

**6** WORLD

- Hezbollah fires rockets at Israel in 'initial response'
- Bangladesh train arson: Opposition BNP leader among eight arrested

**8** NATION

- Navy trying to hunt down pirates involved in hijacking attempt
- Modi changed country's political culture: BJP chief Nadda

## Additional chief secretary to investigate into Titabor youth death case

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Jan 6:** The Assam government has directed additional chief secretary KC Samaria who is also the chairman of Assam Revenue Board to investigate the cause and circumstances of the death of Dipankar Gogoi, son of Khagen Gogoi of Birinasayek Gariguri village on December 26, by reportedly hanging from a tree, under Titabor police station in Jorhat district.



KC Samaria will be present on January 8, 2024 at 10 am onwards in the meeting room of the office of the sub-divisional officer (Civil) of Titabor to receive written statements/reports from the persons or individuals concerned related to the incident and the circumstances under which the incident occurred. If anyone desiring to meet the additional chief secretary in person then such individual should inform the district commissioner of Jorhat in advance, so that the additional chief secretary may be informed in

this regard. It may be mentioned that Gogoi was found hanging from a tree behind his house on December 26, 2023. The incident created uproar by his family and various organizations on the grounds of alleged torture by police when he was taken to the police station several times regarding grenade blast at the Military Station, Lichubari on December 14 night. The police, however, refuted allegations of torture and stated that was sent back in good health.

## Another feather on its cap: PM hailing ISRO success

# India's maiden solar mission craft Aditya L1 reaches destination

**BENGALURU, Jan 6:** In yet another success of its space programme, India's first solar mission craft Aditya L1 on Saturday reached its destination, the L1 point, about 1.5 million kilometres from Earth from where it will orbit the Sun and study our star's wonders, uninterrupted by eclipses and occultation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the announcement about ISRO's latest feat, which comes months after the success of Chandrayaan-3 where the space agency achieved the challenging soft landing of the craft on the lunar surface. The Lagrange point 1 (L1) of the Sun-Earth system is about one per cent of the total distance between the Earth and the Sun. A satellite in a halo orbit around the L1 point has the major advantage of continuously viewing the Sun without any occultation / eclipses, ISRO officials said, adding, this will provide a greater advantage in ob-



India's first solar observatory Aditya-L1 reaches its destination. It is a testament to the relentless dedication of our scientists in re-

alising among the most complex and intricate space missions. I join the nation in applauding this extraordinary feat. We will continue to pursue new frontiers of science for the benefit of humanity," he said in a post on micro-blogger site 'X'. Union minister Jitendra Singh, who among others holds the Space portfolio, said: "From Moon walk to Sun Dance! What a glorious turn of year for Bharat!" "Under the visionary leadership of PM @narendramodi, yet another success story scripted by Team #ISRO. #AdityaL1 reaches its final orbit to discover the mysteries of Sun-Earth connection," he wrote on 'X'. According to ISRO, the Halo-Orbit Insertion (HOI) of Aditya-L1 was accomplished at 4 pm approximately on Saturday. The final phase of the maneuver involved firing of control engines for a short duration, it said in a statement. ISRO chairman S Somanath said (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

### HT BRIEFS

4 policemen held

**GUWAHATI:** Four police personnel have been arrested in Assam's Hailakandi district for allegedly demanding money from trucks carrying smuggled areca nuts, an officer said on Saturday. They were apprehended from a place near the inter-state border with Mizoram, he said. Information was received that the four constables, engaged at a naka checking under the Bilalpur Police Station jurisdictions, were demanding money from truckers and allowing goods vehicles carrying smuggled areca nuts to pass without valid documents.

### Rahul to launch Nyay Yatra in Manipur

**GUWAHATI:** Congress spokesperson Mahima Singh on Saturday said party leader Rahul Gandhi has chosen Manipur to launch the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' due to his concern over the situation in that state. She also alleged that the BJP is not bothered about the problems faced by people, and it is only concentrating on "headline management". "The BJP, wherever it is in power, is concerned with headline management and people's issues have been sidelined," Singh, also the in-charge of communication and media coordination in Assam for the yatra, told reporters here.

### Illegal Burmese supari seized

**BOKAJAN:** Karbi Anglong police recovered illegal Burmese supari from a container truck. The container truck, AS 01 NC 5128, was intercepted and checked at lahorijan patrol post under Dillai police station. The truck was coming from Dimapur and going towards Manja, on NH 38. The illegal Burmese supari was recovered from inside the cabin of the truck inside a secret chamber. 1,798 kg of burmese supari was seized and one Md Ariful islam (31), a resident of Pallitul under Jugighopa police station, Bongaigaon was arrested.

## Development of Brahmaputra's north bank due to PM's effort: Sonowal

**HT correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Jan 6:** Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush, Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the rapid progress and development of the north bank of Brahmaputra while attending the 9th biennial session of All Assam Sonowal Kachari Students' Union (AASKSU) in Dhemaji district. Speaking on the occasion, Sonowal said, "Under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is progressing at a rapid speed. The most important facet of this growth story is that it is not limited to a few urban pockets but a sincere attempt has been made to ensure that the development trickles down to the interiors of the country. His inspiring leadership has ensured that our policy framework executes strategies that are focussed on the holistic and well round develop-



ment of the country. Never has there been a government that has given so much due attention for the progress and development of the north-east than that under Prime Minister Modi. With the record number of visits by the Prime Minister, the government machinery has been constantly revved up to deliver and bring about holistic development for the people of the re-

## Goyal remains optimistic about USD 2 trillion export target

**KOLKATA, Jan 6:** Union commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday expressed optimism that the country will meet its ambitious USD 2 trillion export target by 2030, notwithstanding geopolitical headwinds and inflationary concerns. Speaking at the inauguration of the Patsan Bhavan, which houses the Jute Commissioner's office and headquarters of Jute Corporation of India and National Jute Board, in New Town, Kolkata, Goyal acknowledged the challenging global situation. He cited the Ukraine war, the Israel conflict and issues related to the Red Sea as factors impacting trade. "To address low food grain production and curb domestic inflation, we have implemented restrictions. However, despite all these challenges, India's exports will (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Rhinos step into Laokhowa-Burachapori wildlife sanctuaries

**GOLAGAHAT/ TEZPUR, Jan 6:** Rhinos have returned to Laokhowa and Burachapori wildlife sanctuaries of Assam, 40 years after the population of pachyderms in the area was wiped out due to poaching, Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. These protected areas had also witnessed human encroachment over the years, which was cleared by the authorities last year, a forest official said. "Happy to share that after 40 years our iconic Rhinos have returned to Laokhowa and Burachapori. They have returned within 1 year of our successful anti-encroachment operation in the region," Sarma wrote on X. A total of 51.7 sq km of forest cover has been retrieved through eviction drives in 2023, he said on Friday. Kaziranga National Park (KNP) director Sonali Ghosh said two rhinos have been spotted in the Laokhowa-Burachapori wildlife sanctuaries, which are part of 'Greater Kaziranga', after almost a gap of 40 years. She said the Laokhowa-Burachapori forest in Nagaon district had a population of 45-50 rhinos till 1983. "They were poached and after that, there was degradation of grassland habitat due to anthropogenic pressure. Stray rhinos from the north bank (Orang National Park) and eastern side (Kaziranga) were known to enter through the Brahmaputra chopari areas but never stayed for long," she said. Ghosh said rhinos have been "sighted in the first addition of Burachapori and Laokhowa wildlife sanctuaries since last November". Both the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Infrastructure witnessing rapid growth in the country: Union minister

**PALAKKAD (KER), Jan 6:** Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Saturday said infrastructure in the country is witnessing rapid growth and the poor are benefitting from it. Various schemes rolled out by the Centre are aimed at the welfare of the poor and underprivileged sections of the country, he said after inaugurating the 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' in Vaniyankulam panchayat in this north Kerala district. The Union minister for housing, urban affairs, petroleum and natural gas also said that world-class standards have been ensured in infrastructure development. The infrastructure in the country is witnessing rapid growth and the poor are benefitting from it, he said. "In 2014, there were 74 airports in the country, which has now increased to more than 150. Railways is making



strides through trains, including Vande Bharat. Toilets have been constructed in more than 11 crore houses," he detailed. More than four crore houses have been constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and more medical colleges have been built, he said. The number of medical seats has also been increased and all the benefits of these have reached the common man,

the Union Minister further said. Puri said that the beneficiaries of Central Government schemes should become their promoters and through the Viksit Bharat Yatra, the officials are directly approaching the people with services. State Bank of India Shoranur Regional Manager Anu Raghurajan, Indian Oil Corporation Chief General Manager Rajendran and Vaniyankulam Gram Panchayat members spoke on the occasion, an official statement said. Beneficiaries of various central government schemes, including Ujjwala Yojana, NULM (National Urban Livelihoods Mission), and PM SVANidhi, shared their experience on the occasion. Tholpavakoothu artiste Ramachandra Pulavar was felicitated on the occasion, it added. Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is being undertaken across the country with the aim (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Israel's air, ground and sea assault in Gaza, aimed at obliterating Hamas, has killed more than 22,400 people UN humanitarian chief calls Gaza 'uninhabitable' 3 months into Israel-Hamas war

**UNITED NATIONS, Jan 6:** The U.N. humanitarian chief described Gaza on Friday as "uninhabitable" three months into Israel's war with Hamas, warning that famine was looming and a public health disaster unfolding. In a grim assessment of the devastating impact of Israel's military response to the horrific Hamas attacks on October 7, Martin Griffiths said that Gaza's 2.3 million people face "daily threats to their very existence" while the world just watches. He said tens of thousands of people, mostly women and children, have been killed or injured, families are sleeping in the open as temperatures plummet, and areas where Palestinians were told to relocate have been bombed. "People are facing the highest levels of food insecurity ever recorded (and) famine is around the corner," Griffiths



said. The few partially functioning hospitals are overwhelmed and critically short of supplies, medical facilities are under relentless attack, infectious diseases are spreading, and amidst the chaos some 180 Palestinian women are giving birth every day. "Gaza has simply become uninhab-

itable," the U.N. undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs said. He said the humanitarian community is facing an "impossible mission" - trying to help more than two million people while U.N. staff and aid workers from partner organisations are killed, communications blackouts continue, roads are damaged, truck convoys are shot at, and vital commercial supplies "are almost non-existent." Griffiths reiterated U.N. demands for an immediate end to the war and the release of all hostages, declaring that "It is time for the international community to use all its influence to make this happen." The October 7 attack into southern Israel by Hamas, which controls Gaza, killed around 1,200 people, and its fighters and other militants took some 250 people hostage. More than 120 remain in captivity. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

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# Red Sea crisis may push costs for traders

## Govt should consider financial help: GTRI

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: The increasing Red Sea crisis may impact trade as it is expected to push shipping and insurance costs for exporters, and to deal with the situation the government should consider extending financial assistance to exporters, a report by economic think tank GTRI said on Saturday. It said the crisis could push shipping costs up to 60 per cent and insurance premium by 20 per cent.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said India must prepare for long-term shipping disruptions due to the current situation. "The attacks by drones and missiles on merchant vessels have seen shipping costs and time to deliver a cargo go through the roof putting margins of exporters under severe pressure. The real problem is being faced by those whose contracts also included costs of delivering goods at buyers' ports," it added. The report suggested steps such as diversifying crude oil imports from regions like West Africa, the Americas, and the



Mediterranean; relying on ports outside conflict zones, like Oman and Djibouti, for transshipment and regional trade; and offering financial support and insurance schemes to Indian companies affected by trade disruptions.

"India may take the steps to safeguard its maritime interests and the steps can include offering financial support and insurance

schemes to Indian companies affected by trade disruptions; and strengthening partnerships with regional players like Saudi Arabia and the UAE to encourage economic cooperation and stability," it added. This conflict could also result in increased shipping costs (40-60 per cent) and delays due to rerouting (up to 20 days more), higher insurance premiums (15-20

per cent), and potential cargo loss from piracy and attacks.

The situation around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial shipping route connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, has escalated due to recent attacks by Yemen-based Houthi militants. Due to these attacks, shippers are taking consignments through the Cape of Good Hope, resulting in delays of about 20 days. The Houthi conflict's disruption of the Red Sea shipping lanes significantly impacts Indian trade, especially with the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, the GTRI said. It said India, heavily reliant on the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait for crude oil and LNG imports and trade with key regions, faces substantial economic and security risks from any disruption in this area. For overall merchandise trade with Europe and North Africa, about 50 per cent of imports and 60 per cent of exports, totalling USD 113 billion, might have used this route, it said.

India might look to diversify its sources of crude oil and LNG, and explore alternative trade routes to reduce dependency on the conflict-prone Red Sea passage, it said. "This conflict could also result in increased shipping costs (40-60 per cent) and delays due to rerouting (up to 20 days more), higher insurance premiums (15-20 per cent), and potential cargo loss from piracy and attacks," it said. While India is implementing measures to ensure safety of its ships in the Red Sea, the effectiveness may be limited as most Indian cargo is carried by global shipping firms, the report added. "India must brace for an extended period of shipping disruptions in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. This requires a strategic blend of diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian measures to safeguard its interests. The situation demands a nuanced approach, balancing immediate needs with long-term geopolitical and economic considerations," GTRI Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said. (PTI)

# E-commerce platforms can't become haven for counterfeiters: Delhi HC



NEW DELHI, Jan 6: The Delhi High Court recently held that e-commerce platforms must diligently protect intellectual property rights of others and they cannot claim 'safe harbour' as an intermediary if the platforms are used to abet counterfeiting.

Justice C Hari Shankar said even though e-commerce platforms are commercial ventures, they cannot become "haven for infringers" and cannot put in place a protocol by which infringers and counterfeiters are provided an avenue to infringe and counterfeit.

"E-commerce websites are commercial ventures, and are inherently profit oriented. There is, of course, nothing objectionable in this; but, while ensuring their highest returns, such websites have also to sedulously protect intellectual property rights of others. They cannot, with a view to further their financial gains, put in place a protocol by which infringers and counterfeiters are provided an avenue to infringe and counterfeit. Any such protocol has to meet with firm judicial disapproval," the Court said. The single-judge made the observations in an interim order restraining IndiaMART IndiaMESH Limited (which runs the e-commerce platform IndiaMART) from providing any registered trademark of PUMA in respect of goods as search option in its drop-down menu presented to prospective sellers when they register on IndiaMART platform.

Justice Hari Shankar ordered IndiaMART to take down all infringing listings containing any of the PUMA's registered trademarks.

The injunction will remain in force till the Court decides PUMA's trademark infringement suit against IndiaMART.

PUMA filed the case stating that several counterfeit goods bearing fake PUMA marks have been put up by third-party sellers on IndiaMART and when one searches for PUMA products on IndiaMART, these fake products are also displayed. The Court was informed that when a seller registers himself/herself on IndiaMART, a drop-down menu is provided by which the seller can represent himself/herself as a dealer of PUMA shoes. If the person chooses this option from the drop-down-menu, he/she is registered with the IndiaMART portal as selling PUMA shoes and, if a purchaser later enters PUMA or PUMA shoes as the product that he wishes to purchase, the PUMA shoes sold by the seller are among the displayed available choices.

Through this process, any counterfeiter can register himself as selling PUMA shoes as no prior verification is done by IndiaMART. This ultimately facilitates the infringement of trademarks, it was stated. Justice Hari Shankar considered the case and held that by

registering themselves without any prior verification, it can prima facie be said that "IndiaMART has aided commission of the unlawful act of counterfeiting, using its platform as a springboard for the purpose".

Aiding is a step before abetting and providing an avenue for counterfeiting is also aiding in the misdemeanour, the Court stressed.

"By this token, the providing of "Puma shoes" as a drop-down option to the prospective seller prima facie aids the seller in his counterfeiting design. As IIL [IndiaMART IndiaMESH Limited] has, therefore, prima facie aided the commission of the unlawful act of counterfeiting and infringement, it cannot claim the benefit of safe harbour under Section 79(1)," the single-judge concluded.

