortured and murdered on December 9, apparently because he tried to thwart an attempt to extort money from an energy firm operating a windmill project.

Police have so far arrested seven persons in connection with the murder.

Suryawanshi, a Dalit, died in judicial custody after he was arrested in connection with violence in Parbhani last month over the desecration of a glassencased replica of the Constitu-

Congress promises ₹ 2,500 to women TN Governor Ravi walks out of Assembly Guv refrains from reading out address

CHENNAI, Jan 6: Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi on Monday walked out of the Assembly without delivering his customary address, opposing what he described as 'disrespect' to the Constitution and the

national anthem. A few moments before Ravi began making his remarks, members of the main opposition AIADMK gathered in front of the chair and raised slogans and they were evicted en masse by marshalls following Speaker M Appavu's di-

At the same time, as Congress party members also raised slogans against the Governor by wearing black badges, nothing could be properly understood in the din. Subsequently, members of the BJP and PMK staged walked out.

In a tweet, Raj Bhavan alleged, the Constitution and the national anthem were once again insulted in the Tamil Nadu Assembly.

"Respecting the national anthem is among the first fundamental duty

CAG report exposes

Kejriwal's 'black deeds': BJP

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: The BJP on

Monday claimed that a CAG re-

port raised 139 questions related to

former Delhi chief minister Arvind

Kejriwal's previous Flagstaff Road

residence and "exposed his "black

deeds". No immediate reaction

was available from AAP on the

Addressing a press conference,

"This report pertains to expendi-

ture till 2022. There is no revela-

tion on expenses of 2023 and 2024

and, according to our information,

the real cost runs up to ₹ 75-80

crore if the inventory of the items

in the bungalow are included," he

claimed. The BJP has sharpened its

attack on Kejriwal ahead of the

Delhi Assembly polls, alleging

corruption related to the 6,

Flagstaff Road, bungalow that he

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

also took a jibe at Kejriwal, saying

he built a "Sheesh Mahal" instead

of paying attention to Delhi's pub-

Sachdeva charged, "The Con-

troller and Auditor General (CAG)

has raised 139 questions and very

minutely detailed the black deeds

of Kejriwal." He alleged that the

bungalow was reconstructed with-

out permission of the Delhi Urban

Arts Commission and the Munici-

ister give to Delhi by constructing

the bungalow in an unauthorised

If the real cost of the bungalow is

to be determined, the accounts of the

public works and other departments

have to be checked, Sachdeva said.

He also alleged that the public works

department, instead of functioning as

a government agency for construc-

tion of the bungalow, acted as a "pri-

"What message did a chief min-

pal Corporation of Delhi.

manner?" he asked.

occupied as chief minister.

the BJP's Delhi president Virendra

Sachdeva said the report of 2022 cited an expenditure of ₹ 33.86 crore on the "Sheesh Mahal" but

the actual cost was far higher.

as enshrined in our Constitution. It is sung in all the state legislatures at the beginning and the end of Governor's address. Today, on arrival of Governor to the House only Tamil Thaai Vaazhthu (Invocation to mother Tamil, state song) was

Further, the tweet said the Governor respectfully reminded the

House of its Constitutional duty and fervently appealed to the Chief Minister, the Leader of the House and the Speaker for singing the National Anthem.

"However, they cussedly refused. It is a matter of grave concern. Not to be a party to such brazen disrespect to the Constitution and the national anthem, Governor in deep

anguish left the House." Leader of the House and senior minister Duraimurugan said the Governor has repeated what he did in previous years, which was not reading the Address fully in the

On Ravi's allegation vis-a-vis national anthem, the minister said that when the Governor sent a letter to the Speaker last year on the same subject, it was made clear then that the practice followed was to sing the state song ahead of the address and the national anthem was played upon the conclusion of the address.

"Still, the Governor again mentioning the same thing as an issue and walking out without reading out the Address raises a question mark about his true intention," he said

The people, the House and the government always showed great respect towards the nation, the national anthem, national leaders, and greatly valued patriotism and national integration. (PTI)

Mamata successful in forming popular political entity which even Netaji couldn't: TMC leader

KOLKATA, Jan 6: Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Kunal Ghosh said party supremo Mamata Banerjee succeeded in forming a popular political party, something even Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose could not achieve in parliamentary politics. Bose had formed the All India Forward Bloc in 1939 after resigning from the Congress.

"He is a historically significant freedom fighter but was unsuccessful in parliamentary politics after forming a party," Ghosh said on Sunday, claiming it is rare for someone to successfully form a popular political party after leaving the Congress. He alleged that the Con-

MUMBAI, Jan 6: Political leaders

cutting across the party lines on Mon-

day called on Maharashtra Governor C

P Radhakrishnan, urging him to re-

move Dhananjay Munde from the state

cabinet to ensure a free and fair probe

into the killing of Beed sarpanch San-

The delegation, comprising Con-

gress MLA Vijay Wadettiwar and BJP

MLA Suresh Dhas, submitted a mem-

orandum to the governor, requesting

him to take decisive action on the issue

that would help uphold the rule of law

and regain public confidence in the dis-

Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Mas-

sajog village in Beed district, was trag-

ically abducted, tortured, and murdered

on December 9, allegedly in retaliation

for his efforts to prevent extortion at-

tempts against an energy firm linked to

have so far arrested seven persons con-

nected to the case, including Walmik

Karad's involvement has raised eve-

brows, particularly following his pub-

lic surrender via a social media video

the CID headquarters in Pune, leading

to concerns over potential disorder and

The event attracted large crowds at

The leaders have demanded

Munde's resignation, a murder case

against Karad, strict action against neg-

ligent police officials, and measures to

As part of the investigation, police

tosh Deshmukh.

pensation of justice.

a windmill project.

Karad, an aide to Munde.

on December 31, 2024.

preferential treatment.

gress failed to recognise Banerjee's indomitable fighting spirit. Banerjee was expelled from the Congress in 1997 following differences with the party leadership.

"But the people of Bengal did not accept her expulsion from the Congress, and that is why they gave her party the status it deserved," Ghosh said. Ghosh's comments came after former state Congress president Pradip Bhattacharya claimed on Saturday that Banerjee's expulsion had weakened the party's position in West Bengal.

Bhattacharya, a former MP, said that the then-state Congress chief Somen Mitra had expelled Banerjee

Karad should be removed.

nated in Deshmukh's murder.

claimed in the memorandum.

pany's Massajog storeyard.

to intimidate others

The memorandum stated that extor-

2024 Lok Sabha elections and culmi-

and rescued after timely action by the

Ahilyanagar police, but the Beed po-

lice were criticised for their lack of

proactive measures, the leaders

They alleged that Karad issued re-

peated threats to Avaada officials, de-

manding Rs 2 crore, and on December

6, 2024, his associates reportedly at-

tacked security personnel at the com-

tortured, and murdered on December 9,

and a video of the crime was circulated

ing village, the memorandum said.

Deshmukh was allegedly kidnapped,

The body was found in a neighbour-

The leaders said residents of Mas-

sajog staged protests demanding the ar-

rest of the accused the next day, but the

murder case.

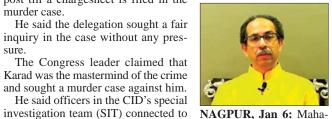
in 1997 under instructions from the then-AICC chief, Sitaram Kesri. Bhattacharya claimed he had ad-

vised Mitra against the decision but said the pressure from the party high command was immense. He made these remarks at an event in Kolkata during the unveiling of a bust of Mitra, who passed away in

Banerjee, currently serving her third consecutive term as West Bengal's chief minister, formed the TMC in 1998 following her expulsion. She subsequently led the party to power in 2011, ending the 34year rule of the CPI(M)-led Left

Leaders meet Maharashtra guv for removal Maharashtra BJP chief of Dhananjay Munde from cabinet slams Uddhav over

Wadettiwar said the delegation has de-Saamana editorial manded that Munde resign from the post till a chargesheet is filed in the



NAGPUR, Jan 6: Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule on tion activities had escalated during the Monday slammed Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray after an editorial On May 28, 2024, an officer of in the party mouthpiece Avaada Power Pvt Ltd was kidnapped Saamana questioned the alleged extravagant expenditure on bungalows of Union ministers over last ten years. Bawankule said Thackeray lacked the stature to speak about Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

> "PM Narendra Modi started his life on a very humble background as a tea stall seller. He became prime minister through a big struggle. In comparison, Thackeray comes nowhere near Modi. He must understand that Modiji has dedicated his life to the 140 crore people of India.' Bawankule told reporters in Nagpur. The state Revenue Minister further said that Thackeray didn't visit Mantralaya or Vidhan Bhavan even for two days when

Maharashtra. "Uddhavji should introspect before saying anything against Modi ji in support of (AAP leader) Arvind Kejriwal," said Bawankule

he was chief minister of

The editorial comes in response to BJP's criticism of AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal over alleged extravagant spending on his official residence when he was chief minister of Delhi. The BJP had described Kejriwal's erstwhile home as "sheesh mahal"

A day earlier, PM Modi launched a scathing attack on AAP, calling it an "aapda" (disaster) that has gripped Delhi for the past 10 years. (PTI)

Youth Congress protests outside Bidhuri's residence

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Delhi Pradesh Youth Congress workers on Monday staged a protest outside the residence of BJP leader Ramesh Bidhuri, condemning his remarks about Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

The protest was led by Delhi Pradesh Youth Congress president Akshay Lakra. The protesters carried placards, raised slogans and sprayed black paint on the nameplate outside Bidhuri's house in central Delhi.

They also wrote "mahila virodhi" (anti-women) with black paint on the main gate of the

Lakra said the BJP leader's remarks over Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is totally unacceptable. He also alleged that Bidhuri has a history of using derogatory language and be rude.

Bidhuri's statement about Priyanka Gandhi is very shameful, he should apologise for this cheap thinking, Lakra said, adding that the Youth Congress will continue to protest like this until the BJP leader apologises.
Ramesh Bidhuri, senior BJP

leader and party's candidate from Kalkaji, said that if elected in the Delhi Assembly polls next month, he will ensure in his constituency are as smooth as Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi's 'cheeks". (PTI)

Nitish rules out

possibility of quitting NDA PATNA, Jan 6: Bihar Chief Min-

ister Nitish Kumar on Monday ruled out the possibility of quitting the NDA, pointing out that his ties with the BJP went back a The JD(U) supremo, who

termed as a "mistake" his two short-lived alliances with the RJD-Congress combine, fondly recalled the backing he had always received from former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

"It was respected Atal ji who made me a Union minister. He used to shower so much of affection on me. I never faced any difficulty in getting my proposals cleared," Kumar told reporters in Vaishali district, which he toured as part of the state-wide 'Pragati

The longest-serving chief minister of the state also recalled that it was Vajpayee's wish that "I become the CM" when the NDA first won assembly polls in Bihar in 2005.

"So, why would I not stay (with the BJP)? A couple of times the people in my party committed a mistake (by pressing for an alliance with the Congress-RJD combine). I rectified it both times," said the JD(U) president.

Kumar was responding to queries about speculations in the political circles, triggered by Union Home Minister Amit Shah's equivocal stance on his projection as chief ministerial candidate in the assembly polls due in less than a year.

The speculations stronger after RJD president Lalu Prasad recently said he was keeping his "doors open" for arch-rival Kumar. (PTI)

ASSOCIATE S&T WORKS E-Tender No. SNT-43-LMG-2024

25: Dated: 30-12-2024. E-tenders ar invited by the undersigned for th following work. Name of work & its Location: Associate S&T works for TBF work by BCM-389 & DUO-8129 a Dimapur, Chongajan, Rangapaha Bokajan & Khotkhoti. Tender Value ₹15,28,487.52; Bid Security ₹30.600.00: E-tender will be Closed a 15:00 hrs. on 22-01-2025 and Opene at 15:30 hrs. on 22-01-2025. For detail visit: www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DSTE, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

RIVER TRAINING WORKS E-Tender Notice No. SCL/Engg/0-

of 2024; Dated: 30-12-2024. E-tende are invited by the undersigned for the following work: SN. 1. Brief Description of Item: Provision rotection and river training works a najor and important bridges unde ADEN/Badarpur Ghat. Tender Value ₹5,85,83,334/-; Earnest Money 4,43,000/-. E-tenders will be closed a 15:00 hrs. on 27-01-2025 and opene at 15:00 hrs. on 28-01-2025. Th complete information with tende documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 27-01-2025 website http://www.ireps.gov.in.

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

REVISED E-AUCTION PROGRAMME FOR SALE OF RAILWAY SCRAP MATERIAL

E-Auction programme for sale of railway scrap materials under jurisdiction of Lumding for the month of January, 2025 has been fixed as under

January/2025 07-01-2025, 17-01-2025, 23-01-2025 & 31-01-2025

through IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in

Interested bidders can participate in E-Auction programme

Sr. Divisional Material Manager, Lumding Division **NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**

curb extortion and hooliganism in cases were registered only after mountvate organisation" to please Beed. Addressing a press conference, ing public pressure. (PTI) Sudden rush to register as Delhi voters due to AAP's pro-women scheme: Sources

Bahin Yojana is creating a burden on the state coffers, affecting its ability to implement the farm loan waiver scheme. The Ladki Bahin scheme, launched by the previous Eknath Shinde-led government in August last year to provide a monthly allowance of ₹ 1,500 to eligible women, is likely to cost the state around ₹ 46,000 crore annually.

The scheme is said to have played a key role in the ruling Mahayuti's win in the state assembly elections held in November 2024.

Speaking to reporters in Pune on Sunday, Kokate said the financial strain caused by the Ladki Bahin Yojana has disrupted the state's ability to form a surplus that would otherwise

be allocated for waiving the loans of farmers. "The burden created by the Ladki Bahin scheme has affected our ability to set aside funds for the farm loan waiver. We are reviewing the financial situation, and once the state's income increases, we will move forward with the loan waiver scheme in the next four to six months," the NCP leader said. The state cooperation department is responsible for implementing the loan waiver decision, which will ultimately be made by the chief minister and deputy CMs, he said. Maharashtra Women and Child Development Minister Aditi Tatkare last week said the state government has decided to act on complaints about bogus beneficiaries of the Ladki Bahin Yojana, and sought information from the income tax and transport departments for their verification. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: The Election Commission on Monday asked officials to scrutinise each and every application for new voter registration to identify genuine people even as sources attributed the sudden rush for enrolment in the Delhi electoral rolls to AAP's Mahila Samman Yojana.

Under the populist scheme, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party has promised to provide monthly assistance of ₹ 2,100 to registered women voters in Delhi. Elections are set to be held in Delhi next month.

In a statement, the Delhi Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said more than 3 lakh voters have been added to the electoral rolls during the special summary revision process. It said an additional 5.1 lakh Form-6 have been received between December 16, 2024, and Monday for registration of new voters.

The statement said the Delhi CEO has asked officials to scrutinise each and every application in accordance with the EC guide-

"Till now, eight FIRs have been filed against 24 people for submission of false/tampered documents



for obtaining voter ID," it said. The Delhi CEO said the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) have been directed to take stringent action against those submitting false claims and fake documents to get enrolled in the electoral roll.

Sources said the Mahila Samman scheme, linked to the voter cards of the beneficiaries, amounts to bribing the electors, which is prohibited under the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct.

The Model Code of Conduct comes into effect the moment elections are announced by the EC.

Sources said the commission had issued notices to political parties in the past to withdraw similar methods of bribing voters tacitly and collecting their data.

After the Lok Sabha elections in 2024, several Muslim women gathered at the Congress office in Uttar Pradesh to get the promised financial assistance under "guarantee cards" promising ₹ 1 lakh

every year to the women during election campaigning. The Delhi CEO statement said

there was an unprecedented rush for new registration since December 16, 2024, as more than 5.1 lakh have submitted Form-6 for enrolment in the electoral rolls. It said 3.09 lakh new voters have already been added to the electoral rolls during the special summary revi-"This trend of unprecedented in-

crease of Form-6 and that too after 20 days of the last date of receiving claims and objections as scheduled SSR-2025 (28.11.2024), is unexpected and needs greater scrutiny," the statement said.

It said directions have been issued to all EROs to scrutinise each and every form according to the ECI guidelines. The statement said, 100 per cent

field verification shall be done by EROs and assistant EROs to identify the genuine eligible persons. "The EROs are also conducting personal hearings in doubtful cases as per ECI guidelines," the state-

ment said. (PTI)

TIMA

ΓUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2025

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Lokpal disposes of corruption complaint against ex-CJI Chandrachud SC or the CJI will not be amenable to the constricted jurisdiction of the Lokpal of India

corruption ombudsman Lokpal has disposed of a complaint alleging corruption against former CJI DY Chandrachud for being "barred by jurisdiction", according to an official order.

A complaint was filed on October 18, 2024, "against the sitting Chief Justice of India (CJI) as on that date, for alleged abuse of office, amounting to corruption and malicious exercise of power to favour and protect a certain politician and political party", it said.

CJI Chandrachud demitted office on November 10.

The Lokpal, in its order, examined in detail if a sitting CJI or a Supreme Court judge was amenable to its jurisdiction under Section 14 of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act and decided to "eschew from dilating upon the diverse allegations contained in this complaint running into 382 pages"

"We say no more," according to the order dated January 3.

"In light of the above, we dispose of this complaint as being barred by jurisdiction," said the order by Lokpal chairperson Justice AM Khanwilkar and five other members.

The order said the complainant was free to pursue other remedies, as permissible in law.

We may not be understood to have expressed any opinion on the merits of the allegations, one way or the other including about the maintainability of the legal reme-



dies to be resorted to by the complainant," it added.

The Lokpal examined different provisions under Section 14 -- "jurisdiction of Lokpal to include prime minister, ministers, members of Parliament, groups A. B. C and D officers and officials of central government" -- of the Act.

"The textual and even contextual interpretation of this provision would lead us to the conclusion that only the persons referred to with their designation or description in this provision, have been made amenable to the jurisdiction of the Lokpal, as being a public servant against whom the Lokpal is bestowed with the duty to inquire or cause an inquiry to be conducted into any matter involved in, or arising from, or connected with, any allegation of corruption within the meaning of provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (for short, PC Act 1988), made by way of a complaint to the Lokpal,'

Indubitably, a sitting judge or CJI would not come within the ambit of clauses (a) to (e), (g) and (h), the

"The only expansive clause that may come into play is Clause (f), which, however, predicates that any person who is or has been a chairperson or member or officer or employee in any 'body' or board or corporation or authority or company or society or trust or autonomous body (by whatever name called) 'established by an Act of Parliament' or wholly or partly financed by the central government or controlled by it," it said.