He, therefore, passed the interim order against IndiaMART.

However, it was clarified that the injunction does not have to continue ad infinitum and IndiaMART can seek modification of the same if it can demonstrate to the Court that it has put in place sufficient regulatory and protective measures to render impossible abuse of the Indiamart platform by counterfeiters. (PTI)

# TN gov't's 3rd Global Investors Meet set to begin today

CHENNAI, Jan 6: Chennai is rolling out the red carpet for global investors and big industrialists as it prepares to host the third Global Investors Meet (GIM) on January 7 and 8, 2024. Tamil Nadu's (TN) pitch to investors comes amid stiff competition from states such as Karnataka, Telangana, as well as Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra. In fact, TN's GIM is slated to be held just ahead of the Vibrant Gujarat summit, scheduled between January 10-12.

Tamil Nadu is pulling out all stops to woo investors, with roads that lead to the GIM venue at Chennai Trade Centre at Nandambakkam decked up to welcome delegates.

This will be the third edition of the GIM in the state. In the first edition under then chief minister (CM) Jayalalithaa in 2015, 98 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) were inked, with potential investments of over Rs 2.42 lakh crore. In 2019, 304 MoUs were signed at GIM-II, which attracted potential investments to the tune of ₹ 3,00,431 crore during the tenure of then CM Edappadi K Palaniswami. This edition will mark the first GIM under the DMK and the government

of chief minister MK Stalin, who has set a target of attracting ₹ 5 lakh crore in investments. The CM will also unveil his government's road map to make Tamil Nadu a \$1 trillion economy by 2030. Tamil Nadu's gross state domestic product level during 2023-24 is estimated at \$354 billion.

Ahead of the GIM, Stalin led roadshows in Japan, Singapore, and the UAE to draw investments to the state. In Japan, he visited the century-old Komatsu company's factory in Osaka. "Tamil Nadu is witnessing an increasing inflow of investments since 2021, as the state government enjoys the respect and goodwill of investors and an excellent industrial ecosystem. I envision making Tamil Nadu a \$1 trillion economy by 2030, and the growth engine of India's economy," Stalin said ahead of GIM.

The TN government is also expected to unveil a 'Semi-conductor and Advanced Electronics Policy' with a specific focus on Hosur, Coimbatore, and Trichy, to attract new investments. Tamil Nadu is currently the country's leading electronics exporter, with exports worth \$5.37 billion last

year (2023). The state has ambitious plans to grow this to \$8 billion in the current year. Tamil Nadu's Minister for Industries, Investment Promotion, and Commerce, TRB Rajaa, in a note said: "Tamil Nadu is India's most urbanised state and the second largest state economy in the country. It is home to 50 percent of the country's women workforce. Committed to diversity and sustainability, Tamil Nadu is leveraging its industrial strengths while investing in R&D to build a future rooted in technology and innovation."

The GIM will witness the participation of nearly 50 countries, including Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, Singapore, France, Denmark, South Korea, and Taiwan. Some of the distinguished participants include: Chris Miller, author of the best-selling book 'Chip Wars'; Somanath S, Chairman, ISRO; Anand Mahindra, chairman, Mahindra Group; Bhavish Aggarwal, Founder and CEO, Ola; Raghuram Rajan, former RBI Governor; Arvind Subramanian, former chief economic advisor, and others.

# Ather Energy launches the new 450 Apex - Pinnacle of design and performance

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, Jan 6: Ather Energy, India's leading electric scooter manufacturer, launched the 450 Apex, a special edition scooter, on Saturday to commemorate 10 years of Ather. The 450 Apex is the pinnacle of performance, and it pushes the envelope on design across all scooters in the country. Along with an exciting new colour scheme and a host of new features on the 450 Apex, Ather has introduced 'Magic Twist', a first-of-its-kind city riding feature that offers outstanding convenience to the rider.

Tarun Mehta, co-founder and CEO of Ather Energy, said, "We wanted to do something special to mark 10 years of Ather and push the boundaries of design, performance, and innovation. The 450 Apex is the culmination of that effort, where we have pushed the 450 platform to its limit in terms of design and performance. The 450 Apex has India's fastest throttle response, and it is Ather's most exciting scooter in production today. The unique design language, rich satin colours, and transparent panel make the 450 Apex the most distinctive electric scooter on the road. With the 450 Apex, we have introduced 'Magic Twist', a disruptive new feature that makes city riding extremely convenient and fun. The 450 Apex is a premium and highly desirable machine, and we expect it to be appreciated by performance scooter enthusiasts across the country." Elevating performance with the 450 Apex, Ather has introduced a new riding mode, Warp+, that takes the scooter from 0 to 40 km/h in just 2.9 seconds. It also boasts an industry-leading reaction time of just 90 ms, making it the scooter with the fastest throttle response time, not just amongst ICE scooters but also amongst EVs as well. The 450 Apex delivers peak torque of 210 Nm at the wheel, nearly 25% higher than its closest competitor and the average 200cc ICE two-wheeler. With Warp+, Ather has increased the power levels of the 450 Apex by 10% so that the peak torque is sustained at higher speeds. This has resulted in a 30% faster 40-80 km/h speed compared to the 450X. With the increased motor power, the 450 Apex now has a top speed of 100 km/h. Ather has also provided a new UI experience on the 450 Apex. Based on the power input, the animation transitions to provide an immersive ride experience, making it a perfect partner for Warp+.

# Bharti Foundation hosts Changemaker Awards

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, Jan 6: The Changemaker Awards, hosted by Bharti Foundation recently, brought together corporates and individuals who have undertaken initiatives and/or are working on projects focused on creating a better world for the current and future generations.

Rakesh Bharti Mittal, co-chairman at Bharti Foundation (vice chairman, Bharti Enterprises), Mamta Saikia, CEO at Bharti Foundation, Lt Col Vijay Chadda, member of the governing board of Bharti Foundation, Akhil Gupta, vice-chairman at Bharti Enterprises, leaders from Bharti Group Companies and partner organisations, along with supporters and volunteers of the Foundation graced the occasion.

This year, the awards received 85 nominations under 6 award categories ranging from Employee Engagement for Bharti Group Companies, social initiatives - National & International to Individual Philanthropy - National & International. The nominations boast of positive impact made on society through strategic, innovative, and sustainable practices in various sectors - education, environment, healthcare to livelihood, sports, etc. This year's winners include:

Popat Chandu Rasal from Sterlite Technologies Limited planted more than 20,000 indigenous trees in Aurangabad, Maharashtra in 2022-23 alone Sathyanarayana K from HP Inc. has been volunteering for hunger mitigation in children and enabling better infrastructure in Government Schools in Bangalore, Karnataka.

Another winner from HP Inc, Arundhati Bhattacharya, volunteered for IAHV (International Association for Human Values), positively impacting 200+ women through mental well-being classes and counselling sessions.

Sudarshan Bengani from Airtel Payments Bank Limited for his regular contribution towards commu-



nity services such as blood donation, supporting bird hospitals, food donation and supporting children from slums. Poornima Kapoor from Bharti Airtel Limited won Special Jury award in the for supporting students from economically challenged background with limited access to quality education, career opportunities and guidance.

Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation for their project Medical PODS, conceptualised for regions where health infrastructure is in deficit.

Signify Innovations India Limited's project, 'Khel Jyoti,' encourages sports in rural areas by providing safe and well-lit spaces for children.

Avaya India Pvt. Ltd. for their initiative 'Road to Career,' providing skill-building opportunities and increasing employability of marginalized youth and adolescents.

Indus Towers' 'innovative project, 'Digital Transformation Van' under their flagship CSR program 'Saksham', has brought digital literacy on wheels to isolated and disadvantaged groups in rural and urban parts of India.

ECI Telecom India Pvt. Ltd.'s initiative 'Right to Education for Every Child' supports capacity building of school run by a grassroot NGO, benefiting more than 2,000 underprivileged students.

# PepsiCo products are being pulled from some Carrefour grocery stores in Europe over price hikes

PARIS, Jan 6: Global supermarket chain Carrefour will stop selling PepsiCo products in its stores in France, Belgium, Spain and Italy over price increases for popular items like Lay's potato chips, Quaker Oats, Lipton Iced Tea and its namesake soda.

Its profits are up, though higher prices have dragged down sales as people trade down to cheaper brands. PepsiCo also has said it's been shrinking package sizes to meet consumer demand for convenience and portion control.

"I do think that we see the consumer right now being more selective," PepsiCo Chief Financial Officer Hugh Johnston told investors in October.

The Purchase, New York-based company said price increases should ease and largely align with inflation, which has fallen considerably worldwide since crunched supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic and then Russia's war in Ukraine sent prices surging.

However, the 20 European Union countries that use the euro currency saw consumer prices rise to 2.9% in December from a year earlier, rebounding after seven straight monthly declines, according to numbers released Friday.

Prices for food and non-alcoholic drinks have eased from a painful 17.5% in the 20-country euro area in March but were still up by 6.9% in November from a year earlier.

Mountain Dew and Rice-A-Roni has raised prices by double-digit percentages for seven straight quarters, most recently hiking by 11% in the July-to-September period.

The French grocery chain said it pulled PepsiCo products from shelves in France on Thursday and added small signs in stores that say, "We no longer sell this brand due to unacceptable price increases."

It comes as a new French law meant to fight the rising cost of living has supermarkets facing millions in fines if they don't reach a deal with suppliers on prices by the end of the month.

The ban also will extend to Belgium, Spain and Italy, but Carrefour, which has 12,225 stores in more than 30 countries, didn't say when it would take effect in those.

PepsiCo products were still on shelves Friday in Rome and Barcelona. Carrefour Italia's press office said information will be posted for customers in their stores in Italy in the next days. PepsiCo said in a statement that it has "been in discussion with Carrefour for many months and we will continue to engage in good faith in order to try to ensure that our products are available."

The company behind Cheetos,



The government of French President Emmanuel Macron has fought back on the rising cost of living for households, passing a November law to implement "emergency measures" to fight high prices.

The law moved up annual negotiations between supermarkets and their suppliers on setting prices and more to Jan. 31 from March 1. Fines have been increased to 5 million euros (\$5.5 million) for grocery companies that fail to meet the new deadline for setting prices.

Burt Flickinger III, managing director of grocery consultancy Strategic Resource Group, said he thinks PepsiCo was targeted because the company has been one of the most aggressive in raising

prices. He thinks other big brand names could be next and that other European retailers could follow Carrefour's lead.

Pulling products off shelves over prices is rare, but it happens. Flickinger noted that Kraft Heinz stopped supplying British retailer Tesco with some of its items in 2022 for a week over a pricing spat.

Rob Dongoski, agribusiness and food lead in the consumer practice of management consultancy Kearney, said the showdown between the two big brands represents the ultimate test of customer loyalty.

"Are you loyal to your store or loyal to your brand?" he said.

In the U.S., several grocery sellers including Walmart have expressed displeasure at consumer product companies' moves to keep pushing up prices even as overall inflation has come down. Particular problem areas had been packaged foods and household goods.

Walmart's CEO Doug McMillon said in May that, "We all need those prices to come down." Steve Leonard Jr., president and CEO of Stew Leonard's, a supermarket chain with stores in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, said in July that he warned the big consumer product companies that he wouldn't accept any more price increases because he believed customers had reached a tipping point. But he noted on Friday that price increases have eased for many items, except for meat.

"It's hard to justify price increase when overall costs are coming down," Leonard said. For its part, PepsiCo has pointed to higher costs for grain and cooking oil for its rising prices. Costs for those food commodities surged following Russia's invasion in Ukraine but fell considerably on global markets last year from record highs in 2022.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said Friday that its food price index was 13.7% lower in 2023 than the year before, but its measures of sugar and rice prices grew in that time.

That overall relief still is not being felt by families at supermarkets. (AP)

### TRACK MAINTENANCE WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION

Tender Notice No. : LMG/Engg/02 of 2024 (Item No. 1, 2 & 3), dtd. 02-01-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: SN-1: Brief Description of Item : Track Maintenance work including casual renewal of rail/sleeper, painting of rail and other ancillary work related to track maintenance under jurisdiction of SSE/P.Way/Senchoa Jn. for a period of two years. Tender Value: ₹ 3,44,65,755/-; Earnest Money: ₹ 3,22,300/-; SN-2: Brief Description of Item : Track Maintenance work including casual renewal of rail/sleeper, painting of rail and other ancillary work related to track maintenance under jurisdiction of SSE/P.Way/Hojai for a period of two years. Tender Value: ₹ 3,33,50,962/-; Earnest Money: ₹ 3,16,800/-; SN-3: Brief Description of Item : Track Maintenance work including casual renewal of rail/sleeper, painting of rail and other ancillary work related to track maintenance under jurisdiction of SSE/P.Way/Lumding for a period of two years. Tender Value: ₹ 3,32,79,610/-; Earnest Money: ₹ 3,16,400/-; Date & time of Closing of above tenders at 15:00 hrs. on 02-02-2024 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 02-02-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 01-02-2024 in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in).

DRM (W), Lumding  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
Serving Customers With A Smile

### CORRIGENDUM AGAINST TENDER NOTICE NO. S&T\_CON 2023-17

The Corrigendum of Tender No. 03/2023/LMG/DMV in connection with Tender Notice No. S&T\_CON\_2023-17. Now to be read as: Date & Time of Opening of Tender: 15:00 hrs. of 16-01-2024. All other terms & conditions shall remain unchanged. By CSTE/CON/Lumding, Maligaon  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY (Construction Organisation)  
Serving Customers With A Smile

### PROVISION OF PROTECTION WORK AT MAJOR BRIDGE

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/03 of 2024 Dated: 01-01-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Brief Description of Item: Provision of protection work at Major bridge (no. 58, 59, 91, 92, 93 & 124) in the section of Narangi-Langchholt under the jurisdiction of DEN/Lumding. Tender Value: ₹ 2,17,36,962.65; Earnest Money: ₹ 2,58,700/-; Date & Time of Closing of Tender: 15:00 hrs. on 02-02-2024 and opening at 15:00 hrs. of 02-02-2024. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 01-02-2024 in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in).

DRM (W), Lumding  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
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### SIGNAL & TELECOM ENGINEERING WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION

E-Tender No. : SNT-30-LMG-2023-24; Dated: 04-01-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: Name of work : Carrying out repair to signaling assets for restoration/maintenance in Diphu/Jamuguri section under SSE/Sig/Dimapur of Lumding Division for a period of 12 months. Tender Value: ₹ 16,54,133.57; Bid Security: ₹ 37,100/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. and opening at 15:30 hrs. on 29-01-2024. For details please visit in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in).

DRM (W), Lumding  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
Serving Customers With A Smile

## Govt gets back ATCL's Sycotta Tea Estate

### Tea estate returned to govt due to losses, labour problems

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Jan 6:** The Sycotta Tea Estate, one of the government owned Assam Tea Corporation Limited (ATCL) gardens, which had been leased out to the Jalinga Tea Company on January 1 last year has been returned back to the government.

The Jalinga Tea Estate Ltd, a Kolkata based company had taken Sycotta Tea Estate and Naginijan Tea Estate, both located in Jorhat under ATCL, on lease but reportedly could not run the garden due to losses and labour problems.

A worker of the garden alleged that labourers of both Naginijan and Sycotta had not received their wages for the past two months.

ATCL chairman Rajdeep



Gowala told this newspaper over phone that the Jalinga tea estate management has handed back the Sycotta Tea estate to the govern-

ment citing the problems, which were mainly to do with labour, but were willing to run the Naginijan tea estate.

Gowala said that the government would run the tea garden again and that this was a clause in the lease deed that if the lessee could not run the garden for whatever valid reason. Then the government would run it again.

Gowala further said that the ATCL managing director Rakesh Agarwala had visited both the gardens and looked into the issues.

He further said that chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has instructed that the wages be paid immediately to the workers and this was being done.