At first impression, there can be no debate about the fact that the Supreme Court is a body of a group of judges associated for common purpose or object, the order said.

HOSHIARPUR/LUDHIANA,

Jan 6: Contractual employees of

the state-owned Punjab Roadways

and the Pepsu Road Transportation

Corporation began a three-day

strike on Monday to press for their

demands, including regularisation

of jobs. The strike left many com-

muters stranded at various bus

According to the protesters,

around 2,800 buses of the Punjab

Roadways and the Pepsu Road

Punjab Roadways, Punbus,

PRTC Contract Workers' Union

president Resham Singh Gill said

around 8,000 contractual employ-

MUMBAI, Jan 6: Fugitive gang-

ster Anmol Bishnoi allegedly or-

dered the killing of NCP politician

Baba Siddique to "create an atmos-

phere of terror" through his organ-

ised crime syndicate, as per the

(PRTC) stayed off the roads.

Corporation

Anmol Bishnoi ordered Baba Siddique's murder

stands around the state.

Transportation

"The judges, generally including that of the Supreme Court, also come within the ambit of expression of public servant within the meaning of Section 2(c) of the PC Act," it said.

The judge of a court would not come within the excepted category of public servant in respect of whom jurisdiction is exercisable by any court or other authority under the specified acts, the order said.

"In that sense, the judge of any court would be a public servant and also can be proceeded with for having committed an offence of corruption, including under the PC Act, as ordained by the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, in K Veeraswami vs Union of India and Ors...," it said.

The moot question is "whether the Supreme Court of India is a body established by an 'Act of Parliament", the order said and added the expression used in Section 14 of the Act was very definite and did not leave any room for interpreta-

"We need to remind ourselves of the cardinal principle of interpretation of statutes that while interpreting any penal statute, strict interpretation must be preferred," it

"In other words, it will have to be first explored whether it is open to take the view that the Supreme Court of India has been established by an 'Act of Parliament'. To this,

Contractual employees of Punjab Roadways,

PRTC begin three-day strike; bus services hit

at all 27 bus depots around the

The contractual employees have

been seeking regularisation of their

jobs and a salary hike, among other

The brunt of the strike was,

Harbans Kaur (70) and her hus-

band Darshan Singh (73) arrived at

the Hoshiarpur bus stand to catch

a state-owned bus to Ludhiana to

most an hour but no government

bus has arrived. We will wait a lit-

tle longer and, if no government

bus arrives, we will have no choice

but to take a private bus, which is

"We have been waiting for al-

however, borne by commuters.

state, he said.

demands, Gill said.

visit a relative.

For, the Supreme Court of India has been established by virtue of Article 124 of the Constitution of India," it

Suffice it to observe that the Supreme Court, even though a body of judges, does not come within the ambit of expression "body" employed in Section 14(1)(f) of the Act, as it is not established by an "Act of Parliament" as such, the order said

Further, the Supreme Court is neither wholly or partly financed by the central government or controlled by it as such, it said.

The same logic must apply to the judges of the Supreme Court or the CJI, namely, as not being wholly or partly financed by the central government or controlled by it as such, the Lokpal said.

"As a concomitant to this view, it must follow that the sitting judge of the Supreme Court or the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court will not be amenable to the constricted jurisdiction of the Lokpal of India in terms of Section 14 of the Act of 2013," the order said.

The anti-corruption ombudsman, however, clarified that the view "propounded hitherto" was only to consider the status of the judges and the CJI of the Supreme Court, having been established by virtue of Article 124 of the Constitution.

"This view may not squarely apply to the judges of the other courts, including high courts...," it added in the order. (PTI)

Bhupinder Kaur (54), another

She said she had been waiting

for a government bus to Adda

Saran near Tanda for over half an

hour. "If no bus arrives soon, I will

Women in Punjab generally pre-

In Ludhiana, there was no serv-

fer state-owned buses because of

ice -- especially for rural routes, in-

cluding Machhiwara, Payal and

have to take a private bus.

the free travel scheme.

Raikot.

commuter from Hoshiarpur, shared

Harbans Kaur said.

a similar experience

on Monday. A bench of Justices Surya Kant

committee.

persuade those people under protest to meet Justice (retd) Nawab Singh led committee today at 3 pm. We are hopeful that there will be a breakthrough. Kindly take it up after a couple of days," Sibal said.

sense prevails on everyone.

The apex court asked Sibal to prepare a brief note of the deliberations and posted the hearing on

representing the Centre, said the committee would file a brief note on the meeting's outcome.

During its meeting, the commit-

Dallewal, who is the convener of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political), has been on an indefinite hunger strike since November 26, 2024, pressing the farmers' various demands, including a legal guarantee on the mini-

He refused medical aid offered by the Punjab government and his condition deteriorated as he devel-

put the onus on Punjab government officials and doctors to de-

However, some buses, with the cide on his hospitalisation. help of regular staff, left the Lud-The top court said Dallewal could be moved to the makeshift

and close contact with sick per-

the detection of two Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases in the state, the Karnataka government on Monday urged people not to panic as the virus is not as transmissible as Covid-19.

piratory infection (SARI) cases.

To prevent escalation of the spread of the virus, people are advised to cover their mouth and nose while coughing or sneezing, wash hands frequently with soap,

The advisory also advised people not to reuse tissue papers or handkerchiefs, share towels and linen and avoid spitting in public

causes flu-like symptoms including cough, fever, nasal congestion,

to bronchitis or pneumonia, especially in young children, the elderly, and immunocompromised

The virus spreads through respiratory droplets, close personal contact, and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus fol-

lowed by touching the mouth,

post hearing on farmers protests

In September, 2024, the SC

The panel in its initial report

flagged various reasons for agrar-

ian distress and listed reasons in-

cluding stagnant yield, rising costs,

debts and inadequate marketing

Singh, the committee comprises

retired IPS officer B S Sandhu,

agriculture expert Devinder

Sharma, professor Ranjit Singh

Ghuman and Dr Sukhpal Singh,

agricultural economist from the

Addressing the media after

meeting Dallewal, Justice (retd)

Nawab Singh said, "We pray to

Waheguru' that he should be

On being asked whether Dalle-

wal agreed to avail medical aid,

Nawab Singh said, "We all repeat-

edly requested him for medical

(help). We want his health to be

good." "I came here today not to

say that the agitation should end,"

the former judge said, "but to tell

him his health should be good. I

also told him that we are here

farming came first, his health later,

Dallewal told the panel for him

Supreme Court judge Justice

Surya Kant formed the committee

The committee reached the

Khanauri protest site at around

3.30 pm and met Dallewal after the

apex court hearing earlier in the

Samvukta Kisan Morcha (non-po-

litical) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha

have been camping at Shambhu

and Khanauri border points be-

tween Punjab and Haryana since

February 13, 2024, after their

march to Delhi was stopped by the

The farmers under the banner of

with some confidence, he said.

whenever he says so.

said the former judge.

healthy.

Punjab Agricultural University.

Aside from Justice (retd) Nawab



SC-panel meets Jagjit Dallewal

NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH, hospital set up within 700 metres Jan 6: After the Punjab governof the protest site at Khanauri borment informed the Supreme Court about a scheduled meeting with septuagenarian farmer leader Jagjit formed the committee with the aim Singh Dallewal, a SC-appointed to amicably resolve the grievances panel met him at around 3.30 pm of protesting farmers.

and N Kotiswar Singh was informed by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the Punjab government, that the protesting farmers had been persuaded to meet Justice (retd) Nawab Singh, who chairs the apex court-appointed

"Some of us have been able to

On hearing this, the bench said, "Let us hope and pray that better

January 10. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta,

tee requested the ailing farmer leader to avail medical aid.

mum support price for crops.

oned some health complications

On December 20, the apex court

Man held for stalking harassing teen girl THANE, Jan 6: A 40-year-old

security forces. (PTI)

man was arrested in Kashimira in Thane district on Monday for allegedly stalking and harassing a teenage girl, a police official said.

He used to follow the 15-yearold girl routinely and subject her to harassment, the Kashimira police station official said. "After the girl told her parents

about the ordeal, they kept a watch and caught the accused in the act today. He was handed over to police after several persons paraded him in a half-naked state. A video of the episode has gone viral on social media," the official said.

He was charged under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act provisions, the official added. (PTI)

SpaDeX docking postponed to Jan 9: ISRO

BENGALURU, Jan 6: ISRO on Monday said the docking experiment of SpaDeX satellites scheduled for January 7 is now postponed to January 9.

In a post on X, the Bengalurubased space agency said, "The SpaDeX Docking scheduled on (January) 7th is now postponed to 9th. The docking process requires further validation through ground simulations based on an abort scenario identified today." ISRO had successfully

launched the ambitious Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission on December 30. The PSLV C60 rocket carrying

two small satellites, SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target), along with 24 payloads, had lifted off from the first launchpad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, and about 15 minutes after liftoff, the two small spacecraft weighing about 220 kg each were launched into a 475-km circular orbit as intended.

According to ISRO, SpaDeX mission is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for the demonstration of in-space docking using two small spacecraft that was launched by PSLV. (PTI)

PM2.5 pollution up in Delhi for second year on trot: Report NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Delhi's anlution including vehicles, indus-

nual PM2.5 levels rose in 2024 for the second consecutive year, despite a 37 per cent drop in stubble burning in Punjab, Haryana and the national capital, according to a

The report by think tank Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) said Delhi's annual PM2.5 concentration increased to 104.7 microgrammes per cubic metre in 2024 -- a 3.4 per cent rise from the 2023 levels. This is also more than twice the national ambient air quality standard of 40 microgrammes per cubic metre.

While the 2024 average is still 9.6 per cent lower than the 2018 peak of 115.8 microgrammes per cubic metre, it is 3 per cent higher than the three-year average of 2021-2023, indicating a gradual reversal of earlier gains made between 2018 and 2022, it said.

The report highlighted that the total annual fire counts (on account of stubble burning) dropped by 37.5 per cent in 2024 in Delhi, Punjab, and Haryana. Punjab recorded a 75 per cent decline, and Harvana, a 37 per cent decline.

Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director, research and advocacy, CSE, said the rise in PM2.5 levels cannot be seen as an annual aberration due to meteorological factors and consistent rise indicates the impact of growing pollution in

"Delhi seems to be losing its air quality gains from past action. Local and regional sources of poltries, open burning of waste, use of solid fuels, construction and dust sources have offset the gains -- undermining the longer-term progress over the past decade.

"Delhi cannot hide behind the smoke screen of farm fires anymore. Despite a 71.2 per cent drop in stubble fire incidents during the October-December 2024, the winter pollution has remained elevated, upsetting the annual trend," she said

According to Sharanjeet Kaur, programme officer with CSE's Urban Lab, real-time data from Delhi's monitoring stations for the winter period (October 1-December 31) reveals a troubling 26 per cent surge in peak pollution levels compared to the previous year dur-

ing the early phase of winter. The city experienced 17 days of severe or worse air quality, alongside two extended smog episodes with average smog intensity of 371 microgrammes per cubic metre and 324 microgrammes per cubic

metre, respectively. This has kept the average levels elevated, Kaur said. Delhi recorded two major smog episodes this winter: from November 13-20 (about eight days) and from December 16-20 (about four days).

The average daily intensity of this smog stood at 371 microgrammes per cubic metre and 324 microgrammes per cubic metre, respectively. At least three continuous days of severe AQI is

considered a smog episode. (PTI) Rail infra expanded rapidly in past 10 years under PM Modi: Jitendra Singh

JAMMU, Jan 6: With Kashmir set to get connected with the rest of the country through rail link anytime soon, Union minister Jitendra Singh on Monday said the railway infrastructure recorded rapid expansion in the past 10 years across the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing a function organised at the Jammu railway station to mark the inauguration of the Jammu railway division by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Singh said Kashmir is getting connected by train very soon, fulfilling a long-lived dream.

The BJP MP from Udhampur also raised a question mark on the delay of over five decades in extending the railway line from Jammu to Kashmir Valley, as he urged people to celebrate the creation of the Jammu division for the bright future of their children.

The first train will go from here to Kashmir (very soon), giving a new impetus to business, industry and tourism besides creating new job opportunities in the region. Modi Ji has done it for us, in a realistic way," Singh said.

"Many elderly people will re-

member that exactly 53 years ago

in 1972, a train arrived at the

Jammu railway station. So the

question that arises is what took so long to extend the service to Kashmir," he said. "In the past five decades, many

service to Kashmir will be a subject of discussion. Were the priorities different or the earlier governments did not have the willpower? "Were there people who did not want Kashmir to be connected to

governments came and went.

Someday, this delay in extending

the rest of India by rail and be made a part of the national mainstream? Or was it the creator's will that we had to wait for 50 years for Modi to become the prime minister," Singh asked.

When the Modi-led government took over in 2014, the work on Kashmir's rail project was almost stopped as the railway line and its alignments were entangled in the midst of controversies, the minister said. But the government decided to go ahead with the work, leading to the construction of the world's highest railway bridge over Chenab river in Reasi district along the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla railway line, which was completed recently and is presently undergoing trial runs between Katra and

Srinagar, he said. Stating that the BJP-led government ensured fast-track work on the rail project to ensure its completion within the shortest possible time, Singh said, "Railway infrastructure in the country expanded at a very rapid pace in the past 10 years after Modi took over as the prime minister in 2014." (PTI)

charge sheet filed by Mumbai Postringent MCOCA. lice on Monday. The crime branch named 29 ac-Former Maharashtra minister cused in the 4,590-page charge sheet, including 26 already arrested and three wanted persons, including

Anmol Bishnoi, the brother of iailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi. Two other wanted persons are suspected co-conspirators, Mohammad Yasin Akhtar and Shubham Lonkar. Police said they have col-

lected strong evidence against all the 29 accused. The crime branch filed the charge

sheet in a special Maharashtra Con-

Police booked them under rele-

trol of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) court in Mumbai.

Police stated that Anmol Bishnoi, along with other members of his organised crime syndicate, hatched a conspiracy to create terror and dominance, leading to the invocation of

Siddique, 66, was shot dead on October 12, 2024, by three assailants outside his son Zeeshan Siddique's office in the Bandra area of Mumbai. The 26 arrested accused include the alleged main shooter Shivkumar Gautam and his aides.

vant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for murder before invoking MCOCA against all of them. The arrested accused are currently in judicial custody. (PTI)

No need for panic, HMPV not as to establish his crime network's dominance: Police transmissible as Covid: Karnataka govt

BENGALURU, Jan 6: Following

Emphasising that the respiratory virus primarily affects children, causing infections similar to the common cold, the Directorate of Medical Education (DME) said in a release that hospitals have been instructed to report influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute res-

avoid public places if symptomatic

According to DME, HMPV

and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, it can lead

individuals.

India ranks above global average in speaking English, Delhi leads chart: Pearson report

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: India ranks above global average in speaking English with Delhi leading the chart followed by Rajasthan, according to Global English Proficiency Report by Pearson.

The report released on Monday is an in-depth analysis of English proficiency trends across India, the Philippines, Japan, Egypt, Colombia and Europe. The Pearson Global English

Proficiency Report 2024 aggregated and analysed data from approximately 750,000 Versant tests conducted worldwide, offering a detailed snapshot of current skill levels and emerging trends. Versant by Pearson is an English Language assessment tool that accurately and efficiently evaluates candidates' English language proficiency, assisting businesses in hiring the best talent suited for their needs.

The report cited that while

India's average English skills score

(52) is lower than the global aver-

age English skills score (57), the

country's average English speak-

ing score (57) is higher (54). The report also said India's average English writing score (61) is equivalent to the global average writing score (61). Delhi led with the highest Eng-

lish speaking score (63) followed by Rajasthan (60) and Punjab (58). "In today's global economy, English proficiency is not just a skill but a strategic asset. The Pearson Global English Proficiency

Report 2024 provides business leaders with the data-driven insights they need to make informed decisions about hiring and developing their workforce. By integrating these insights into their talent strategies, organizations can enhance their competitive edge and drive growth," said Giovanni Giovannelli, president of Pearson's English Language Learning divi-

dian market has experienced significant growth in English skills in recent years, which is predicted to continue, with an emphasis on voice-based testing. "Indian Business leaders know

According to the report, the In-

that accurately testing English skills reduces the cost of mis-hires and protects credibility, particularly when hiring at scale. India's average writing score is 61, matching the global average, reflecting steady improvements driven by increased digital communication and the necessity for written English in global business contexts," it said.

In India, the finance and banking sector leads with the highest speaking score of 63, surpassing

the global average of 56, it said. "Conversely, Healthcare has the lowest score (45), influenced by its rapid expansion and the focus on increasing access to jobs... Other sectors like Tech, Consulting and BPO show strong performance, consistently aligning with or exceeding global benchmarks," the report said. (PTI)





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PAYAL KAPADIA'S 'ALL WE IMAGINE AS LIGHT' MISSES OUT AT GOLDEN GLOBES

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light" on Monday failed to convert its two nominations at the 82nd Golden Globe Awards into wins as the film lost to "Emilia Perez" in the Best Non-English Motion Picture Category and to Brady Corbet of "The Brutalist" fame in the Best Director segment.

Hours after the ceremony, Kapadia shared a throwback photograph with her producers Thomas Hakim, Julien Graff, and Ranabir Das as

they were heading to the Golden Globes. "We didn't win anything but had soo much fun (sic)" she captioned her Instagram Story.

The filmmaker also gave a shout-out to designer Payal Khandwala and stylist Indrakshi Pat-

"And a special thank you to @payalkhandwala for this amazing outfit... and @styledbyindrakshi for being the kindest, smartest stylist who helped me feel so confident," wrote Kapadia, who wore a black silk jumpsuit designed by Khandwala.

"All We Imagine As Light", about two Malayali nurses working in Mumbai and their friend, a cook, was nominated in the Best Motion Picture Non-English Language category alongside France's "Emilia Perez", "The Girl With the Needle" (Poland), "I'm Still Here" (Brazil), "The Seed of the Sacred Fig (Germany) and "Ver-

The Best Director Motion Picture category was equally competitive with nominees, including Jacques Audiard ("Emilia Perez"), Sean Baker ("Anora"), Edward Berger ("Conclave") and Coralie Fargeat ("The Substance").