Gowala said that all the 15 ATCL gardens had been incurring losses due to which 11 of them were given out of lease, including Sycotta and Naginijan.

## Govt to introduce reforms in skill education sector

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** The state government is keen on introducing reforms in the skill education sector in the state. The government will establish industrial training institutes (ITI) in every block of the state, said Cachar's guardian minister and state tourism minister, Jayanta Malla Baruah.

The state tourism minister said this during the 30th biennial conference of instructors and staff of Assam at the conference hall of ITI in Silchar on Friday. He later moved to Hailakandi to attend a programme on Khel - Moharan at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Stadium.

Baruah said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken initiatives to improve the skills of the youths of the state and they must come forward and support these initiatives. This will benefit the youths in their workplace.

Mallabarua said, "All the methods adopted by the government should come up through the skilled workers to advance every institution. Therefore, they should put forward their acceptable suggestions along with their demands."

"Under the leadership of the state chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the entire ITI education is being taken forward on the path of change. In this case, the help of departmental staff is also very necessary. The students should give priority to technical education and such an environment should be created. The plan to modernize ITI is also underway," he further said.

He said that agreements are being made with various organizations for the technical education and skill development of the



youths. Old ideas about ITIs need to be changed. He advised ITI employees to change their mind set for the skill development sectors.

The minister further stated that the establishment of equivalence between general and vocational education for class 10th and 12th pass-outs from SEBA and AHSEC for ITI courses streamlines educational pathways, ensuring equal recognition for vocational achievements.

The minister said that officials including staff should practice new ideas for the development of ITI. Departmental staff should also think carefully about how to figure out the way forward without being too busy about their own advantages, disadvantages and demands. The minister also said that the state government is also planning to set up a youth welfare center in every employment exchange office across the state.

The tourism minister also conducted a review meeting with the food and civil supply department in the presence of Silchar district commissioner, Rohan Kumar Jha

at the new conference hall of the DC's office. He said that 40 lakh new ration cards will be distributed in the state from January 16 to 21. Of this, more than 2 lakh families in Cachar district will receive this card. The minister also asked to ensure that a true beneficiary is not deprived of this opportunity. The ration cards will be distributed by ministers and MLAs in every constituency of the state on the same day.

The minister also discussed the various skill development programmes being conducted by the Directorate of Employment and Craftsmen Training and Assam Skill Development Mission in the district.

State transport minister Parimal Suklabadaya will formally distribute ration cards in the Cachar district on January 16 and 19. Jayanta Malla Baruah and deputy speaker of the state assembly, Nomal Momin will also distribute ration cards in the district.

Ration cards will be distributed to 214,000 beneficiaries in the Cachar district.

## Demow Yuva Samaj conducts cycle rally

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Jan 6:** The Demow Yuva Samaj took out a cycle rally on Saturday at Demow in Sivasagar district to generate awareness on the need to conserve the Panidehing Bird Sanctuary.

The Panidehing Bird Sanctuary is situated in Thowra constituency of Sivasagar.

Local youths led by Dipjyoti Gogoi took out the cycle rally from the Raichai Rural Stadium on Saturday morning. They also carried placards displaying information about the bird sanctuary. The cycle rally ended at the HCDG College in Nitaipukhuri near Demow.

Dipjyoti Gogoi alleged that the migratory Birds which used to come to the Panidehing Bird Sanctuary have been decrease.

"The Panidehing Bird Sanctuary is in bad shape. Neither the previous state governments nor the present one has taken any initiative to conserve the sanctuary. I appeal to the people of Demow to protect the sanctuary," Gogoi said.

## 9 touts arrested for illegal sale of railway tickets

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) conducted different drives over the zone and apprehended nine touts during the illegal sale of railway tickets.

The RPF recovered 55 railway e-tickets worth more than Rs 1 lakh from January 2 to 4. Apprehended touts were prosecuted under the relevant section of the Railways Act.

On January 2, the crime prevention and detection squad (CPDS) of Alipurduar RPF in collaboration with New Coochbehar RPF conducted a drive in a shop located at Gosaigaon in Kokrajhar and apprehended one person and recovered five railway e-tickets worth ₹ 5,350. In this regard, cases were registered in both the incidents under section 143 of the Railways Act.

Similarly, on January 3 the crime intelligence branch (CIB) of the Rangia RPF conducted a check and drive with the assistance of local authority in a shop located at Balipara. During the drive, the RPF team apprehended one person and recovered six railway e-tickets worth ₹ 14,370. In another incident, a team of Samsi RPF conducted a drive at a shop at Malda Road, West Bengal and apprehended one tout with four railway e-tickets worth ₹ 4,420. A case was



registered at respective posts for both the above incidents under section 143 of the Railways Act.

Moreover, on January 4, the CIB of New Jalpaiguri RPF in collaboration with Bagdogra RPF conducted a raid and a search operation at 'Swadist Hotel' located at Thakurganj, Bihar. During the drive, the RPF team apprehended one person and recovered four railway e-tickets worth ₹ 13,700. The RPF also conducted similar checks and drives at multiple locations and apprehended four more touts and recovered twenty-seven railway e-tickets worth ₹ 34,900. In this regard, a case was registered under section 143 of the Railways Act. The RPF keeps close vigil on touting activities to prevent illegal selling of railway e-tickets. Unauthorized supply and procurement of railway tickets is a punishable offence under section 143 of the Railways Act.

## CM Sharma campaigns in Haflong ahead of NCHAC elections

**HT Correspondent**

**HAFLONG, Jan 6:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma embarked on an unprecedented campaign tour in Haflong in Dima Hasao district to garner support for the BJP candidate ahead of the upcoming 13th N C Hills Autonomous Council Members of Autonomous Council (MAC) elections scheduled for January 8.

The chief minister accompanied by cabinet ministers, aimed to persuade voters to cast their valuable votes for the BJP.

Himanta Biswa Sarma kicked off his campaign on Friday in various MAC constituencies, including Grampani (Umraungu), the industrial township of Dima Hasao district, Khartong, Dehangi, Lower Khartong, Mahur, Laisong, Hangrum, Jinam, Dautahaja, Borail, Jatnaga, Dolong, Langting Kaklchand, Hatikhalki, Semkhor, and Haflong constituencies. This extensive campaign by the chief minister is considered historic and unprecedented for the NCHAC MAC elections.

During the campaign, chief minister Sarma addressed large gatherings in different constituencies, appealing to the people to vote for the BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with the slogan "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas and Biwas."

He highlighted the welfare schemes implemented by the BJP-led state and central governments, covering areas such as employment, infrastructure, road communication, tourism, healthcare and education. He also assured of construction of several sports complexes in different parts of district, providing ration

cards to the people and initiatives like Arunodoi.

He also assured the public that camps would be organized at the community level by the departments concerned to facilitate the issuance of ration cards for those who have not yet received them. He urged citizens to avail the benefits being made available under various welfare schemes offered by the state and central governments. Moreover, he also announced a financial incentive of ₹ 10,000 for individuals holding bank accounts under self help groups (SHGs).

Making a significant decision, the chief minister also declared that if voted to power, the present chief executive member (CEM), Debola Goroisa, would be entrusted with another five-year term for the 13 NCHAC. Furthermore, he stated that independent candidates contesting in the election would not be acceptable for BJP membership in any way.

The chief minister also congratulated six BJP MAC candidates from Gunjung, Hamri, Hajadisa, Maibang West, and Maibang East constituencies, who won uncontested without facing any opposition out of 28 MAC constituencies of N C Hills Autonomous Council.

As the election approaches, opposition parties like INC, TMC, AAP, and independent candidates are actively campaigning in the district. TMC and AAP, entering the fray for the first time in some constituencies, are campaigning to establish their presence in Dima Hasao. Meanwhile, INC and other independent candidates are making efforts to woo voters and secure their support in the upcoming NCHAC MAC elections.

## Gunotsav concludes in Sivasagar district

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, Jan 6:** The fifth Gunotsav for quality assessment of schools in Sivasagar that began on Jan 3 concluded on Saturday.

A total of 407 schools out of 1263 were assessed on Saturday by the external evaluators, mostly college teachers. The rest were assessed on Friday and the day before. Jan 3 was the day of self-assessment. Inspector of schools, Devajyoti Gogoi informed that the district has achieved the 99.6 per cent attendance of students during the three days of assessment.

Of the four core areas of assessment, the focus in this year's Gunotsav is on the scholastic area in particular. The other three areas such as co-scholastic, infrastructure and community participation have not been given much importance this year.

The state education minister Ranaj Pegu visited several schools in the district on Friday. Speaking to the media, he said that the state government has spent over ₹ 800 crore for school infrastructure development in recent years and have accorded top priority to quality assessment.

## Guv reviews development in Nalbari district

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** Governor Gulab Chand Kataria visited Nalbari district on Saturday and held a meeting with the district commissioner, heads of different departments to review developmental works. He also assessed the implementation of the central and state government schemes in the district along with the prevailing law and order in the district.

Chairing a review meeting with all heads of the departments at the conference hall of the district commissioner's office on Saturday, the Governor took note of the status of implementation of government schemes. He took stock of the schemes and their efficacy towards health and hygiene, drinking water, cleanliness, elementary education, road and communication, agriculture among others. He asked the district commissioner and other authorities concerned to make optimum use of the PM Fasal Bima Yojana, PM Kisan Credit Card and other government welfare schemes for the benefit of the beneficiaries.

The Governor also took stock of the works of the panchayat and rural development department, Jal Jeevan Mission and the PM flagship programmes. With regard to the social forestry department, he pointed out that the resources of the department should be used to take pragmatic steps of increasing green coverage of the surroundings. He said that the department should be increasingly engaged in creating economically viable trees. He also asked the department concerned to identify locations in the government offices, schools and colleges for plantation drives.

Kataria also asked all functionaries to resolutely follow PM's call for optimum utilization of the welfare schemes of the central and state government for seamless transformation of the country into Viksit Bharat. He also asked the district administration to generate large-scale awareness among the people about the government welfare schemes and how beneficiaries can avail them.

The Governor expressed satisfaction at the fact that there has been steady progress in various indicators of the district as compared to his last visit to Nalbari.

Kataria also interacted with the beneficiaries of various schemes in the district. He enquired about the outcomes of the schemes and said that government schemes are for everyone and therefore, all categories of beneficiaries should avail of the schemes.

## Protest staged against assault on journalist

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Jan 6:** The members of the Nagaon Press Club on Saturday staged a two-hours sit in protest near the office of the Nagaon district commissioner (DC) against the alleged misbehaviour and assault of a journalist of a Guwahati based private satellite news channel by the DC.

The Nagaon DC had reportedly assaulted the journalist, Dipankar Medhi inside his office chamber on Friday. He also took the later to the police station.

About a hundred media persons as well as other members from var-



ious organizations participated in the stir. Members of the Nagaon Press Club strongly condemned the incident and also criticised the attitude of the district commissioner towards the victim.

The protestors demanded a high

level probe into the incident and urged the authorities concerned to ensure the security of the journalist community in future.

"If a journalist is not safe and attacked in the open, how will a common man be safe?" said a

media person.

**Our Morigaon correspondent adds:** The Morigaon Sambadik Samaj on Saturday staged a protest at the Bihutoli ground in Morigaon against the alleged assault of a journalist of a Guwahati based private satellite channel by the Nagaon district commissioner at his chamber on Friday.

Members of the Samaj held banners and leaflets and shouted slogans demanding justice for the journalist. Members of the All Assam Students' Union and the Garia-Moria Parishad also landed their support to the protest.

## 36 teams including more than 300 participants from Biswanath, Behali, Gohpur LACs participated in Sanskritik Mahasangram in Biswanath concludes on Saturday

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Jan 6:** District level Sanskritik Mahasangram organised by the Biswanath district administration at the Kamalakanta Khetra in Biswanath Chariali concluded on Saturday.

36 teams including more than 300 participants from Biswanath, Behali and Gohpur legislative assembly constituencies participated in the two-day cultural programme.

The second day of the programme began with smrititarpan. A total of 21 teams including 13 Jhumur teams, 2 Karbi teams, 2 Bodo and Mising teams and Nepali, Hajong and Sambalpur teams showcased their tradi-

tional folk dances in the event.

Similarly 15 Bihu teams from the three legislative assembly constituencies enthralled the audiences with their performances. Singer Dibakar Bora conducted the proceedings, which were attended by Laxmi Saikia, Binoy Kumar Bora, Jiten Saikia, Dibyajyoti Nath, Pranati Bora Keut and Hiren Nath as judges.

The event was also attended by Biswanath MLA Pramod Borthakur, Biswanath district commissioner Neha Yadav and administrative officer Girish Hazarika among others. On the other hand, tge Jyoti Sangeet competition will be held on January 17.



## Minister reviews development activities in Morigaon

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, Jan 6:** State panchayat and rural development minister Ranjit Kumar Das on Saturday reviewed various schemes implemented by his department in Morigaon district.

He also inspected two houses constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural) and Amrit Sarovar under construction.

He reviewed the progress and work of programmes under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural), 15th Finance Commission, MGNREGA, Amrit Sarovar and Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission in a review meeting at the Mayang development block office in the district.

He directed government officials to complete the construction of houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural) within a month.

He also directed to expedite the work of various schemes under the department. The minister also directed the officials to conduct repair works in more schools under the 15th Finance Commission to ensure that the students do not face any difficulties in their education.

The meeting was attended by Morigaon district commissioner Devashish Sharma, sub-divisional magistrate (Sadar) Hriday Kumar Das, chief executive officer of Zilla Parishad Lakhinanda Sahaharia, deputy chief executive officer of Zilla Parishad Moinuddin Ahmed and Mayang Anchalik Panchayat president Kabita Das.

The minister also attended a review meeting in Bhubandha development block of the district and discussed the progress of various schemes implemented by the department in the development zone.

The meeting was attended by Morigaon MLA Ramakant Deuri, chief executive officer of Zila Parishad, development zone officer Rahul Deka, presidents of different gaon panchayat, secretaries and government officials.

# Ayodhya's evolution: From conflict to victory and politics to progress

By: Dipak Kurmi

The grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya, adorned for the upcoming inauguration on January 22 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, signifies the realization of a longstanding dream for the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. In 1992, a Hindu mob, contending that the Babri Masjid was constructed on an ancient Hindu temple site in Lord Ram's birthplace, demolished the mosque. The resolution to the communal conflict came in 2019 when the Supreme Court determined that the disputed area rightfully belonged to the Hindus.

The commendable adherence to the rule of law by Muslims, accepting the Supreme Court verdict in a spirit of closure, is evident. The Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board received an offer of five acres in Dhannipur village, Ayodhya, to construct a mosque. Despite reports of a boom, Reuters notes that the substantial Muslim community of around 350,000 in the city ex-

presses dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of benefits.

The construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is more of a political narrative than a religious one. The Shilanyas ceremony was performed by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) on November 9, 1989. On August 5, 2019, Prime Minister Modi marked the commencement of the temple's construction by laying a 40 kg silver brick. Ayodhya, with its immense cultural, religious, and political importance, becomes the backdrop for this significant development. It stands as a triumph for the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the driving force behind the movement, and Modi, whose political journey aligns with the ascent of Hindu nationalists. The significance of the inauguration of the Ram Temple cannot be overstated, considering the fierce efforts of BJP leaders L.K. Advani and Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi. It holds a pivotal role in the BJP's strategy for the 2024 elections. The Modi government has suc-



cessfully fulfilled two key promises from its electoral agenda—the construction of the Ram Temple and the revocation of Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Addressing the implementation of a uniform civil code becomes the third crucial issue on their agenda. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement, initiated in 1989 and spearheaded by BJP leaders Lal Krishna Advani and Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi in 1992 played a pivotal role in establishing the BJP's current political dominance. Acknowledging its political motives, Advani

approximately 2,000 lives, predominantly Muslims. The year 2019 marked a pivotal moment when the Supreme Court declared the contested Babri Masjid site in favor of Hindu groups.