An official India-French co-production, "All We Imagine..." stars Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha, and Chhaya Kadam. The Malayalam-Hindi movie is produced by Petit Chaos, Chalk & Cheese, and Another Birth.

"All We Imagine As Light" may have missed at the Golden Globes, but the film has been on a winning streak at international platforms since it scripted history by becoming the first film from India to win the Grand Prix trophy at the Cannes Film Festival last year.

The film is nominated in the Best Foreign Language Film category at the 30th annual Critics Choice Awards, to be held on January 12.

The movie was named the Best International Film by New York Film Critics Circle and won an award in the same category at the Gotham

It also claimed the top spot at the Sight and Sound magazine's annual list of 50 best movies of

It is also expected to earn nominations at the BAFTAs where it features in the longlist.

Corbet's "The Brutalist" revolves around a visionary architect and his wife, who flee post-war Europe in 1947 to rebuild their legacy and witness the birth of the modern United States. But their lives are changed forever by a mysterious, wealthy client.

"The Brutalist" was also crowned Best Drama Film and Best Actor for Adrian Brody. genre-shifting trans musical "Emilia Pérez" won Best film, Comedy or Musical. It also won Best Supporting Actress for Zoe Saldaña, Best Song ("El Mal") and Best Non-English Language Film.

"Emilia Perez", which is also France's official entry to Oscars 2025, follows four remarkable women in Mexico, each pursuing their own happiness. Cartel leader Emilia enlists Rita, an unappreciated lawyer, to help fake her death so that she can finally live authentically as her true self.

The Golden Globe Awards, telecast in the US on Sunday night, streamed live in India on Monday on Lionsgate Play. (PTI)



Glad our film will finally hit big screen: Kangana Ranaut on 'Emergency'

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Actor-filmmaker Kangana Ranaut shared the trailer of her much awaited film "Emergency" on Monday, calling the journey to the release of the political drama a long one "filled with challenges". Starring Ranaut as former prime minister Indira Gandhi, the film missed out on its September 6, 2024 release date as it was unable to obtain the clearance certificate from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

"Emergency" was mired in controversy after Sikh organisations, including the Shiromani Akali Dal, accused it of misrepresenting the community and getting facts wrong.

Ranaut, who also serves as director and producer on the film, said she is looking forward to its release on January 17.

"I'm glad that our film 'Emergency' will finally hit the big screen on 17th January. This story isn't just about a controversial leader; it delves into themes that remain profoundly relevant today, making the journey both difficult and significant," the actor-BJP MP said in a statement. "Releasing just a week before Republic Day, it's the perfect time to reflect on the resilience of our Constitution and experience the film with your loved ones." she added.

Ranaut shared the trailer of the film on her X handle.

She captioned her post as: "1975, Emergency - A Defining chapter in Indian History. Indira: India's most powerful woman. Her ambition transformed the nation, but her #EMERGENCY plunged it into chaos." "Emergency" delves into the emergency that was imposed by Indira Gandhi for 21 months from 1975 to 1977 and its aftermath. "As we mark 50 years since the 1975 Emergency, this film isn't just a historical retelling—it's a reflection on the resilience of democracy and a tribute to those who fought to protect it. 'Emergency' is a cinematic milestone that challenges audiences to question, engage, and remember the cost of freedom," added producer Umesh KR Bansal. (PTI)



Top filmmakers to mentor 'MAMI Select-Filmed on iPhone' initiative

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: The Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI), organizers of the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival, on Monday announced the second edition of 'MAMI Select - Filmed on iPhone' initiative, which will be mentored by eminent filmmakers Konkona Sensharma, Vetri Maran, Vikramaditya Motwane and Lijo Jose Pellissery.

The initiative is aimed at nurturing four new filmmakers from across India. They will be provided with a grant, the iPhone 16 Pro Max to shoot the film and the MacBook Pro to edit the film.

Four emerging filmmakers will be selected from across the country and they have to make four short films, each between 20 and 40 minutes long and presented in four languages: Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, and Tamil. The four selected filmmakers will be mentored by an illustrious panel, including actor and director Sensharma, Malayalam filmmaker Lijo Jose Pellissery, director-producer Vikramaditya Motwane and Tamil filmmaker Vetri Maaran.

From pre-production to post- production, these mentors will guide the filmmakers in pushing the boundaries of storytelling using cutting-edge technology.

The completed short films will premiere at a special screening event, followed by their release on the MAMI YouTube channel, ensuring widespread accessibility and audience engagement.

"As we embark on a new year with a new inclusive vision for MAMI to encourage independent cinema and fresh voices, I am delighted to announce MAMI Select -Filmed on iPhone where for the first time we have opened the call for applications across the country to make films in four regional languages," said Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, Festival Director, MAMI.

Motwane, who was part of the first initiative, said he is happy to be returning as a

"I was completely blown away by the quality of the storytelling and the technical finesse of the short films last year and I cannot wait to see what kind of magic the new batch of filmmakers create this year. I'm also honoured and excited to be working with my fellow mentors and genius filmmakers Konkona, Lijo and Vetri Maaran."

Sensharma said she is happy to partner with MAMI on this initiative, given its focus on enabling and providing a platform to fresh young filmmaking voices.

Pellisserry called "MAMI Select – Filmed on iPhone" an excellent initiative to foster the talent of budding filmmakers across

"Given the diversity of Indian cinema, I was so happy to hear that the aim of this programme is to identify and support filmmakers from different regions of India and to give them a platform to show their films. I am honoured that I was invited to be a mentor for the Malayalam film and I look forward to my interactions with the filmmaker and sharing my knowledge and expe-

Wish they become bigger than us: Ajay Devgn on nephew Aaman, Raveena Tandon's daughter Rasha

MUMBAI, Jan 6: Superstar Ajay Devgn on Monday said he hopes newcomers Aaman Devgan and Rasha Thadani, who are set to make their acting debut with "Azaad", go on to become bigger stars than him and colleague Raveena Tandon.

Aaman is Devgn's nephew and Thadani is the daughter of film distributor Anil Thadani and Tandon, who has worked with Devgn in films such as "Dilwale" (1994) and "Divya Shakti" (1993).

Devgn plays a pivotal role in "Azaad", a pre-Independence period drama directed by Abhishek Kapoor. The Hindi film is set to be released on January 17.

"I wish they go beyond us, they become bigger than us. (I hope) Whatever little we achieve, they get more than that. A lot of things have changed.

When we came into the industry, there was a certain rawness to us. Today's new generation is coming prepared which is a good thing. We were learning on the sets," the "Singham Again" star told reporters at the trailer launch of "Azaad"

Devgn said audiences earlier would be a little more "forgiving" towards new actors, but today it isn't so.

"Audiences used to forgive our mistakes somewhere but today's audience doesn't forgive anyone. So you have to come prepared. Hopefully, I feel these children have prepared well and Abhishek has guided them well... I feel no matter what you prepare it always feels less because I know the audience doesn't

forgive anyone today." The actor said the next generation needs to embark on their own journey.

"If you follow someone, then you will never succeed. You can take inspiration from many people but you need to figure your own path," he said.

Aaman said it was his uncle's 2002 period drama "The Legend of Bhagat Singh" which inspired him to become an

"The best advice I got from him (Devgn) was no matter how much success you achieve, you need to be grounded. If you genuinely want to achieve something, you have to be a good person," he added. Rasha said her mother asked her to fol-

low the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. "Putting in your best and then whatever

happens is up to god. This stuck with me because in this industry, there are a lot of emotions, overthinking, and, of course, a lot of trolls. If you listen to everyone, it will drain you," she said.

While Tandon and Devgn have worked together, the debutante said she first met him on the set of "Azaad"

"I was nervous. (But) He has this aura that just makes everyone feel comfortable. So, luckily throughout we felt secure and nice. It's just been such a fun experience." "Azaad" also features Diana Penty and Mohit Mallik in pivotal roles. The film is written by Ritesh Shah, Suresh Nair, and Abhishek Kapoor, and produced by Ronnie Screwvala and Pragya Kapoor. (PTI)



Jaideep Ahlawat's Hathi Ram Chaudhary sets out to unravel new mystery in 'Paatal Lok 2' trailer

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Actor Jaideep Ahlawat is returning as the world-weary 'jamunapar' police inspector Hathi Ram Chaudhary in "Paatal Lok 2", whose trailer, re-leased on Monday, promises a new mystery that takes its primary characters to Nagaland.

The eight-episode series, which is slated to stream on Prime Video from January 17, is directed by Avinash Arun Dhaware. Produced by Clean Slate Flimz in association with Eunoia Films, the crime thriller is written, created and executive produced by Sudip Sharma.

Ahlawat, who shot to great acclaim after the season one premiered in 2020, said the first season was a "milestone" in his career and the love he received for it still humbles

"Hathi Ram Chaudhary wasn't just a character, it became a mirror reflecting the complexities of society and humanity, striking a chord with millions worldwide. With Season 2, we delve even deeper into Hathi Ram's psyche. This season unravels the raw, vulnerable side of him as he grapples with new adversities, uncharted moral dilemmas, and his own shadows," he said in a statement. (PTI)

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INDIA'S BENCH STRENGTH: PLENTY OF BATTING OPTIONS; BOWLING TALENT SPARSE

SYDNEY, Jan 6: The nightmarish batting performance is deservedly under the scanner after India's meek surrender in the Border-Gavaskar series but a closer look at the team's bench strength would reveal that bowling resources are a bigger concern for the side as it navigates a difficult transition.

Skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli's Test future hangs in balance after their poor returns with the bat but the national selection committee has the reserves to ensure that the order remains a solid one even if the two giants were to be phased out. However, bowling, especially

pace, is a different story. The cupboard in the fast bowl-

take some time to prepare another crack line-up that can match up to the aura of Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma.

The available names are doing their best but is that enough for the team or for Bumrah, whose workload became a massive concern during the just-concluded

The spearhead was forced to watch from the dressing room during the last innings of the decisive fifth and final Test that India lost by six wickets as back spasms prevented him from

Mohammed Siraj, after 36 Tests, hasn't developed into a Krishna bowls too many loose balls. There is the duo of Akash Deep and Mukesh Kumar, who are skilful, but they are not really tested at the highest level.

In the Ranji circuit, there aren't too many exciting fast bowling options that the selectors can explore as of now.

The main problem seems to be a dearth of left-arm seamers as Arshdeep Singh hasn't actually set the stage on fire and Yash Daval doesn't look a finished product.

But when it comes to batting there is some real talent available although the Ajit Agarkar-led selection committee will not decide anything till the end of the Ranji



If the panel decides to move the two announce retirements,

there are at least half a dozen name ready to stake a claim for away from Rohit and Kohli or the two slots that will open up.

Tamil Nadu.

The elegant left-hander impressed in his appearance for India A against Australia A in Mackay but then he had a sports hernia operation and is undergoing rehabilitation.

As and when Sudharsan is ready and if there are at least a couple of slots, he should be in contention provided he is in form and has the requisite fitness levels. In the current set-up, there is Devdutt Padikkal, another stylish and sinewy left-hander, who has played a couple of Tests.

Abhimanyu Easwaran has been around the side for three years now but there is a belief in an indication that he is quite low the Indian cricketing circle that in the pecking order. (PTI)

he is not cut out for bigger challenges in SENA (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia). A proof of it the recent series, where he travelled with the squad but wasn't even remotely in contention for a playing XI slot in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. For Sarfaraz Khan, his technique against real quick bowling was always doubtful but the manner in which he got out in Pune and Mumbai in the home Tests against New Zealand has made the current team management wary.

In most of the venues, Sarfaraz didn't even come out to bat during the customary net sessions,

Harmanpreet, Renuka rested; Mandhana to lead team in home ODIs against Ireland



NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Prolific opener Smriti Mandhana was on Monday named captain of the Indian women's cricket team for this month's three-match home ODI series against Ireland after regular

skipper Harmanpreet Kaur was

Also given a break was pacer Renuka Singh Thakur, the BCCI announced in a press release. The short series against Ireland will begin on January 10 at Rajkot and all three games will be played

at the same venue. Harmanpreet had injured her knee during the home series against the West Indies last month,

forcing her to sit out of the last two T20Is before returning to play three ODIs.

Before that, the 35-year-old had sustained a neck injury during the match against Pakistan in the

Women's T20 World Cup in October last year. Lead pacer Renuka was the

player of the series in the ODIs against the West Indies after taking 10 wickets from three matches. In the past, a stress fracture of

the back had troubled her. The move to rest her for the series against Ireland could be to ease her workload.

The Indian women's team will enter the games against Ireland on a high after recording its first home T20 International series triumph in five years by beating the West Indies 2-1 last month.

It then went on to blank the travelling side 3-0 in the ODIs that followed. The 28-year-old Mandhana was in scintillating form during the assignment, notching up three consecutive half centuries in the T20 Internationals. She also scored two fifties during the ODIs.

India squad: Smriti Mandhana (C), Deepti Sharma (VC), Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Jemimah Rodrigues, Uma Chetry (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Tejal Hasabnis, Raghvi Bist, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Tanuja Kanwer, Titas Sadhu, Saima Thakor, Sayali Satghare.

Schedule (All matches in Rajkot, starts at 11 AM) 1st ODI: January 10

2nd ODI: January 12 3rd ODI: January 15. (PTI)

Learnt a lot in Australia, we'll be back stronger: Jaiswal



NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Young India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal on Monday termed his maiden tour of Australia a learning experience and vowed to come back stronger after India went down 1-3 to Australia, surrendering the Border-Gavaskar

The 23-year-old left-handed batter was one of India's standout performers, amassing 391 runs at an average of 43.44, the second-highest in the series. His contributions included a stellar 161 in the Perth Test, which India won by

fifties, but India failed to rewickets at Sydney on Sunday.

"I learnt a lot in Australia... Unfortunately, the result (PTI)

wasn't what we had hoped for, but we'll be back stronger. Your support means everything," Jaiswal wrote on his Instagram page.

The defeat also dashed India's hopes of securing a spot in the World Test Championship final, with Australia now set to face South Africa.

India's loss has left fans and experts disappointed, but legcricketer Sunil Gavaskar backed young talents like Jaiswal and Nitish Kumar Reddy, emphasising the need for hungry players who treat their wicket with ut-

"They are hungry to earn a tain the Trophy for the first name for India and themtime in a decade, after losing selves. Such players are the fifth and final Test by six needed. You need such players who will protect their wicket like their life," he had said.

Former India all-rounder Rishi Dhawan retires from domestic limited-over tournaments

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Former India allrounder Rishi Dhawan has announced his retirement from domestic limitedover tournaments after the conclusion of the group stage matches of the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Dhawan, who played three ODIs and a T20I for India in 2016, took the decision after Himachal Pradesh failed to advance to the knockout stages of the tournament.

However, the 34-year-old will be available for selection for the remainder of the Ranji Trophy season, starting from

"It's with a heavy heart, even though I have no regrets, that I'd like to announce my retirement from Indian cricket (Limited over). It's a sport that has defined my life for the past 20 years," Dhawan wrote in a social media post. "This game has given me immeasurable joy and countless memories that will always stay very close to my heart," he added. Dhawan, who had led Himachal to their only Hazare title in 2021-22, had a middling run this year, making 196 runs in seven matches at an average of 39.20 with a

A brisk medium pacer, Dhawan took wrote, Overall, Dhawan played 134 List eight wickets from seven matches this season. "I want to take a moment to show my gratitude towards the opportunities that were given to me by the Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI), Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association (HPCA), Punjab Kings, Mumbai Indians and Kolkata Knight Riders.

"From humble beginnings to representing my nation on the grandest stages, it has been a privilege beyond measure. Cricket has been my passion, and my reason for waking up every morning," he

A matches and scored 2906 runs, besides taking 186 wickets. From 135 T20s, Dhawan amassed 1740 runs and 118

"I would like to thank all of my coaches, mentors, teammates, and support staff for the valuable contributions you have made to shaping me into the person I am today," he concluded his post. In the IPL, Dhawan played for Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians between 2013 and 2024 with limited suc-

Focus on Satwik-Chirag as Indians look for strong start at season-opening Malaysia Open

India's doubles duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will aim for a strong result, Lakshya Sen will look to build on his recent form and HS Prannoy will hope to shake off rust after a lengthy break at the season-opening Malaysia Super 1000 tournament starting here on Tuesday.

For Satwik and Chirag, seeded seventh, this USD 1.45 million event marks the start of a new season like it did in 2024.

Last year, although they narrowly missed out on the title, the pairing went on to reach three more finals, winning two of

The Asian Games gold medallists were in exceptional form and will be hoping to replicate that success this year. Having reunited with Malaysian coach Kim Tan Her, the former world number ones are determined to go the distance, but they face a

tough challenge ahead. The high calibre of opponents in their draw will make the path

Satwik and Chirag, who reached the semifinals of the 2024 China Masters in their last event, will open their campaign against the pair of Ming Che Lu and Tang Kai Wei from Chinese

If they progress, they are likely to face a quarterfinal clash against Indonesia's fourth seeds Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Rian Ardianto, a matchup that promises to be a thrilling contest. In men's singles, Lakshya will

look to carry forward his recent success after ending a long title drought with a victory at the Syed Modi International Super 300 and a third-place finish at the King Cup International last

These wins have given him much-needed confidence, and he will aim to make a deep run in the Super 1000 event.

Prannoy, on the other hand, will be returning to action after a five-month hiatus following his prequarterfinal exit at the Paris Olympics. The 32-year-old, who



will be missing from the tourna-

ment, having recently got mar-

ried. In her absence, other Indian

players -- Malvika Bansod,

Aakarshi Kashyap, and Anupama

Upadhyaya will look to make

Malvika will open against

Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei, Aakarshi

will face Denmark's Julie Dawall

Jakobsen, and Anupama has a

tough task ahead as she faces

Pornpawee

their mark.

eighth-seeded

had to take a break due to chikun- Olympic medallist PV Sindhu gunya and to regain his fitness, will be hoping to shake off any

His first test will be against Canada's Brian Yang in the opening round.

Priyanshu Rajawat, who has shown flashes of brilliance but has struggled with consistency, will face seventh-seeded Chinese player Li Shi Feng in his opening

In women's singles, two-time

Gopichand, seeded sixth, will look to carry the momentum from a maiden Super 300 title in Lucknow and its participation in the season-ending BWF World Tour Finals. The Indian combination will Thailand's Ornnicha Jongsathapornparn and Sukitta

Suwachai in their opening match. Eighth seeds Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who retained the Guwahati Masters Super 100 title, will take on Japan's Misaki Matsutomo and Chiharu Shida in their first match.