Merely four years later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's team achieved the completion of a temple at the disputed location. This event serves as a potential catalyst for the Sangh Parivar to elevate community pride. The BJP strategically plans to amplify the message and symbolism of the Temple. Additionally, the propaganda surrounding the Ram temple could potentially undermine the Opposition's campaign. Prior to the inauguration, Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated various projects valued at Rs 22,000 crores, including the unveiling of a new airport and railway station on December 30.

The Temple is set to host seven new temples dedicated to honoring prominent figures from the Ramayana. These include Maharishi Valmiki and Shabri, representing the Dalit community,

Nishad Raj from the fishing community, Acharya Vashisht from the Brahmin community, Rishi Vishwamitra from the Rajput community, and Ahalya and Agastya, revered across various castes and communities.

The Ayodhya movement left a lasting social impact, as evident in the Mandal Commission report's implementation by the VP Singh government. This move successfully consolidated the OBC vote, aligning it with parties advocating for social justice. The intertwining of both the Mandal and Kamandal movements is notable. The current political ascendancy of the BJP cannot be solely attributed to the Ram temple issue. From 1991 to 2009, their vote share lingered around 20%. However, under the leadership of Modi in 2014, the BJP's vote share surged beyond 30%, securing a majority in the Lok Sabha after three decades.

This upward trajectory continued in 2019. The construction of the Ram Temple suggests that the BJP could further amass Hindu

votes in 2024. Following Rajiv Gandhi's demise, the Congress party distanced itself from the Ram Mandir issue, while the BJP successfully consolidated support within the Hindu community. The party grapples with a dilemma regarding whether to embrace a soft Hindutva stance, risking potential loss of Muslim support. Consequently, Muslims are increasingly aligning themselves with compassion-based and secular organizations like the Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, and Bahujan Samaj Party.

The Supreme Court's decision marks the conclusion of a protracted conflict, opening avenues for peace and development in Ayodhya. With unwavering commitment from both the Centre and state government to the region, there's anticipation that Ayodhya will undergo substantial modernization, bringing significant benefits to its residents. This stride towards progress promises a more promising and radiant future for the city's populace. *(The author is a popular columnist)*

## Ram Jyoti and Rajneeti Shri Ram has been in our minds, culture, speech, love, reproaches, and sayings for centuries

By: Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee

Light Ram Jyoti at your homes on Jan 22 but 'don't come to Ayodhya' - PM Modi's appeal for the Ram Mandir event is now reaching every home in India. If every religion has a story to tell, for us, there is nothing surprising that every politician also has a religious story to reach out to Indians. Everyone knows that we have two great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. The prime character of The Ramayana is Shri Rama, noted for his sheer patience and bravery. He is best known as Lord Vishnu's seventh avatar. It is very rare that, with 33 crores of Gods in Hinduism, none got the name of 'Maryadha Purush' as Lord Rama got it. Sometimes we start believing in myths to glorify our culture.

According to the Hindu epic Ramayana, Lord Rama was believed to be around 56 years old when he died. This is stated in various versions of the Ramayana, including the Valmiki Ramayana and the Ramacharitanamas by Tulsidas. It is said that after ruling Ayodhya for 11,000 years, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana returned to their divine abodes. The original and historic epic that describes Lord Rama's life and adventures, the Valmiki Ramayana, does not specifically state his age at the time of his death. Therefore, the Valmiki Ramayana does not specifically state Lord Rama's age at the moment of his demise.

The age of Lord Rama when he left the mortal world is estimated differently in various traditions and Ramayana adaptations, as well as later writings and folklore. He may have lived for a number of thousand years, according to some accounts, but other sources may offer a different interpretation based on their own beliefs and stories. Similar stories abound in Ayodhya about the birthplace of Lord Rama.

Many earthquakes occurred, and the geographical bases underwent drastic changes. It is really surprising to know today the exact place of Lord Rama's birth. The disappearance of Sri Ram from earth happened when he entered voluntarily into the Sarayu River. This divine event is described as the death of Lord Rama. The story of the disappearance of Sri Ram is mentioned in many Hindu scriptures. This story of his death is from the Padma Purana. However, according to one version, it is believed that he was in his early 30s when he returned to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana and rescuing his wife Sita. This event is celebrated as Diwali, the festival of lights, in Hinduism.

After his return to Ayodhya, Lord Rama ruled as a just and wise king for several years. However, it's essential to note that the age of Lord Rama at the time of his death is a matter of religious and mythological belief rather than historical fact. When Mahatma Gandhi wanted to establish 'Ram Rajya' in India, the Muslims gradually separated from Gandhi's movement for Freedom, and Muslims started demanding Pakistan for the Muslims because they cannot

accept Ram Rajya for their country.

Today the concept of Ram Rajya is more symbolic, and the narrative that Prime Minister Modi is creating is more inclusive. It is explained by many that this new Ram Rajya concept will include the minority more significantly. Some historians claim that the exact site of Rama's birthplace is where the Babri Masjid once stood in present-day Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, is not so certain. Several findings of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have confirmed the existence of a Hindu temple that Babri masjid was built upon. But if we take it all as a Hindu myth, then no such big problem can occur about its historical accuracy. Each nation in Europe or Asia has a mythical hero of their own, and people get inspiration from their heroic activities. There is nothing much to raise a hue and cry over that. The only problem is if any party is gaining mileage from such glorification during the election time.

2024 being an election year, such apprehensions are there in the minds of the politicians who otherwise have nothing much to say against the development of any state in UP or MP. Our divided opposition opposed even the building of the new Parliament House almost for no reason.

Even if there is a reason to believe that Ram is politicized, the fact cannot be denied that he himself was a political person, and Dussehra signifies the killing of Ravana by Ram and the celebration of good over evil. Besides, Ramayana is our most-read epic, and over the centuries, the tradition of reading the Ramayana is going on. BJP is using Ram Myth for winning the Indian psyche, and one cannot create obstacles from a moral point of view.

Supporting Ram is politicization; opposing Ram is no less so. The only thing that is to be kept in mind is to make Ramrajya inclusive where people of all religions can live safely. Ram is not the creation of RSS or BJP, and Others who are opposing Ram have nothing much to be proud of creating Ram myth. Ram is basically the icon of Indian Hinduism. If the name of Ram unifies, then the purpose of the Ram Temple will be laudable. Religion unites, communalism divides.

According to the Hindu epic Ramayana, Lord Rama was believed to have lived for 11,000 years. He was born in the Treta Yuga, which is believed to have lasted for around 1,296,000 years, and he ruled the Kingdom of Ayodhya for 11,000 years before he left his mortal body and attained moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. It is not explicitly mentioned in the Ramayana at what age Lord Rama died, but according to Hindu tradition, he is believed to have lived a full and complete life, and his death is considered to be a divine event that marked the end of his earthly journey.

As per the Ramayana, the average age of humans is much higher in Treta yuga compared to Kali yuga. After returning from his exile, Rama ruled the kingdom for eleven thousand

years. When sage Viswamitra asked Dasaratha to send Rama to protect his Yagna, in one of the slokas, Dasaratha said that Rama is barely 16, hence wouldn't be able to fight with dangerous demons.

In the same trip, Rama lifted the Sivadhanus and married Sita. Hence by the time he got married, in the mysterious Cobra Cave, the Archaeologists found these caves dating back to more than 1000 years back without any source of origin and inside the caves, there are pictures representing capture of Sita Devi.

Rama went into exile when he was 25 years old. He returned to Ayodhya and was crowned at 39. After ruling for 30 years and 6 months post his coronation, when he was about 70 years old, Rama relinquished the kingdom. Now the big question is what harm is there caused by the development of Ayodhya and creating this big hype on Ram Lala and Ram Jyoti when trains and planes are connecting Ayodhya, which is now being made the epicenter of Hinduism in the BJP version of explanation.

The opposition group leaders are at a big fix. First, they cannot directly belittle Ram Lala as most of them are pseudo-secularists. They appease the people of all religions directly or indirectly; they too create a big hype by visiting mosques and churches for their political gains. It is not an honest opposition to Ram Lala and the so-called fear of communalism. They are scared of hurting the Muslim sentiments by creating the Ram Temple.

Some others are raising the neat outcome of this big expenditure for developing one city in UP when the money could be used for generating more employment and combating poverty all over the country.

In the earlier times, Kings and emperors used to build big temples to generate employment and inspire tourism. The Modi Government is trying to justify the Ram Lala budget somewhat in that way. But the focus is more on the change of the Indian psyche. They link the building of the Ram Temple as a part of their Election manifesto. Secondly, they want to see this mega event as a resurrection of Ram Myth, and many claim that finally after 500 years of waiting, Ram is having his homecoming, and the Ram Jyoti will be lit all over the country to celebrate the Consecration Ceremony. It will be an extraordinary Diwali in honour of Lord Ram's homecoming.

PM Modi said the people of India should celebrate Diwali on 22 January and light Ram Jyoti in their homes. "This historical moment has very fortunately come into the lives of all of us. We have to make a new resolution for the country and fill ourselves with new energy. For this, all the 140 crore countrymen should light Ram Jyoti in their homes on 22 January and celebrate Diwali. The Sikhs have their Golden Temple, the Hindus have their Ram Temple, and Ayodhya is becoming a smart city. *(The author is an Affiliate Faculty in Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond and a multilingual writer)*

openly admitted that the movement aimed to garner Hindu support for strategic political gains. The Ayodhya agitation, led by the Vishva Hindu Parishad, a front organization of the Sangh, aimed at constructing the Ram temple, holds paramount importance. The Sangh firmly believes that building the Temple is instrumental in the establishment of Hindu Rashtra. In 1992, a Hindu mob carried out the demolition of the Babri mosque situated on the disputed site. The aftermath saw widespread riots across the country, resulting in the tragic loss of

By: Dr. Satyavan Saurabh

Hello. In Haryana, there is a tradition of saying 'Desi Namaste' to strangers walking on the road. This shows that in the minds of the people of Haryana, which is considered the land of Geeta and Mahabharata, Shri Ram is more established than Shri Krishna. Many names like Ramphal, Rambhaji, Rampyari, and Rambhateri will be heard among the Haryanvi people. On January 22, 2024, in Ramnagar Ayodhya, a new chapter of Ramkatha begins; this is its own 'Uttarkand' of the struggle story that lasted for 493 years. Ramlala waited for five centuries to get a place in his soil and his courtyard, so the 'trial of fire' of Ram's devotees has now been completed.

According to Dr. Himmat Singh, former professor of Kurukshetra University, Haryana, among the common people of Haryana, the criticism of Ramji rains a lot when it rains or Ramji rains Koni when there is no rain. To express good love and acquaintance with someone, we use the saying 'Uschay toh meri Ram-Ram bi kauna,' or to express ignorance, we use the saying 'Ustai toh meri Ram-Ram bi kauna.' Here, references to Ram are included in the songs, and mention of Ram is also found in the bhajans. Haryanvi bhajans like 'Laddu Ram naam ka khala nai ho yoga kalyan'... or 'Manai ib kai pilshan mil ja main to lyau Ram ki mala'... have been hits. To console someone, there are sayings like 'Ram bhaali karega ya Andhe ki maakhi Ram udavi.'

The 90-year-old Dr. Himmat Singh Sinha, who has done four PhDs on Ramayana, says that till 1999, there were more than 150 researches on Ram and Ramayana in Hindi-speaking areas. Now their number will be more than 250. A lot of research has

been done in non-Hindi regions also. The credit for creating Ram in the folk life of Haryana and Hindi-speaking areas goes to many saints and poets and Arya Samaj. Considering Kabir to be of low caste, they were not allowed to go to temples at that time. Then Kabir propagated considering Ram as having no qualities.

Earlier, Adi poet Valmiki, Saint Ravidas, and Namdev propagated the Nirgun form. Arya Samaj has had a lot of influence in Haryana, and Arya Samaj has considered Ram as an ideal man. There are also camps in the state to propagate Kabirpanth. In Kabir's couplets, Ra is considered as an umbrella and Ma is considered as the bindi on the forehead. That means everyone is considered a symbol of protection and respect. There has been a lot of mention of Ram's incidents in the old songs of Haryana, which is why Ram's influence is on the public mind from generation to generation, whereas there are no ancient temples of Shri Ram anywhere in the state, including religious cities like Kurukshetra. There are moral values and political philosophy in the imagination of Ramrajya. The most used saying in politics, Aaya Ram-Gaya Ram, also originates from Haryanvi politics. When in 1967, an MLA had switched parties thrice in a single day.

Luv-Kush had memorized Ramayana in Mundadi village of Haryana, and Mother Sita was present in Sivan village. In Kaithal Dadi, Luv-Kush, the sons of Lord Ram and Sita, had memorized the Ramayana from Maharishi Valmiki on this very pilgrimage, after which Maharishi Valmiki had observed silence. Due to this, the name of the village became Mundadi. There are temples of Shiva, Hanuman, and Luv-Kush on this pilgrimage. On the walls of the sanctum sanctorum of the temple,

there are pictures of Ram, Hanuman carrying Lakshman on his shoulders, Krishna with Gopis, Raasleela and Ganesh, etc. According to Narad Purana, one attains salvation by taking a bath in this pilgrimage on Chaturdashi of Chaitra month. During the excavation of the temple's pond, pottery and other antiquities from the Kushan period (1st-2nd century AD) to the medieval period (9th-10th century AD) were found. Which proves the antiquity of this pilgrimage. Maharishi Valmiki Sanskrit University is also being built here. At the same time, village Sivan or Sheetvan of Kaithal is considered by the people to be related to Jankanandini Sita ji.

According to popular belief, Sita disappeared into the earth at this very place. That is why this pilgrimage is also known as Swargadwar. Apart from Mahabharata and Vamana Purana, mention of this pilgrimage is also found in Padma Purana, Brahma Purana, Kurma Purana, Narad Purana, and Agni Purana. It is also believed that Sheetvan got corrupted and became famous by the name of Sitavan in later times. In Vamana Purana, this pilgrimage has been placed after Matirithra.

The people of Haryana can never forget the moments of the Ram Mandir movement when Ram Shilas came from every village for Ram Mandir and countless people of the country marched towards Avadhupuri for Kar Seva. Ram Mandir of modern India is a unique gift of truth, non-violence, and justice-loving India. This temple will indeed become a symbol of penance, sacrifice, and determination. This eternal temple will become a symbol of faith and national spirit. Whenever we have to do any work, we look towards Lord Rama. Say Jai to Lord Ram. Ram resides in our hearts. Ram is the basis of our culture.

## Unveiling India's timeless strategic tapestry: From ancient wisdom to modern realities

By: Rudrasingh Thapa

India's aspiration to become a Vishwa Guru, a global leader, triggers discussions on the nation's strategic culture, particularly in its military and foreign policy domains. The discourse centers on the perceived absence of a systematic approach to strategic thinking in India, prompting a debate on the untapped potential of ancient knowledge and its various interpretations. India's strategic thinking is shaped by its extensive history, diverse culture, civilization, and geographical position. From the ancient eras of Kautilya and Ashoka to modern times marked by leaders like Nehru and Modi, India has cultivated a distinctive strategic culture reflecting its identity, geopolitical interests, and security challenges.

India's strategic culture is not homogenous but composite, diverging from Western perspectives on society, politics, and statehood. Scholars define strategic culture as shared beliefs, assumptions, and behaviours derived from common experiences and accepted narratives, shaping collective identity, relationships with other groups, and guiding security objectives. Conflicting assessments of India's strategic thinking indicate that strategic culture is not universally uniform.

For instance, a 1992 Pentagon study by John Tanham suggested a "relative lack of strategic thinking" in India. However, a 2006 Pentagon-commissioned study argued that India possessed an original tradition of strategic thinking originating from ancient texts like the Arthashastra. The misconception of India lacking robust strategic culture may stem from its oral tradition, unlike the book cultures of the Chinese, Greeks, and Judeo-Christian traditions in the West.