In women's doubles, the Indian

duo of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri

The Panda sisters, Rutuparna and Swetaparna, will also be in action, looking to make their presence felt.

In mixed doubles, Tanisha Crasto will partner Dhruv Kapila, while Sathish Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath, along with Ashith Surya and Amrutha Pramuthesh, will also compete in their respective events. (PTI)

Bahadur Sagoo to succeed Sumariwalla as AFI chief CHANDIGARH, Jan 6: Sandeep Mehta will be elected Asian Games gold medallist unopposed as the AFI secreshot putter Bahadur Singh tary. He was the senior joint

Asian Games gold winner

Sagoo will be elected unopposed as the president of Athletics Federation of India (AFI) at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) here on Tuesday, succeeding the long-serving Adille Sumariwalla for the top post.

The 51-year-old Sagoo won a shot put gold in the 2002 Busan Asian Games and also took part in 2000 and 2004 Olympics. He is a member of the outgoing executive council as an Athletes Commission representative.

He is also a member of the senior selection committee. Sagoo is the lone candidate left in the fray after incumbent

senior vice president Anju Bobby George opted out of the race for the top post. Anju will, however, remain as the senior vice president for a second term.

The first agenda item of the two-day AGM is the appointment of the new AFI office bearers for the next four years. Sagoo had won the men's shot put gold in the 2002 Asian Games with a throw of 19.03m. He has a lifetime best of 20.40m, and is also a Padma Shri recipient. There will also

be no elections for the remaining posts, just like it happened during the last AGM in 2020. Delhi unit's top official

secretary in the outgoing executive council.

Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, who won 800m and 1500m gold in the 1998 Asian Games, will be the joint secretary and Stanely Jones of Telangana will be elected the treasurer. Sikdar was also a member of the outgoing executive council as an Athletes Commission representative.

Among the new executive committee members will be Sudha Singh, who won 3000m steeplechase gold in 2010 Asian Games, former 100m national record holder Rachita Mistry, Harjinder Singh and Priyanka Bhanot -- daughter of AFI Planning Commission Chairman Lalit Bhanot.

The 67-year-old Sumariwalla has served as AFI president since 2012 and he is not eligible to contest elections this time under the existing National Sports Code.

His stewardship of the AFI saw Neeraj Chopra win a historic gold and a silver in the Tokyo and Paris Olympics respectively.

Sumariwalla is currently a member of the powerful executive board of World Athletics.

The AFI has invited an observer from the international body, World Athletics, for the AGM. (PTI)

Aswini Kumar Chetia & Tolan Chetia Memorial Football begins in Hanhchora

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HT Corresppondent SIVASAGAR, Jan 6:

Aswini Kumar Chetia &Tolan Chetia Memorial Invitational Football Championship, organised by Tai Ahom Students' Union, got underway in Hanhchora HS School Field on Monday. In the inaugural match Evening Star FC, Nazira defeated Hanchora FCC 4-3 through tie breaker.

Inaugurating the football championship, Manoj Kumar Borthakur, vice president of Sivasagar Sports Association, said that sports is the only natural activity of human beings while all other activities are done under compulsion. Inugural ceremony was attended by Brajen Phukan, Member of State Women Commission Binita Saikia Deb, Pallobi Chetia, Prabin Chetia, Utpal Gohain, Jatin Chetia, principal, Hanchora HS School, Akhil Gogoi, ATASU president Basanta Gogoi.

Australia's tactics to break down Rohit Sharma were successful: Kerry O'Keeffe



SYDNEY, Jan 6: Indian skipper Rohit Sharma wilted under the traditional Australian tactic of mentally breaking down the opposition captains during the just-concluded Border-Gavaskar Trophy, said former spinner Kerry O'Keeffe.

India lost the five-match series 1-3 and Rohit made just 31 runs from three Tests at an average of 6.20.

"They couldn't bring down (Jasprit) Bumrah. He was too good. But then the baton was passed to Rohit Sharma and they brought him down straight away, to the extent that he withdrew from the final Test," O'Keeffe told Fox Sports.

"So that's a tactic they seem to

want to do if they can, if they can

break the skipper and make him

anonymous, it empowers them," he

It may be recalled that former Australian pacer Glenn McGrath used to make pre-series predictions as how many times he will dismiss the opposition captain and it often worked against the likes of ex-England skipper Michael

Atherton. Bumrah led India in the first Test at Perth in the absence of Rohit, who stayed back in India for the birth of his second child.

India won the match by 295 runs. The 37-year-old Rohit took over

Adelaide, but his personal form and the team's fortunes went south from that point

Eventually, Rohit "opted out" of the fifth and final Test Sydney with Bumrah returning to guide the side.

The 75-year-old further validated his point saying the Aussies could not dominate Ajinkya Rahane during the 2021-22 series which India

"They couldn't get Ajinkya Rahane the last time and he won the series," he said.

O'Keeffe, who played 24 Tests and two ODIs for Australia, said Australia had employed a similar strategy against captains of other visiting teams.

"But if you look at the captains they've brought down in recent times, Sharma. Tick. Shan Masood with Pakistan. It was threenil. Kraigg Brathwaite, it was one-all, but they were on top of

"They went to New Zealand and brought down Tim Southee, winning two-nil," O'Keeffe added.

The leg-spinner also said veteran batter and former India skipper Virat Kohli had become "bunny" of pacer Scott Boland in the series.

After a hundred in Perth, Kohli was dismissed repeatedly poking outside the off-stump and ended the series with 190 runs at an average of 23.75. (PTI)

Injured Jasprit Bumrah likely to miss majority of home white-ball series against England

Jasprit Bumrah, who sustained back spasms, is likely to be rested for the majority of India's home white-ball series against England, keeping an eye on the ICC Champions Trophy, starting from Febru-

Bumrah, who was India's stand out player with 32 wickets in their 1-3 thrashing at the hands of Australia in the just-concluded Border-Gavaskar Trophy, couldn't bowl in the final innings of the series here after suffering back spasms.

The 30-year-old Bumrah who bowled more than 150 overs in the

The injury has a direct link to his excessive workload in the series, and the BCCI medical team will try to ensure the new Test captain is ready for the ICC showpiece where his presence is mandatory to India's fortunes.

According to sources privy to the development, the grade of Bumrah's back spasm has not yet been ascertained. India will open their Champions Trophy campaign against Bangladesh on February 20 in Dubai. If Bumrah's injury is in grade 1 category, then it will take a minimum two to three weeks of rehabilitation before Return to Play (RTP).

In case of Grade 2 injury, the recovery can go up to six weeks while Grade 3, the most severe in nature, requires a minimum three



months of rest and rehabilitation programmes.

It was always known that Bumrah will not play T20I bilateral series as this is not the World Cup year, but with the Champions Trophy around the corner, he would have certainly played two if not three ODIs against England as its

the 50-over format

But now, the grade of his injury will decide whether Bumrah plays the England series at all or at least the last match at his home ground in Ahmedabad on February 12 to check on his fitness. India will face England in five T20Is and three ODIs from January 22. (PTI)

ICC, BCCI, CA, ECB explore possibility of two-tier Test system

SYDNEY/NEW DELHI, Jan 6: The ICC in collaboration with cricket boards of India, Australia and England is exploring the possibility of a two-tier Test system to facilitate more series between big

The Age reported that Jay Shah, the new ICC chairman, is set to meet Cricket Australia chair Mike Baird and his England counterpart Richard Thompson later this month to discuss the finer points.

"Any plan for a move to two divisions in Test cricket would kick in after the end of the current Future Tours Program in 2027," the Age reported quoting its sources.

The BCCI is currently gearing up for its Special General Meeting on January 12 in Mumbai where interim secretary Devajit Saikia is expected to get a full-time role. Saikia was appointed in the interim role after Shah vacated his post last month to take over as ICC chair-

A BCCI official indicated that the discussion floated around the ICC corridors in 2016, the firsttime when a two-tier Test system

was seriously considered. "We don't have any news of any such move as yet. Currently, preparations are being made for SGM and the recent tour to Australia too needs to be discussed.

"There was such a move sometime back, but we haven't heard anything since," a BCCI source

The BCCI and cricket bodies of Zimbabwe and Bangladesh opposed the move, citing the possi-



bility of decreasing revenue. They had also argued that smaller nations would miss out on the opportunity of playing against top teams if such a system comes into existence.

However, nine years down the road the modalities have changed and even some of the reputed experts such as former Indian skipper Ravi Shastri are supporting the di-

"I've been a firm believer in that if you want Test cricket to survive and be alive and thriving, I think that's the way to go.

"The top teams play against each other more often, so there is a contest; you want contests," Shastri told SEN during the recent fifth Test between India and Australia.

Even some of the top players such as England Test skipper Ben Stokes had criticised the current model of World Test Championship. (PTI)

Indonesia fires head coach ahead of vital **World Cup qualifiers**

JAKARTA (INDONESIA), Jan 6: Indonesia has dismissed Shin Tae-yong as head coach of its national team, the country's federation announced on Monday.

"This decision was made based on long and mature considerations and evaluations carried out by as a whole regarding the team's performance and the long-term goals that the Indonesian National Football Team wants to achieve" the Indonesian federation, known locally as PSSI, said in a statement.