**Ancient Period:** Ancient Indian strategic culture drew from significant literary texts like the Mahab-

harata, Panchatantra, and Kautilya's Arthashastra. The Mahabharata depicted the war between the Pandavas and Kauravas, offering insights into the responsibilities of a virtuous king in defense, war, administration, policy, and people's well-being. The Panchatantra, from the 3rd century BC, comprised fables with animals as characters, spreading worldwide and teaching statecraft, strategy, alliances, espionage, morality, and power to princes.

Kautilya's Arthashastra stands as the most influential source, serving as a comprehensive treatise on statecraft, economics, and military strategy. Its discovery in 1909 had a profound impact, exploring governance, administration, law, finance, trade, agriculture, industry, defense, foreign policy, espionage, welfare, and ethics.

Similar to Machiavelli's 'The Prince,' it delves into monarchical statecraft, realpolitik, and practices of war and peace. The Arthashastra unveils the Mandala Theory, outlining neighbouring states' geopolitical ties through power and proximity, offering strategic insights. It defines Shakti (power) as the ultimate objective of statecraft, aligning with a hardcore Realist perspective.

Besides the realist tradition, Indian statecraft also showcases an 'idealist' tradition, traced back to figures such as Buddha and Ashoka during the 3rd century BC. Renouncing war, they embraced a peaceful foreign policy emphasizing cultural diplomacy. These age-old traditions emphasize values of peaceful cohabitation, conflict resolution, and the concept of 'moral politik.'

**Medieval and Modern Period:** Foreign invasions, colonial control, and independence movements influenced India's strategic culture. Between the 11th and 18th centuries, Muslim dynasties introduced novel political concepts, military structure, gunpowder, feudalism, and Sufism to India. These influences integrated

into Indian culture, art, architecture, and music, fostering a syncretic and pluralistic society. Meanwhile, naval power grew with the Marathas and Cholas, leaving a lasting impact on Southeast Asia.

The arrival of European powers—Dutch, French, and the British—ushered in an era of trade-centered domination. The British East India Company transitioned into the British Raj, exercising control over regions like Orissa, Bihar, and Bengal. The 200-year British rule introduced liberalism, democracy, nationalism, bureaucracy, English education, and railways. While some sections embraced these ideas, others rejected them. Indian soldiers made significant contributions in World War I; their success was attributed to a rich history of war fighting and traditions of statecraft and military strategy.

Under British rule, India saw the rise of nationalist movements led by figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. These independence movements varied in approaches—societal reform, non-violence, constitutionalism, revolution, resistance, radicalism, communalism, and nationalism—shaping India's strategic culture, encompassing realism, idealism, pragmatism, militancy, unity, and diversity.

**Contemporary India:** India's contemporary strategic culture mirrors the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, and Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi represents idealism, Patel embodies realism, and Nehru combines Kautilyan realism with idealistic principles, characterizing India's strategic culture. Other influential factors include historical legacies, cultural diversity, partition violence, global aspirations, and contributions of intellectual figures like Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Indira Gandhi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Figures like C. Ra-

jamohan, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Manmohan Singh, Narendra Modi, and S. Jaishankar also shaped India's strategic culture.

India's strategic culture emphasizes non-alignment, opposition to racial discrimination, pursuit of strategic autonomy, No First-use policy, Credible Minimum Deterrence, and advocacy for decolonization, which are distinct from Western concepts. These principles underscore India's commitment to nuclear disarmament and aspiration to be a responsible global actor. Since Narendra Modi's ascent to power in 2014, a shift from Defensive realism to offensive realism marks a departure from the Nehruvian framework of Non-alignment and Strategic autonomy.

India's strategic culture is rooted in a rich history amid a changing global order. Drawing from ancient epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, as well as influential works like Kautilya's treatise, India's strategic thinking has evolved over centuries. Foreign invasions, colonial rule, and the struggle for independence have deeply influenced its strategic outlook. India's assimilation of diverse cultural and political ideas has fostered a syncretic and pluralistic society, shaping its strategic culture.

The evolving geopolitical landscape of a multipolar world necessitates India's strategic culture to adapt and evolve. While Western concepts inform policy formulation, they do not supplant India's unique strategic culture. India's ability to navigate covert wars, address border security, and forge favourable foreign relations stems from its rich tradition of strategic thought. This robust strategic culture guides its actions as India strives to preserve its unique identity while embracing global influences, aspiring to be a global leader known as Vishwaguru. *(The author is a Research Assistant at Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai)*

# The role of women in Indian folk art of puppetry

By: Simanta Sarma

The use of puppetry in art can be traced back to ancient Greece. Although the discovery of puppetry in the burial sites of ancient Mesopotamia with artifacts like ivory and clay puppets suggests that the sophisticated Greek civilization might have adopted it, the development of puppetry is believed to have originated in ancient Greece. Puppetry has played a significant role in the cultural evolution of various societies in Africa, particularly prevalent in the ancient civilizations of North and South Africa.

The origins of Indian puppetry are often linked to the theatre traditions dating back to around 500 BCE. The excavation sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro provide evidence of puppetry with clay models found there. Philosophically, puppetry in Indian culture is reflected in the Bhagavad Gita, where the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva is compared to a puppet show. Throughout the Indian sub-continent, puppetry has been a source of inspiration for folklore, mythology, and local legends.

There are four main types of puppets: string puppets, rod puppets, shadow puppets, and glove puppets. The names of puppets vary across the states of India. In Assam, the existence of puppetry is not clearly evident in ancient times. However, written evidence in the Kalika Purana from the 9th century AD suggests the strong presence and reliability of puppetry in Assam. The term "Panchalika Vihar" used in the Kalika Purana likely indicates the existence of puppetry in those times, with "Panchali" meaning puppet and "Panchalika Vihar" referring to a particular form of puppetry. Puppetry is mentioned in the Assamese Bhagavata as well. The use of wooden puppets and shadow puppets is implied.

In Assamese culture, puppetry holds significant importance. Various forms of puppetry are performed in different contexts. Through these art forms, puppetry has evolved and thrived both as a traditional and contemporary cultural expression. Despite the decreasing significance in the modern technological era, the efforts and struggles of puppetry artists have helped it survive and thrive globally, making it an integral part of the world's cultural heritage.

The art of puppetry is one of the ancient traditional folk arts that has always been an integral part of the cultural and religious philosophy and practices of the northeastern region of India. Perhaps, it is in the early ages that this form of art, possibly initiated by the 'Puthala Natok' (puppet drama) name, gave birth to the movement of anthropomorphic representations by human figures. Over time, it has evolved into a comprehensive form incorporating elements from various arts. This art form encompasses two main elements: puppet making and presentation.

In puppet making, stories from Indian mythologies are often depicted with characters crafted according to the narratives. The presentation involves storytelling, singing, dancing, and skillful manipulation of puppets to create a visually captivating performance. The performance area, usually a stage in rural settings, is adorned with vibrant colours, and puppeteers use their hands, fingers, and sometimes even their feet to control the movements of the puppets, adding a dynamic and lively aspect to the scenes.

Moreover, the puppeteer, through the use of hand gestures, facial expressions, and body language, conveys emotions, narrates stories, sings songs, and engages the audience. This art form plays a significant role in the socio-cultural exchange and communication in rural India, where traditional values, beliefs, and practices form the foundation of knowledge and interaction. It serves as a means of information exchange and communication in rural areas, contributing to the development of indigenous systems of knowledge and communication.

In addition to being a source of entertainment, puppetry in India serves as a powerful medium for conveying information, knowledge, and messages. It goes beyond mere entertainment and becomes an inspiring and informative communication tool. Through the years, it has transformed into a powerful medium for information exchange and communication. It dispels superstitions prevalent in rural areas, educates on various subjects, and, in particular, plays a crucial role in the development of information exchange and communication networks in rural India.

India, with its complex social structure, is a diverse country



where people from various castes, classes, religions, and ethnicities coexist. Through puppetry, it has significantly influenced the art forms of local communities, reflecting the rich cultural diversity of the country. It not only provides entertainment but also inspires and conveys meaningful messages. Puppetry in India is not just a form of entertainment; it is a medium that connects generations.

The traditional puppetry of India, particularly the string puppetry and shadow puppetry, has played an essential role in empowering women. According to studies, traditional puppetry provided women with an active role, breaking the barriers of limited participation. In Kerala, the 'Tholpavakuthu' form of traditional shadow puppetry, led by Ramachandran Pulavar, has provided women with the opportunity to actively participate and contribute to the art form. Women have been involved in creating the puppet's body, designing and dressing the puppets, using natural materials like clay, fabric, coconut husk, and bamboo.

The use of natural materials, such as clay, fabric, leaves, and bamboo, for creating puppets is significant in this traditional art form. Women play an active role in preparing materials like seeds and charcoal, weaving cloth, and using natural colors to create intricate designs. The craft of puppetry is an integral part of India's traditional folk art, thriving in many regions of the country, as oral traditions pass down the art from one generation to another. Particularly in rural areas, the exchange of information and communication through oral traditions plays a crucial role in development.

The traditional puppetry of India, with its elaborate designs and vibrant colors, has become a form of not just entertainment but also a medium for communication. It is a continuous form of communication that transcends generations, preserving traditional art in its timeless form. Puppetry is not just a form of entertainment; it is a living art that continues to be relevant in contemporary times, serving as a bridge between tradition and modernity.

In this art form, the practice of preserving the traditional female sculptures was maintained. The reasons for preserving these sculptures from this art form are partially related to customs and traditions, as well as their association with rituals and seasonal cycles. Female sculptures, representing deities and celestial beings, play a representative role according to popular belief, and they are considered sacred entities.

The sculptures are counted as holy, and women are not allowed to touch or participate in the creation or modification of these sacred idols. Despite not being governed by any formal rules, such practices are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs.

In earlier times, women were not allowed to venture outside their homes. Movement outside the household was restricted. Women were mainly engaged in domestic work, and their activities were directed within the confines of their homes. In Kerala and other regions of India, traditional artisans, primarily men, perform rituals and ceremonies, and women are not allowed to participate. The puja room in the house is considered sacred, and the cleanliness of the area is of utmost importance. Women are not allowed to enter the puja room during certain times.

The traditional belief system in Kerala has led to the exclusion of women from certain roles, such as serving as priests in temples. Only men are permitted to perform such roles. The concept of a female priest in a temple, especially for rituals related to female deities, is not accepted in the traditional framework. However, in recent times, there has been a shift in this perception, and women are taking on diverse roles, including those traditionally reserved for men. Ramachandran Pulavar emphasizes the contemporary significance of female puppetry in India. Modern women engaged in puppetry theatre

have shown a keen interest in reviving and promoting traditional puppetry. Women in contemporary attire actively contribute to the preservation and promotion of puppetry as an art form. They use puppetry not only for entertainment but also as a means of addressing important social issues in India.

In today's context, female artists are actively participating in puppetry performances, receiving training, and contributing to the development and dissemination of puppetry as an art form. Ramachandran Pulavar's wife and daughter are not only involved in performances but also contribute to the creation of puppetry. The traditional practices of puppetry are being followed even in this contemporary context, and women are playing a vital role in the resurgence of puppetry.

Overall, female artists in puppetry are contributing significantly to the contemporary revival, sustainable development, and widespread recognition of puppetry as an art form in India. They are breaking barriers and challenging societal norms, making puppetry a powerful medium for storytelling and expression.

Born in Lucknow in 1934, Lilavati M Kabi has contributed a lot to puppetry. She has earned a reputation for performing puppet dance in India and abroad. He received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award of the Government of India in 2013 for his active role in puppet dance and contribution to the society. Many women have received awards for puppet dance at national and international levels. The role of women in puppet dance is unique in different states of India. She is actively earning her living by doing puppet dancing in Kerala, Rajasthan, Calcutta, Assam and other states. Shubha Saxena successfully worked in the Department of Puppetry at the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Government of India. In the case of Assam, women are involved in puppet dance.

Women are involved with puppets in many groups in Assam. Narayan Deka of Assam Puppet Theatre, Giridhar Senapati of Navaratna Puppet Theater and Sagarika Puppet Theatre's wife Manoranjan Roy are deeply involved in puppet dance. He has also made, directed and voiced the puppets. Puppet dancer Archana Talukdar is an employee of the Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Government of Assam. Binita Devi of Guwahati, Assam has been promoting puppet dance through Surojit Academy. He has received National Research Tagore Scholarship, Junior Fellowship, Senior Scholarship from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India and is conducting research on puppet dance at Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev Viswavidyalay. Government programs like NCERT, CCRT, Vigyan Prasara, ASTEC, SCERT etc. have been providing training to school teachers on how to easily acquire knowledge through puppet dance in education.

In addition, she has promoted the importance of puppet dance in education by conducting workshops and puppet dance performances in various universities and schools in India. Binita Devi has earned a reputation for performing puppet dance in cultural stages in various states under the Government of India. There are many women who are successfully doing puppet dance in Assam. It is a good sign for the folk art of Assam that many women of the new generation are learning puppet dance and working on the subject.

In conclusion, puppetry has become a significant form of cultural expression, connecting traditional and modern elements. Women, as puppetry artists, have played a crucial role in shaping the cultural landscape of Assam. The contemporary landscape of art and culture is dynamic, with a focus on research, education, social causes, economic aspects, campaigns, and, ultimately, entertainment. (The author is an Assistant Professor, Suakuchi Budaram Madhab Satradhikar College, Suakuchi)

# Role of Public Relations

By: Er. Prabhat Kishore

In a democracy, such as ours, the existence and growth of any business eventually depend not only on public support in purchasing its products and services but more importantly on the sanction of the general public. Legislatures, who enact laws governing and regulating business, are elected by, and represent, the public. The management of public companies derives their power from and owes their tenure to the shareholders, who are members of the general public. Its employees are recruited from the public and live amongst the public. Therefore, it is only good business policy to practice 'Public Relations' to inform, to educate, to persuade, through effective communication, and create understanding and obtain the willing cooperation of various publics in business.

The skills and techniques to create and develop mutual understanding are provided by public relations (PR) practitioners. But first, it is essential to define the objectives that have been agreed upon which a PR program can be drawn up. These may be both long term and short term, but as John Maynard Keynes once said, "in the long term all of us will be dead." So, it is necessary to define the perspective of the long term.

Some form of research is necessary both before the PR program is drawn up and when a PR campaign has gathered momentum. In most business enterprises, top management consists of wise people, but there is no fun in flying blind when one can use a reader. Research is a word that seems to frighten many people. It conjures visions of long-bearded intellectuals working away in the backrooms on problems of no conceivable practical significance.

Many people discount the value of research and say they

prefer to rely on their own judgment. In this connection, there is much truth in the story of the man who, when given the results of research, says 'It is not true.' When it has been proved beyond doubt that it is true, he says, 'It has no practical value.' When it has been shown to have distinct practical possibilities, he says, "The research has only proved what was already known."

Public Relations is essentially an art of persuasion, and to influence people, it is obviously helpful to know as much as possible about the way in which people think and the manner in which they react to particular circumstances. There is also an urgent need for research into the results of public relations activities. Too little is known about the effects of PR programs on public attitudes and public action.

In discussing the place of PR in any organization, one important point has to be noted. It relates to the nature and functions of PR, as contrasted with those of other departments such as production, finance, marketing, personnel, etc. While all the latter departments are largely concerned with the respective spheres of responsibility, PR tends to flow over the whole gamut of business and management. From this point of view, PR has been called an extended arm of management. Each department or aspect of business and industry has its specific PR problems and tasks, and those have to be tackled by PR with the top man of each department and top management.

If, therefore, an organization takes its PR responsibilities seriously, then the PR men must be given the status and position they deserve. Public relations must have full and continuing access to top management if it has to succeed in its job. Not because PR men are anything special, but because PR is ultimately the responsibility of top management. Too

many organizations misuse or waste their PR men, e.g., in employing PR men as organizers of VIP hospitality and travel. This is not the job of public relations, or perhaps only a small part of PR.

A good PR man represents the management and communicates the policies, problems, and performances to the public on the one hand and feeds back the socio-economic and political trends and public opinion to top management and counsels them on possible lines of action, on the other.

Therefore, fearlessness and objectivity are essential qualities in PR practitioners. And top management must create the necessary environment for such attitudes. A PR man that feeds the management with what it likes to hear, viz., the glory and greatness of the organization, is doing himself and his company little good.

All this underlines the importance of the selection of PR men in regard to their abilities to counsel wisely; use effectively all the techniques of communication and their personnel and personality attributes. Good PR men can do the company a great deal. The difference is considerable, and top management must recognize this and pay more attention to the recruitment and training of PR men and create the necessary environment for good PR men to practice their skills and techniques.

For its day-to-day existence and functioning, a business has to reckon with its public. Each firm has to plan its communications program by carefully assessing the relative importance of its key public, the messages that it wishes to convey, the selection of the specific media through which its key groups could be reached most effectively and economically.

In the present Indian context, one of the most important segments of any business public is

the government. In our country, the government is at the driver's seat of the economy, and any business is dependent on government policies and action for its existence, functioning, and growth. Therefore, it must communicate effectively with the government in the case of a large public or private undertaking. Communications with the government assume even greater importance for a number of reasons. Firstly, because the company is accountable to the government. Secondly, because the government is run not only by ministers but by a large number of officials at various levels in the ministries and departments, many of whom may influence a decision. Lastly, the government, in its turn, is answerable to Sansad and the public.

Communications with MPs are also very important since parliamentary proceedings receive such wide publicity. It is in the interest of any company to communicate with MPs and tell them about its performance and problems.

Large public and private undertakings are always in the news and are under the searchlight of public scrutiny and attention. In spite of the fact that Doordarshan, private electronic channels, and Cinema have a wider audience than the press, public opinion in Bharat is largely influenced and molded by what is read in the press. There is, of course, no obligation on any organization to have any dealings with the press, but since the activities of all large companies, both in the public and private sectors, affect the public interest, the press will publish reports and comments irrespective of whether they have received a company's cooperation or not. Communicating with the press, or press relations is, therefore, of vital importance in the interests of any company's PR department. (The author is a technocrat and educationist)

## A strong and good-hearted thai lady's journey to Manipur

By: Marjing Mayanglambam

Just as Louise Lightfoot got admired by the beauty of Manipur art and culture, I am so honored to have known about Maynumptech, who also got inspired by Manipuri dance while studying for her bachelor's degree in Thailand. Her inspiration let her find out more about Manipur, and she came to know about the relationship and similarities between Manipur and Thailand. The more she came to know about these connections, the more she wanted to reach Manipur. Due to her utmost dedication, devotion, and love, she finally reached Manipur in 2015. She graduated from Visva Bharati Santiniketan University in Drama and Theatre Arts.

Who is Maynumptech? Well, I am not the only person to say more about her, but as far as I know, she is from Bangkok and has a younger sister and many cousins who all grew up together in the beautiful land of Thailand. I may add that she is a very engaging and hard-working lady, and she has lots of fans not only from Manipur but also from the north-eastern region of India.

I also questioned myself about the mythological belief about the aromatic black rice, which we Manipuris believed came from Thailand. (Poirenton Chak-Hao) It could be a mere coincidence, historical occurrence, or folklore, but Manipur and Thailand have many cultural ties, starting with art, culture, and food habits.

Maynumptech also got her motivation to travel from another Thai traveler, and she developed the idea to make vlogs even though she had not much knowledge about YouTube back then. She felt a lot like home whenever she came to Manipur be-

cause of the people, the food, and the environment, or she thinks that Manipur is like her second home. There is this deep feeling inside her where she gets more connection with Manipur, and her heart is always longing for this small land. Her honest response when I asked about the people is that there are so many people from Manipur, which is uncountable, who have helped her in various ways.

Beyond Manipur, she has also reached various states of Northeast India, and her outreach has spread like wildfire in India as a whole. Maynumptech is a lovely person, and nobody would ever say or feel a negative word or sense towards her. My humble words for Maynumptech may sound like an exaggeration, but these words are too little for such a priceless soul.

I have not met her in real life, but I can say with pride that she is indeed a shining gem who cares for Manipur so genuinely as if she were born and raised in this land.

She always prays for the betterment and peace of Manipur and India. She cannot be who she is right now without the support of us Indians. She has been paying her gratitude to us and praying for peace, stability, and prosperity to prevail in Manipur. Her videos on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are so wonderfully crafted that I even approached her for this short article one and a half years ago but could not publish it due to many reasons.

However, this year, I believe that Maynumptech's peace and loving messages will surely bring a change to Manipur and all of India.

"Praying for everyone to stay happy and spread love." - **Maynumptech.**



## Root Out Injustice

By: Khemu Parashar

Raising voice against crime is the cure for crime  
don't tolerate wrong,  
with high spirits,  
putting courage forward,  
destroy crime,  
don't embrace injustice at all.  
otherwise it will push you on the path of destruction,  
will destroy your reputation,  
he is very evil

It is absolutely true,  
it is a sin to succumb to crime.  
there should be no problem of community in this.  
at present there is a dire need,  
everyone should get justice,  
our ancestors have said this



## Bring It Home

By: Privalakshmi Gogoi

Keep running till you win the race  
Don't look back nor slow down your pace.  
There's struggle on the way  
But remember, you are going to brighten your day.

Be confident to bring home the trophy  
You will get appreciation for all the glory.  
Keep in mind to compete with yourself  
Raise the bar today and be better than yourself.

Promise yourself to be better than yesterday  
Give your best shot today and everyday.  
This way you will win any race with ease  
Day by day your confidence will increase.

Boost your energy with the shining trophy  
Work hard, for success doesn't come for free.  
Raise the trophy to enjoy the celebration  
Live the moment you are now the inspiration!

Hezbollah reported on Saturday that it had achieved direct strikes with 62 rockets fired at an air surveillance facility atop Mount Meron

## Hezbollah fires rockets at Israel in 'initial response' to killing of top leader from allied Hamas

**BEIRUT, Jan 6:** Lebanon's Hezbollah militia fired dozens of rockets at northern Israel on Saturday, warning that the barrage was its initial response to the targeted killing, presumably by Israel, of a top leader from the allied Hamas group in Lebanon's capital earlier this week.

The rocket attack came a day after Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said that his group must retaliate for the killing of Saleh Arouri, the deputy political leader of Hamas in a Hezbollah stronghold south of Beirut. Nasrallah said that if Hezbollah did not strike back, all of Lebanon would be vulnerable to Israeli attack. He appeared to be making his case for a response to the Lebanese public, even at the risk of escalating the fighting between Hezbollah and Israel as the war between Israel and Hamas rages on.

Hezbollah said on Saturday that it launched 62 rockets toward an Israeli air surveillance base on Mount Meron and that it scored direct hits. The Israeli military said about 40 rockets were fired toward Meron and



that a base was targeted, but made no mention of the base being hit. It said it struck the Hezbollah cell that fired the rockets.

The cross-border escalation came as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was kicking off an urgent Middle East diplomatic tour, his fourth to the region since the Israel-Hamas war erupted three months ago. The war was triggered by a deadly Hamas attack on southern Israel in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took some 250 hostages. Israel's blistering retaliation by air, ground and sea has killed more than 22,600 Palestinians, about two-thirds of them women and chil-

dren, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. Hezbollah leader says his group must retaliate for suspected Israeli strike in Beirut

In recent weeks, Israel has been scaling back its military assault in the north of the territory and pressing its heavy offensive in the south, vowing to crush Hamas. In the south, most of Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians are being squeezed into smaller areas in a humanitarian disaster, while still being pounded by Israeli airstrikes.

On Saturday morning, the European Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis received the bodies of 18 people killed in an overnight airstrike on a house in

the city's Maan neighborhood, said Saleh al-Hammis, head of the nursing department at the hospital. Citing witnesses, he said more than three dozen people had been sheltering in the house, including those displaced, when it was hit.

Israel has held Hamas responsible for civilian casualties, saying the group has embedded within in Gaza's civilian infrastructure. Still, international criticism of Israel's conduct in the war has grown more persistent because of the rising civilian death toll in Gaza. The United States has urged Israel to do more to prevent harm to civilians, even as it keeps sending weapons and munitions, while shielding its close ally against international censure.

Blinken began his latest Mideast trip in Turkey on Saturday. The Biden administration believes that Turkey and others can exert influence, particularly on Iran and its proxies, to tamp down fears of a regional conflagration. Those fears have spiked in recent days with incidents in the Red Sea, Lebanon, Iraq and

Iran.

In talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, Blinken will also be seeking Turkish support for still nascent plans for post-war Gaza that could include monetary or in-kind contributions to reconstruction efforts and some form of participation in a proposed multinational force that could operate in or adjacent to the territory.

From Turkey, Blinken will travel to Turkish rival and fellow NATO ally Greece to meet Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis at his residence on the Mediterranean island of Crete. Mitsotakis and his government have been supportive of U.S. efforts to prevent the Israel-Hamas war from spreading and have signaled their willingness to assist should the situation deteriorate.

Other stops on the trip include Jordan, followed by Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia on Sunday and Monday. Blinken will visit Israel and the West Bank next week before wrapping up the trip in Egypt. (AP)

## B'desh train arson: Oppn BNP leader among 8 arrested, party demands UN probe

**DHAKA, Jan 6:** Dhaka police on Saturday arrested eight people, including a prominent leader of the opposition BNP, in connection with Friday's arson attack on a train in the heart of Dhaka that left at least four people dead, ahead of elections in Bangladesh boycotted by the opposition.

Four carriages of the Benapole Express that runs from Benapole, bordering West Bengal, were set on fire at around 9 pm on Friday at the Gopibagh area, less than two km from its destination of the capital's Kamalapur Railway Station.

The eight persons arrested include Dhaka south city unit BNP joint convener Nabi Ullah Nabi and five activists of Jubo Dal, which is the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party's youth wing. "Nabi Ullah Nabi and Jubo Dal activist Mansur Alam were among the planners and financiers of the arson attack on the train, which was planned through a video conference," The Daily Star newspaper quoted Harunor Rashid, Chief of Detective Branch (DB) of police and also the Additional Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) as saying.

"At least 12-13 Jubo Dal unit leaders including Mansur held a video conference on Thursday around 6:00 pm. They planned arson attacks in Kishorganj-Narsingdi and Narayanganj-Kamalapur routes and crude bomb attacks at various polling centres in different wards," Harun told a press conference at the DMP media centre.

The Daily Star also said, quoting the DB chief Harun that police have recovered clips of the video conference. "One of

them agreed to execute the arson attack on the train. Nabi was not present at the video conference, but was one of the financiers and advisors of the attack," he said.

The DB chief identified the other six arrested and said, "The planners engaged known criminals for the arson attack. Detectives got their names and were trying to arrest them."

However, demanding a UN-supervised investigation into the incident, the BNP, led by former prime minister Khalida Zia, called it a "pre-planned" act of sabotage ahead of Sunday's general elections, which the party has boycotted and given a call for a 48-hour nationwide strike starting at 6:00 am Saturday.

In a statement, BNP senior Joint Secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi expressed concern over the "heartbreaking" incident of casualties "due to arson by miscreants" on the Benapole Express train.

"There is no doubt that the Benapole Express train fire was an act of sabotage, leading to the loss of life," The Daily Star newspaper quoted Rizvi as saying and further said that the BNP leader called for a UN-supervised investigation into the incident.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported that the Bangladesh Railways has formed a seven-member committee to investigate the incident, to identify the reason behind it and fix responsibility.

Of the four, three coaches were completely burnt. Railway officials said that most of the train's nearly 292 passengers were returning home from India. (PTI)

## Blinken opens latest urgent Mideast tour in Turkiye as fears grow that Gaza war may engulf region

**ISTANBUL, Jan 6:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has kicked off his latest urgent Middle East diplomatic mission in Turkiye, as fears mount that Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza may explode into a broader conflict.

Blinken's fourth visit in three months comes amid worrying developments outside of Gaza, including in Lebanon, northern Israel, the Red Sea and Iraq, that have put intense strains on what had been a modestly successful US push to prevent a regional conflagration in the weeks after the war began, and growing international criticism of Israel's military operation.

Blinken was meeting on Saturday with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to discuss what Turkiye and others can do to exert influence, particularly on Iran and its proxies, to ease soaring tensions, speed up humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza and begin in earnest to plan for reconstruction and governance of postwar Gaza, much of which has been reduced to rubble by three months of in-



tense Israeli bombardments.

The immediate difficulty of Blinken's task was underscored just hours before his talks with Erdogan as Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militia fired dozens of rockets at northern Israel, warning that the barrage was just an initial response to the targeted killing, presumably by Israel, of a top leader from the allied Hamas group in Lebanon's capital earlier this week.

Meanwhile, stepped-up attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have disrupted international trade and led to increased efforts on the part of the US and its allies to patrol the area and respond to threats, including possibly taking direct action against the group at its bases in

Yemen.

The Houthis have carried out at least two dozen attacks in response to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza just since December 19, which have further heightened tensions and raised risks for the global economy.

In Istanbul, US officials said Blinken would be seeking Turkish buy-in, or at least consideration, of potential monetary or in-kind contributions to reconstruction efforts and some form of participation in a proposed multi-national force that could operate in or adjacent to the territory.

Turkiye, and Erdogan in particular, have been harshly critical of Israel and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the prosecution of the war and the impact it has had on Palestinian civilians.

In addition, officials said, Blinken will stress the importance of the US places on Turkiye ratifying Sweden's membership in NATO, a long-delayed process that the Turks have said they will complete soon. Sweden's accession to the alliance is seen as one critical response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (AP)

## Taiwan says Chinese balloons are harassment and a threat to air safety

**TAIPEI, Jan 6:** Taiwan's Defence Ministry accused China on Saturday of harassment and trying to affect public morale by repeatedly sending balloons over the self-governing island.

A ministry analysis found that the paths of the balloons posed a serious threat to international passenger flights, according to a report by Taiwan's official Military News Agency. The ministry called for an immediate end to the activity to ensure flight safety.

"The ministry urged the people (of Taiwan) to clearly understand the Chinese Communist Party's cognitive combat methods and face it rationally and calmly so as to avoid being affected by it," the report said. The purpose of the balloons is unclear, and a Chinese state media outlet has accused Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party and Taiwanese and American media of hyping what it says are harmless weather balloons.

The balloon incidents come ahead of a January 13 presidential election in Taiwan in which the island's relations with China are a major issue. Taiwan's Defence Ministry has reported several instances of Chinese balloons flying near or over the island in the past month. (AP)

## Death toll from western Japan earthquakes rises to 126 as rain and snow imperil already shaky ground

**WAJIMA (JAPAN), Jan 6:** Aftershocks threatened to bury more homes and block roads crucial for relief shipments, as the death toll from the earthquakes that rattled Japan's western coastline this past week rose to 126 on Saturday.

Among the dead was a 5-year-old boy who had been recovering from injuries after boiling water spilled on him during Monday's 7.6 magnitude earthquake. His condition suddenly worsened and he died Friday, according to Ishikawa prefecture, the hardest-hit region.

Officials warned that roads, already cracked from the dozens of earthquakes that continue to shake the area, could collapse completely. That risk was growing with rain and snow expected overnight and Sunday.

The death toll on Saturday rose to 126. Wajima city has recorded the highest number of deaths with 69, followed by Suzu with 38. More than 500 people were injured, at least 27 of them seriously.

The tremors left roofs sitting haplessly on roads and everything beneath them crushed flat. Roads were warped like rubber. A fire turned a neighbourhood in Wajima to ashes.

More than 200 people were still unaccounted for, although the number has fluctuated. Eleven people were reported trapped under two homes that collapsed in Anamizu.