Appointed in 2020, the South Korean boss had led Indonesia to the third round of qualification for the 2026 World Cup for the first time. In November, the team defeated Saudi Arabia 2-0 to move into third place in the six-team group with four games remaining.

At a press conference in Jakarta, PSSI chairman Erick Thohir, who handed Shin a contract extension to 2027 last June, explained the deci-

"The dynamics of the national team need special attention from us," Thohir said. "We see the need for a leader who can better implement strategies agreed upon by the players, good communication and better implementation." There was no announcement of a replacement, though there is speculation that the new boss could be European.

The national team's recent success has been driven by the naturalization of players of Indonesian heritage, born and raised in Europe. Of the team that started November's victory over Saudi Arabia, only Marselino Ferdinan, who scored both goals, was born in the Southeast Asian nation. Indonesia's next qualifier is against

Australians were pleased about Bumrah not bowling on third day at SCG, admit Khawaja and Head



ters Usman Khawaja and Travis Head have conceded that the incomparable Jasprit Bumrah's absence on the third day of the series-deciding fifth Test played a mare facing him on that wicket. As big role in their team's victory against India on the bowler-

friendly SCG deck. Laid low by back spasm, Bumrah could not bowl on the spiciest wicket of the series as India failed to defend a small 162-run target to lose the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time in a decade.

Such was Bumrah's impact on the series that the Australians heaved a sigh of relief when they realised that the injured pacer would not be taking the field. Khawaia was one of the worst sufferers through the long series.

"I was just getting Bumrah'd. It was tough work. I have to face this

guy with the new ball every single time. "You never want to see anyone injured and it's a shame he was but thank God for us. Today would've been an absolute nightsoon as we didn't see him out there we thought 'alright, we've got a chance here'," Khawaja told ABC Sport. The 38-year-old Khawaja, who has scored over 5500 runs in Test cricket, said that Bumrah just did not give him any opportunity to score runs off him.

"He's the toughest bowler I've ever faced. And I have faced him in 2018. He got me out once, he was alright, he was good but he has been something else this year. He has got his tail up," Khawaja said.

Bumrah, who took 32 wickets in the rubber at an average of 13.06 and was named the Player of the Series, dismissed the batter six

times. Asked about what made facing Bumrah such a daunting task, Khawaja said, "The wickets have definitely helped him. He is six years more mature. He understands his skills, who he is bowl-

"He has different plans for everyone. I always felt like no matter how good a bowler is I can always get something to score runs, but I did not get anything at all from him. He's just so hard. I don't have to face him again, thank God.'

Khawaja's views were seconded by the swashbuckling lefthanded batter Travis Head during a chat with the broadcasters.

"I think there were 15 people really pleased that Bumrah didn't bowl today. He's a great performer, he had an exceptional tour," Head said.

Head, who made two big hundreds in the series before signing off with an unbeaten 34 on Sunday, spoke about how his 46-run stand with Khawaja for the fourth wicket gave him the belief that they would win the game.

"Nice to contribute, I don't worry about the results too much. Two great teams, felt like it would be nice if I could come out and contribute. Same approach as always, felt like I was moving well, knew that if I could build a partnership with Usman we would be well placed. (PTI)

Odisha government announces three-year sponsorship for Indian kho kho team

BHUBANESWAR, Jan 6: The Odisha government on Monday announced a three-year sponsorship deal for the Indian national kho kho team, marking a significant step forward in promoting indigenous sports in the country.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said the state will invest Rs 5 crore annually from January 2025 to December 2027, with funding provided through the Odisha Mining Corporation.

The total sponsorship package of Rs 15 crore demonstrates Odisha's continued commitment to sports development, following its successful partnership with Indian hockey. This initiative aims to elevate Kho Kho's status and provide essential support to the national team.

'This is a watershed moment for Kho Kho in India. By supporting our indigenous sports, we are not only preserving our cultural heritage but also creating new opportunities for our athletes," said

"Just as we transformed Indian hockey, we envision a similar renaissance for Kho Kho, positioning Odisha as a catalyst for sporting ex-

Sudhanshu Mittal, President of the Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI), welcomed the announcement, as the country prepares to host the sport's first ever World Cup from January 13-19 in New Delhi

"Odisha's commitment to Kho Kho represents a turning point for this traditional sport. This sponsorship will significantly enhance our ability to develop world-class athletes and promote Kho Kho on the global stage," Mittal said. (PTI)

Harbhajan says 'superstar culture' not taking team forward, wants performance-based selection



NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh has urged the BCCI to end the "superstar culture" in the team and pick players for future assignments solely on the basis of performance and not on reputation.

Harbhajan's stinging remarks came after India's 1-3 Test series defeat to Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time in a decade.

'There is a superstar culture which has developed. We don't need superstars, we need performers. If the team has them (performers), it will move forward. Whoever wants to become a superstar should stay at home and play cricket there," the spin great said on his Youtube channel.

"There is a tour of England coming up. Now everyone has started talking about what will happen in England, who will go, who will not go. For me, it is a simple matter. Only players who are performing should go. You can't keep picking players on their

"If you do that, then you should take Kapil Dev sir and Anil bhai also. Here, the BCCI and the selectors will have to be firm and act tough. I don't think that the superstar attitude is taking the team forward.'

Captain Rohit Sharma and star batter Virat Kohli were woefully out of form during the just-concluded Test series against Australia. The series defeat resulted in the team losing out on qualifying for the World Test Cham-Kohli could manage only 190 runs in his

nine innings in the series Down Under, repeatedly offering edges to the slip cordon or Harbhajan said the struggling players should play some form of cricket and prove

themselves if they wish to be picked for the England Test tour. "It should be based on performance only, whether it is Virat, Rohit or anyone. No player is bigger than the game, even if he thinks in his mind that he is a big superstar. have to ask tough questions.

"I am not saying that you should drop them but if you take them on tour, they (struggling players) should play some form of cricket whether county cricket or something before England tour.

"This will be a challenge for the selectors, but it's time for selectors to wake up and take some action.

"I don't say that any player be dropped, and unnecessarily start chopping and dropping but at least there should be a procedure as to who will get how many chances and for how long, because in India there is a long queue of talents."

He also spoke about Kohli's struggles in the past few years.

"Virat has played 11 Tests in 2024 and scored 440 runs. The average is 23.15, with one hundred and one fifty. Such an average may be unheard of because he is a very big name. This stat is obviously very low. When I saw it, it was a shocking stat for me too.

"If you give a youngster an opportunity, I feel he will also be able to do this much (match the stats of Kohli).' Harbhajan said India would have lost the series 0-5 or 0-4 if Jasprit Bumrah was not

part of the team. "He was used like you squeezed juice from sugarcane. It was like 'Travis Head has

If we have to take Indian cricket forward, we come, give the ball to Bumrah, Marnus has come, give the ball to Bumrah, Steve Smith has come, give the ball to Bumrah'.

"How many overs will Bumrah bowl? He has been reduced to such a condition that he was not available at the end. If he was there, Australia may have won the fifth Test but they would have lost eight wickets, it would have been tough for them.

"You broke his back and the management should have decided on how many overs he should be given.'

Harbhajan also criticised the team selection for the fifth Test in Sydney which India lost by six wickets.

"The team selection was not right. Two spinners were played on a spicy pitch, you saw green patches. It is beyond my understanding that despite playing so much cricket and watching so much cricket you do not understand such a small thing... what to do on such pitch.

"The gentleman who has gone there and sitting there together if he is not able to understand this thing then I don't know what he is doing.

"What is the point of having two spinners on this pitch. Your spinners did bowl very little, you are just making batting line-up onger. It is not right, they are just stuck in their stubbornness. This is not a T20 format, this is Test cricket." (PTI)

Sriram, Reyes-Varela advance; Nagal exits

doubles duo of N Sriram Balaji and Miguel Reyes-Varela advanced to the Adelaide International pre-quarterfinals while Sumit Nagal fought hard before making an early exit at the Auckland ASB Classic on Monday. The Indo-Mexican pair of Balaji

and Reyes-Varela staged a remarkable comeback to defeat Rohan Bopanna and his new Colombian partner Nicolas Barrientos 4-6, 6-Bopanna, who ended his twoyear partnership with Australia's

Matthew Ebden and paired up with Barrientos ahead of the Australian Open, had a stellar first-serve per-With an 81 first-serve percentage and winning 76 per cent of those points, their clinical service

game made the difference. Despite losing the first set, Balaji and Reyes-Varela improved their game to dominate the second set, taking advantage of their opponents' faltering serve and return

Their aggressive approach allowed them to break serve multiple

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Indian times and level to take the match into the tiebreaker where they showed fine composure to prevail in one-hour and 15 minutes.

The unseeded duo will face

fourth seed Finnish-Briton pair of Harri Heliovaara and Henry Patten in the last-16 of the ATP 250 meet. India's top singles player Nagal put up a spirited fight before falling to his USA rival Alex

Michelsen 7-6 (8), 4-6, 2-6 in a

gruelling two-hour, 40-minute bat-

Nagal edged the first set in a tense tie-break but Michelsen's improved consistency and stronger service game in the subsequent

sets proved too much for Nagal. Nagal fought valiantly, saving 70 per cent of break points and taking the first set with a gritty tiebreak win.

His return game remained competitive, winning 58 per cent of points on Michelsen's second

However, Nagal struggled to maintain momentum, particularly on his second serve, where he managed just 33 per cent of points.

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