For Shiro Kokuda, 76, the house in Wajima where he grew up was spared but a nearby temple went up in flames and he was still looking for his friends at evacuation centres.

"It's been really tough," he said. Japan is one of the fastest-aging societies in the world. The population in Ishikawa and nearby areas has dwindled over the years. A fragile economy centred on crafts and tourism was now more imperiled than ever.

In an unusual gesture from nearby North Korea, leader Kim Jong Un sent a message of condolence to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, the official Korean Central News Agency reported Saturday.

Japan earlier received messages expressing sympathy and promises of aid from President Joe Biden and other allies.

Japanese government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters that Japan was grateful to all the messages, including the one from North Korea.

Hayashi said the last time Japan received a condolence message from North Korea for a disaster was in 1995. Along Japan's coastline, power was gradually being restored, but water supplies were still short. Emergency water systems were also damaged.

Thousands of troops were flying and trucking in water, food and medicine to the more than 30,000 people who had evacuated to auditoriums, schools and other facilities.

The nationally circulated Yomiuri newspaper reported that its aerial study had located more than 100 landslides in the area, and some were blocking lifeline roads. The urgency of the rescue operations intensified as the days wore on. But some have clung to life, trapped under pillars and walls, and were freed. (AP)

## Alaska Airlines grounds 737-9 aircraft after midair window blowout on flight from Portland, Oregon

**PORTLAND (US), Jan 6:** Alaska Airlines grounded all of its Boeing 737-9 aircraft on late Friday, hours after a window and piece of fuselage on one such plane blew out in midair and forced an emergency landing in Portland, Oregon. The incident occurred shortly after takeoff and the gaping hole caused the cabin to depressurize. Flight data showed the plane climbed to 16,000 feet (4,876 meters) before returning to Portland International Airport.

The airline said the plane landed safely with 174 passengers and six crew members.

"Following tonight's event on Flight 1282, we have decided to take the precautionary step of temporarily grounding our fleet of 65 Boeing 737-9 aircraft," Alaska Airlines CEO Ben Minicucci said in a statement.

Each of the aircraft will be returned to service after full maintenance and safety inspections, which Minicucci said the airline anticipated completing within days.

The airline provided no immediate information about whether anyone was injured or the possible cause. The plane was diverted about six minutes after taking off at 5:07 p.m., according to flight tracking data from the FlightAware website. It landed at 5:26 p.m. The pilot told Portland air traffic controllers the plane had an emergency, was depressurized and needed to return to the airport, according to a recording made by the website LiveATC.net.

A passenger sent KATU-TV in Portland a photo showing the hole in the side of the airplane next to passenger seats. Video shared with the station showed people wearing oxygen masks and passengers clapping as the plane landed. The National Transportation Safety Board said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, that it was investigating an event on the flight and would post updates when they are available. The Federal Aviation Administration also said it would investigate.

The Boeing 737-9 MAX involved in the incident rolled off the assembly line and received its certification just two months ago, according to online FAA records.

The plane had been on 145 flights since entering commercial service on Nov. 11, said FlightRadar24, another tracking service. The flight from Portland was the aircraft's third of the day. Boeing said it was aware of the incident, working to gather more information and ready to support the investigation.

The Max is the newest version of Boeing's venerable 737, a twin-engine, single-aisle plane frequently used on U.S. domestic flights. The plane went into service in May 2017. (AP)

## Pak's major political parties demand election be held on Feb 8 itself after Senate resolution seeks delay

**ISLAMABAD, Jan 6:** All major political parties in Pakistan, shocked by a controversial resolution passed by the Senate to delay the general elections scheduled for February 8, have displayed rare unity in demanding no change in the schedule of the polls.

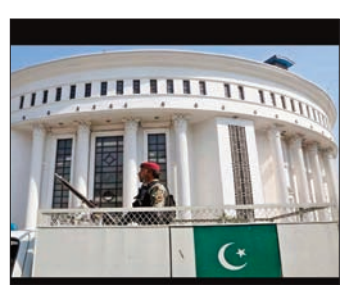
The united stand from political parties from across the political spectrum followed a non-binding resolution passed by the upper house on Friday when only about 14 senators out of over 100 members were attending the session.

The move resulted in an outcry that the national and provincial elections to be held on February 8 should not be delayed. The resolution, tabled by independent Senator Dilawar Khan, cited harsh cold weather and security concerns in many areas across the country

which he said could result in less participation in elections.

Raising concerns about the security situation, he said the law and order situation was not good and added that politicians were being targeted. The Dawn newspaper reported on Saturday that demanding that the Supreme Court (SC) take immediate notice of the resolution passed by the Senate, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Barrister Gohar Khan said: "A resolution of 14 senators based on their personal opinions, has no legal or binding force in the constitutional process of holding general elections."

He saw the "attempt by some political parties to defer the much-needed polls beyond the scheduled date of February 8 by using the floor of Senate [as] tantamount to



[an] attack on Constitution and democracy". According to a statement issued by the central media department of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party, Gohar Khan insisted that the passage of the resolution was a violation of the order of SC and amounted to contempt of court.

He called on the top court to take effective and remedial measures to foil attempts to delay or af-

fect the transparency and fairness of elections.

He also called on the apex court to "enforce its orders and observations regarding February 8 elections in the country", adding that his party was "fully prepared" for general elections.

He also said that those scared of the elections had violated the sanctity of the upper house of parliament by passing an unconstitutional resolution.

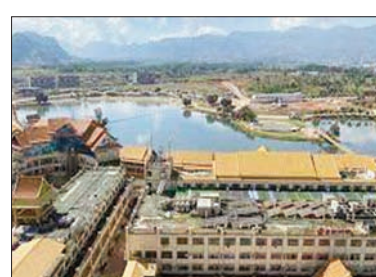
The Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) seemed to be in a Catch-22 situation after the passage of the Senate resolution, since it was not opposed by the sole party Senator, Behramand Tangi, in the House at the time of voting, leading the party to distance itself from his stance and vowing to seek explanation from him. (PTI)

## Myanmar confirms that a key northeastern city near China has been seized by an armed ethnic alliance

**BANGKOK, Jan 6:** Myanmar's military government has acknowledged that it withdrew its forces from a key city on the northeastern border with China after it was taken over by an alliance of ethnic armed groups it has been battling for months.

The Three Brotherhood Alliance took control of Laukkaing late Thursday after Myanmar military forces laid down their arms and were allowed to withdraw, both sides said on Saturday. Photos and videos on social media showed a vast amount of weapons that the alliance claimed to have captured.

Laukkaing is the capital of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone, which is geographically part of northern Shan state in Myanmar. The Three Brotherhood Alliance is comprised of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army. The MNDAA is a military force of the Kokang minority, who are ethnic Chinese.



The capture of the city was a primary goal of the alliance's offensive launched on October 27.

Myanmar government spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun told the Popular News Journal, a pro-army website, on Saturday that the military and its local commanders relinquished control of Laukkaing after considering many aspects, including the safety of the family members of the soldiers stationed there.

He said the military also took into consideration Myanmar's relationship with China, which is just across the bor-

der from Laukkaing.

China, which has good relations with both the military and the ethnic alliance, has been seeking an end to the fighting.

Beijing protested after artillery shells landed in its territory on Wednesday, wounding five people. Zaw Min Tun said the alliance had fired the shells and that it tried to blame the military in order to damage its relationship with China. A statement posted by the alliance on social media late Friday declared that the entire Kokang region had become a "Military Council-free area".

It said 2,389 military personnel — including six brigadier generals — and their family members had surrendered by Friday and that all were evacuated to safety.

Video clips circulating on social media purportedly showed the soldiers and their family members being transported in various vehicles. The Shwe Phee Myay News Agency, an online news site reporting from Shan state, reported that many of them were taken to

Lashio, the capital of Shan's northern region, under an agreement with the MNDAA for their repatriation.

The city's fall to the alliance is the biggest in a series of defeats suffered by Myanmar's military government since the offensive was launched, underlining the pressure it is under as it battles pro-democracy guerrillas and other ethnic minority armed groups across the country. Ethnic armed organisations have battled for greater autonomy on and off for decades, but Myanmar has been wracked by what amounts to civil war since the army seized power in February 2021 from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking nationwide armed resistance by pro-democracy forces. Whether the Three Brotherhood Alliance will try to extend its offensive outside of Shan state is not yet clear, but it has vowed to keep fighting against military rule.

The alliance cast its offensive as a struggle against military rule and an effort to rid the region of major organised

criminal enterprises, including cyber-scams operations controlled by Chinese investors in collusion with local Myanmar warlords, especially in Laukkaing. China has publicly sought to eradicate the large-scale criminal industry and tens of thousands of people involved have been repatriated to China in recent weeks.

But the offensive was also widely recognised as an effort by the MNDAA to regain control of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone by ousting a rival Kokang group backed by the military government from its seat of power. Peng Deren, the MNDAA commander, said in a New Year's speech published by The Kokang, an affiliated online media site, that the alliance had seized over 250 military targets and five border crossings with China.

He said more than 300 cyberscam centres were raided and more than 40,000 Chinese involved in cyber crimes were repatriated to their country. (AP)

# Sikkim has achieved extensive financial inclusion: Sitharaman



**GANGTOK, Jan 6:** Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday lauded the Sikkim government for helping the Himalayan state achieve extensive financial inclusion, covering remote villages and habitats.

She also congratulated banks and other financial institutions for the success story in Sikkim.

"Sikkim has done extremely well to set up bank branches and ATM kiosks in all six districts, covering remote villages and habitats to make the mission of financial inclusion a great success," Sitharaman said at a credit outreach programme here. The minister said there are 32 bank branches and 36 ATMs in Sikkim per one lakh population in comparison to the national average of 14.

"The state capital Gangtok alone has 43 bank branches and 58 ATMs per one lakh population," she said, adding that women and youth are the biggest beneficiaries of financial inclusion in Sikkim.

Sitharaman also handed certificate of loans worth Rs 402 crore to 3,828 beneficiaries under various central schemes, noting that the number of beneficiaries were 1,720 when she had visited the state last year.

She said it was due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's insistence that banks were not seeking collateral from beneficiaries to sanction loans under various central schemes.

"The banks are there to lend you money for your business, and you don't need to give any guarantee, as our PM is himself the guarantor," Sitharaman asserted. (PTI)

## Security forces apprehend PLA member in Manipur

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** A joint security team has apprehended a proscribed member of the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) People's Liberation Army (PLA) for allegedly involved in extortion activities in Imphal East, said Manipur Police. The accused, identified as 50-year-old Aheibam Amorjit Singh, was arrested during a checking at Mantripukhri Bazar in Imphal East. "On 05.01.2024, a joint security team arrested a proscribed member of the RPF/PLA namely Aheibam Amorjit Singh (50 years) of Kongba Kshetri Leikai, Imphal East during mobile frisking & checking at Mantripukhri Bazar, Imphal East. The individual was involved in extorting money from three-wheelers plying along NH-2," the Manipur Police wrote on micro-blogging site X.

## Champhai Police Station clinches 4th position in National Police Station rankings

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** In a remarkable achievement, Champhai Police Station has been honored as the 4th best Police Station in the country, receiving the Certificate of Excellence from the Union Home Ministry in the Annual Ranking of Police Stations for 2023.

The recognition underscores the dedicated efforts of the Champhai Police in maintaining law and order, ensuring public safety, and fostering community relations.

"Champhai Police Station has been declared the 4th best Police Station in the country and awarded the Certificate of Excellence by the Union Home Ministry in the Annual Ranking of Police Stations for 2023," the Mi-



zoram police wrote on social media site X.

This accolade reflects their commitment to excellence and their contribution to upholding the highest standards of policing. The entire community celebrates this commendable accomplishment, and the police force remains steadfast in their commitment to serving and protecting the citizens of Champhai.

Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma also took to the micro-

## Arunachal CM inaugurates water supply, roads, and eco-fishery park under JJM



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** Arunachal chief minister Pema Khandu on Saturday inaugurated water supply projects for Lingko village, Chetam CO HQ, Segi-Gusar CO HQ and Maro CO HQ at Daporijo under Jal Jeevan Mission scheme.

Besides this, Khandu also inaugurated the Daporijo township road and drainage system, road from Soki village to Raji village, material recovery facility and eco-fishery park."

material recovery facility and eco-fishery park.

Taking to the micro-blogging site X, he said, "Happy to have inaugurated water supply projects for Lingko village, Chetam CO HQ, Segi-Gusar CO HQ and Maro CO HQ, today at Daporijo under Jal Jeevan Mission scheme. Also inaugurated Daporijo township road and drainage system, road from Soki village to Raji village, material recovery facility and eco-fishery park."

He also laid the foundation stone of multistorey parking lot building at Daporijo and inspected under construction multipurpose convention hall.

Later, he expressed his gratitude to Union minister Kiren Rijiju, minister Nakap Nalo Ji and MLA Shri Tanya Soki Ji for their gracious presence during Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra.

## Sikkim records 1 pc rise in voters to 4.62 lakh



**GANGTOK, Jan 6:** Sikkim recorded a nearly 1 per cent increase in its total voters this year, according to the latest electoral rolls.

According to the Final Electoral Roll dated January 1, the total number of voters in Sikkim rose by 4,050 or 0.88 per cent to 4,62,456. Of them, 2,32,117 were men, 2,30,334 were women and five transgenders.

During the revision of rolls, 13,716 names were added, and 9,666 names were deleted for various reasons, primarily deaths.

Also, 3,856 persons with disabilities were marked in the electoral rolls. The total number of service voters in the state was 1,992. (PTI)

## Manipur CM launches College Fagathansi Mission in Moirang

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** In a momentous event held at Moirang College in Bishnupur District, Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh launched the College Fagathansi Mission in Moirang on Saturday.

He also laid the foundation stones for various development projects in the Moirang Assembly Constituency.

The chief minister marked the occasion by inaugurating the ambitious College Fagathansi Mission, aiming to enhance infrastructure and elevate the quality of higher education in colleges across the state.

"Delighted to launch the College Fagathansi Mission, a significant step towards the holistic development of our educational institutions at Moirang College, Moirang. The College Fagathansi Mission, designed to expand the horizons of our colleges, will provide modern amenities and state-of-the-art facilities to colleges across Manipur, ensuring that every student has access to high-quality education," the Manipur chief minister informed on social media site X.

He further urged the students, faculty, and people of the state to actively participate in and support the College Fagathansi Mission.

Addressing the gathering, chief minister N Biren Singh also emphasized the government's commitment to prioritising the health and education sectors.

Later, he highlighted the success of the School Fagathansi Mission, which focused on improving infrastructure in government schools, leading to academic achievements and increased admissions.

With the launch of the College Fagathansi Mission, Singh articulated the government's dedication to fostering better higher education facilities in the state. He also disclosed plans to cover 24 colleges under the mission, investing significantly in their infrastructure.

Commenting on the broader issues, N Biren Singh discussed the importance of education in promoting environmental awareness, emphasising the role of proper education in preserving Reserved Forests and mitigating environmental degradation.

Addressing the ongoing conflicts in the state, the chief minister reassured the public of the government's efforts for resolution and urged support and cooperation.

Singh also provided updates on additional development projects, including the completion of the Water Supply Scheme at Kwakta, construction of an open gym at Moirang, and plans for an Ima Market at Kwakta.

It is worth mentioning that these initiatives underscore the government's multifaceted approach to address various aspects of public welfare and infrastructure development in Manipur.

## APCSU 5th annual conference held in Arunachal's Diyun



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, Jan 6:** The Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Students' Union (APCSU) successfully hosted its highly anticipated 5th annual conference on Friday at a general playground in Arunachal's Diyun, witnessing an assembly of approximately 10 thousand attendees from diverse communities, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

Themed as "Embracing Change through Recognition, Dialogue, and Constructive Discourse," the conference aimed to illuminate APCSU's initiatives, gather wisdom from esteemed elders, and engage in vital discussions shaping the present and future.

The conference served as a platform to recognise and honor the remarkable contributions and sacrifices of the Chakma community across various sectors.

It sought to foster unity through dialogue and discussion among Chakma Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Gaon Burahs (GBs), esteemed Social Workers, and Students, aligning their efforts towards a collective vision.

Distinguished guests including Santana Chakma, cabinet minister for industry and commerce, jail (home), OBC welfare, Government of Tripura, Doni Nich, chairman IT & E-Governance, government of Arunachal Pradesh; and S N L Naam, APST, extra-assistant commissioner, Diyun, graced the event and elevated the significance of the conference.

A highlight of the conference was the prestigious APCSU Karmayogi Award 2023 conferred upon Subimal Bikash Chakma, acknowledging his exemplary leadership as the President of the Committee for Citizenship Rights

of the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCHAP).

His instrumental role in advocating for the rightful rights of the community has been pivotal since the inception of the Chakma-Hajong human rights' movement.

The event also acknowledged individuals preserving the Chakma Script, facilitated Gaon Burahs for drug-free village initiatives, and recognised the academic excellence of the 10th and 12th class toppers for the year 2022-23.

In her address, minister Santana Chakma emphasized unity as the cornerstone for prosperity, urging the preservation of cultural values.

She commended the peaceful coexistence and participation of the Chakma community, underscoring the potential for development through unified efforts.

With the efforts of all, through education, culture, and religion, Chakmas wherever they are, they will do good for the community's welfare.

Guest of Honour Doni Nich emphasised cooperation and coordination with students' unions as integral in fostering unity and progress.

"The development of the area is possible with whatever initiative APCSU has taken, and the cooperation and support from all would ensure achieving the area's development," she added.

## President Murmu to inaugurate Meghalaya Games 2024 on Jan 15



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma on Saturday informed that President of India, Droupadi Murmu will inaugurate the Meghalaya Games 2024 at Tura on January 15.

Taking to the micro-blogging site X, the chief minister said that the games would be historic.

"Meghalaya Games 2024, Tura, will be historic as Hon'ble President of India, Smti. Droupadi Murmu ji will grace the occasion as Chief Guest. We look forward to welcoming Hon'ble President to Meghalaya this month on the 15th in Tura and 16th in Shillong. @rashtpratibhvn @ianuragthakur @kishanreddybjp," he said.

Sangma in another post on X, said that the Meghalaya Games 2024 will be held for the first time in Tura with participation of young people from across Meghalaya.

## Number of voters in Tripura rises to 28.56 lakh, sex ratio improves



**AGARTALA, Jan 6:** The total number of voters in Tripura rose to 28.56 lakh after the revision of the electoral rolls, election officials said on Saturday. Names of 32,218 people were added to the rolls, while names of 13,231 voters were deleted because of their deaths, additional chief electoral officer UG Mog told PTI.

As per the final electoral rolls

dated January 1, there are 28,56,925 voters in the state. Of them, 14,35,172 are male, 14,21,679 are female, and 74 transgenders. Following the revision of rolls for the 60 assembly seats, the number of voters in the state increased by 18,987 or 0.66 per cent.

Mog said that there has been an improvement in the sex ratio

as well in the voters' list.

"In the final electoral rolls, the sex ratio has gone up from 989 to 991, which is encouraging, given that more women cast votes than men," he said.

The Badharghat assembly seat has the highest number of voters at 62,723, and the Simma seat has the lowest at 38,974. Both are in the West Tripura district. (PTI)

## Arunachal to hold folk music festival in Feb

'Arunachal Pradesh being a multi-tribes state is very rich in folk songs, music and dances'

**ITANAGAR, Jan 6:** The Arunachal Pradesh government has decided to organise an indigenous folk music festival in February this year to promote such songs and culture, a minister said.

Deputy chief minister Chowna Mein on Friday convened a meeting with senior officers of various departments to make arrangements for the programme.

"Arunachal Pradesh being a multi-tribes state is very rich in folk songs, music and dances. However, the resonance of folk music and such performances are diminishing owing to the adoption of modern culture into our everyday life," the deputy chief minister said.

The decision to organise the festival has been taken to revive the essence of the state's indigenous culture and to promote the state's tribal folk songs, music and dances, Mein said.

The deputy chief minister pointed out that there is a need to showcase Arunachal Pradesh's folk



heritage to a larger audience outside the state, in a bid to foster stronger connections with the culture, language, music and dances of the other states of India under the broader vision of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'.

The state government would also host another important event called

'Bharat Lok Sangeet Arunachal Utsav 2024' wherein cultural troupes on folk songs and dances from other northeastern states and some selected states from the Himalayan region and South India would be invited.

The event is scheduled to take place in the later part of February

this year.

The meeting was attended by principal secretary of finance, planning & investment Sharat Chauhan, secretary general administration Sadhana Deori, tourism secretary Swapnil M Naik, planning secretary R K Sharma and other senior officers. (PTI)

# Indian Navy on Friday thwarted the attempted hijacking of Liberian-flagged vessel Navy trying to hunt down pirates involved in hijacking attempt

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** Indian Naval forces are on Saturday investigating suspected vessels in the North Arabian Sea to track down the pirates involved in an attempt to hijack a merchant vessel with 21 crew members including 15 Indians, officials said.

The Indian Navy on Friday thwarted the attempted hijacking of Liberian-flagged vessel MV Lila Norfolk and rescued all its crew members. The crew of the bulk carrier are now engaged in restoring the propulsion system, power supply and steering gear of the platform, the Navy said. "Thereafter, MV Lila Norfolk will recommence her passage to her destination under escort of the Indian naval warship," it said.

The Navy deployed a warship, maritime patrol aircraft P-8I, helicopters and and MQ9B Predator drones to assist the vessel, MV Lila Norfolk, after it sent a message on the UK Maritime Trade Operations portal, saying unknown armed personnel had boarded it on Thursday evening.

On Friday, Indian Navy's elite marine commandos rescued all 21 crew members of the commercial vessel after boarding it from frontline warship INS Chennai.

The Navy came out with a statement detailing its response to the hijacking attempt.

In a video shared by the Navy, three Indian crew members of the bulk carrier thanked the



force for rescuing them. "I am proud of Indian Navy," said one of them.

The Navy said it swiftly responded to the hijacking incident by deploying considerable strength of assets, both ships and aircraft, with an aggressive intent to counter the attack by

pirates. "INS Chennai guided missile destroyer arrived at the scene of action by 1515 hours. Continuous aerial recon of MV Lila Norfolk was undertaken by MQ9B (Sea Guardian drone), P8I (maritime patrol aircraft) and in-

tegral helicopters," it said in the statement.

It said that subsequently, the Indian Navy Marine Commandos boarded MV Lila Norfolk and undertook thorough sanitisation of the upper decks, machinery compartments and living spaces/

"The team did not find any pirates onboard. Forceful warnings by the Indian Naval aircraft to the vessel and likely interception by the Indian Navy warship, probably compelled the pirates to escape during the night hours," the Navy said.

"All 21 crew of MV Lila Norfolk have been rescued and are safe. Indian Naval forces are investigating the suspected vessels in the area," it said.

"Presently, the crew of MV is engaged in restoring propulsion, power supply and steering gear," it said.

This is among a series of such maritime incidents witnessed in the strategic waters over the last few weeks.

Liberian-flagged vessel MV Chem Pluto, with 21 Indian crew members, was the target of a drone attack off India's west coast on December 23.

Besides MV Chem Pluto, another commercial oil tanker that was on the way to India came under a suspected drone strike in the Southern Red Sea on the same day. The vessel had a team of 25 Indian crew. (PTI)

# Modi changed country's political culture: BJP chief Nadda

**CHANDIGARH, Jan 6:** BJP president J P Nadda on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has changed the country's political culture that used to revolve around caste, creed, and vote bank politics.

Nadda held a roadshow in Haryana's Panchkula and expressed confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would sweep all the 10 Lok Sabha Seats in the state in the upcoming general elections.

"He (PM) has changed the culture of politics in the country which was earlier based on caste and creed... divisive politics and vote bank politics were practised for a long time until PM Modi gave a new message -- Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas -- and said that the country can move ahead with the mantra," Nadda said.

Scores of people lined the route of the roadshow, which was dotted with party flags, and showered flowers on the vehicle of the BJP chief who urged the crowd to ensure that the party repeats its 2019 parliamentary polls performance and wins all 10 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the upcoming general elections.

With Nadda's visit to Haryana coming after BJP's victory in the Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh Assembly polls, the BJP chief told the gathering, this enthusiasm shows you want to take the country and the state forward and make Narendra Modi the PM for the third time.

When he asked how many of the 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana will the BJP win, the crowd replied, "Dus ki dus (all 10)"

Nadda then said, "Dus bata bus, dus bata dus (all 10 seats)... I am doing an advance booking. I have come here with Modi ji's message."

The BJP is in alliance with the Janayak Janta Party in Haryana, but both have remained non-committal about whether they would contest the LS polls jointly.

Praising Modi's leadership, Nadda said, "He is the country's and the world's most popular leader and we are proud that he is a leader of the BJP."

"We have to make the country strong and stable and you will see it

becoming a developed nation before your own eyes," he added.

Even the Chinese media is praising India's progress. It has been said that earlier, India used to balance but now, it works according to its interest, he said.

He cited an article in Global Times, a prominent state-run Chinese media outlet, that said India has become more strategically confident and proactive in creating and developing a "Bharat narrative".

Nadda also highlighted mentioned several welfare schemes and initiatives of the Modi government, particularly for the underprivileged sections, saying they have benefitted from the policies and programmes of the Centre.

Today, India is the world's fifth largest economy and is poised to be among the world's top three economies well before the end of this decade, he said.

Nadda also praised the welfare schemes of the Khattar government and said its flagship 'Parivar Pehchan Patra' (family ID) scheme has brought a big change in society.

Today, people don't have to run to government offices, they only have to mention their details on a portal and the government reaches their doorsteps, said Nadda.

Nadda was accompanied by Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and State BJP chief Nayab Singh Saini on the vehicle decorated with marigold garlands during the roadshow.

BJP Haryana affairs in-charge Bipul Kumar Deb, senior party leader Om Prakash Dhankar and State Assembly speaker and Panchkula MLA Gian Chand Gupta also accompanied the BJP chief.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines, Gupta said, "The big roadshow and overwhelming public support shows that Narendra Modi is going to become the prime minister for the third time and we will win 400 (Lok Sabha) seats".

"And in Haryana too, the party will form government for the third time in this year's assembly polls," Gupta added. On Wednesday evening, Nadda made an overnight stopover at Panchkula before heading to Himachal Pradesh on Friday where he held a roadshow in Solan. (PTI)

## Will take decision on Ram Temple consecration ceremony invite very soon

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday said he will "very soon" take a decision on whether he will attend the Ram Temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya on January 22.

Kharge and former party chief Sonia Gandhi have been invited for the event and the Congress had earlier said that their decision would be conveyed at the "right time".

Besides them, Congress' leader in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, has also been invited for the ceremony.

"I have got the invitation. Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's former principal secretary had come along with the secretary of the (temple) trust, they have invited me. I will decide on it very soon," Kharge said at a press conference at the AICC headquarters here when asked about the invite sent to him for the ceremony. (PTI)

## Another grand feat accomplished by ISRO: Prez Murmu

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday congratulated ISRO for successfully placing India's first solar observatory Aditya-L1 into its destination orbit, and said the mission will benefit the entire humanity.

"Another grand feat accomplished by ISRO! As part of India's maiden solar mission, Aditya L1, the observatory has been placed in the final orbit and reached its destination at Lagrange Point 1," Murmu said in a post on 'X'.

"Congratulations to the entire Indian scientist community for the great achievement! This mission will enhance our knowledge of the Sun-Earth System and benefit the entire humanity," she added.

Murmu also said that the significant participation of women scientists in ISRO missions "takes women empowerment too onto a higher orbit".

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Saturday placed Aditya-L1 into its destination orbit Lagrange Point 1. (PTI)

## Delhi Police urges court to frame charges against ex-WFI chief



**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** Delhi Police on Saturday urged a court here to frame charges against BJP MP and former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh in a case of alleged sexual harassment of women wrestlers. The police opposed the contention of the accused that since some of the alleged incidents took place overseas, they do not fall in the jurisdic-

tion of courts in Delhi, as it concluded arguments on framing charges against Singh.

The police submitted before Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Priyanka Rajpoot that the incidents of sexual harassment, allegedly committed by Singh, overseas and inside India, including Delhi, are part of the same offence.

"Delhi court has jurisdiction to try this case," the police told the judge. The court will further hear the matter on January 20.

The city police had filed a charge sheet in the case against Singh, a six-time MP, on June 15, 2023 under sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354-A (sexual harassment), 354-D (stalking) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code. (PTI)

## Law panel examining various formulae on holding three-tier polls together

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** The Law Commission, looking into the issue of holding simultaneous elections in the country, may examine the possibility of carrying out the three-tier democratic exercise in two phases in a single year, sources here said.

In the first phase, Lok Sabha and assembly polls can be held and in the second phase, local body polls can be organised, they said, citing one of the formulae the law panel may consider for the simultaneous elections issue.

This, the sources said, is a practical approach keeping in mind the varied climatic conditions of the country.

In August 2018, the previous Law Commission had endorsed the Narendra Modi government's proposal to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies,

saying it will prevent the country from being in constant election mode. However, it had sought further public discourse on the issue before arriving at a final decision.

The present law panel under Justice (ret'd) Ritu Raj Awasthi is finalising its report on holding assembly and Lok Sabha polls together. But the high-level committee on 'One Nation, One Election' under former president Ram Nath Kovind has been tasked with recommending how Lok Sabha, assembly and local body polls (panchayat, municipalities, zila parishad) can be held together.

Keeping in mind the terms of reference of the Kovind-led panel, the Law Commission has enhanced the ambit of its study to include holding local body polls along with national and state elections. (PTI)

## Flight sent back from France: Statements of 66 from Gujarat recorded by CID

**AHMEDABAD, Jan 6:** The statements of all 66 passengers from Gujarat on the Nicaragua-bound flight that was sent back to India by France have been recorded as part of the state CID's probe into alleged human trafficking, and an FIR will be lodged soon, an official said on Saturday.

The flight operated by Romanian charter company Legend Airlines had landed at Vetry near Paris on December 21 after which French authorities intervened to probe a human trafficking angle. The flight, with 276 passengers, landed in Mumbai on December 26. While the flight that landed in France had 303 Indian passengers, 27 sought asylum in the European nation and stayed back.

Speaking about the probe, Sanjay Kharat, Superintendent of Police, CID-Crime and Railways, who is investigating the case, said details of 15 immigration agents suspected to be involved in the case have been gathered.

"There were 66 persons from Gujarat on board. The CID Crime has recorded their statements. They are now back in their native villages in the state," Kharat told reporters.

These 66, including some minors, are mainly from Mehsana, Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar and Anand districts.

"The CID has been probing the role of immigration agents in this case. Based on the leads and information we have gathered, we will be filing an FIR soon. We have got

names and other details of some agents from Gujarat and other parts of the country. A probe is underway to find out how they sent people to Dubai and further to Nicaragua with the aim of illegal entry into the USA," the SP said.

The documents these agents used, the money they collected and the kind of visas used are all part of the probe, he said, adding that 15 agents have been tracked and are being questioned.

The Gujarat CID had earlier said the passengers, most of whom had studied till Class VIII and XII, had paid ₹ 60-80 lakh each to enter USA illegally after reaching Nicaragua via Dubai.

The Gujarat CID has also written to the Central Bureau of Investigation for help in collecting details of agents who had got these passengers Dubai visas, bank details of payments made, as well as details of how the visas for Nicaragua were obtained from Dubai.

Nicaragua has become a popular destination for those seeking asylum in the US.

As many as 96,917 Indians attempted to enter the US illegally in the financial year 2023, according to US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) data.

Flights to third countries where obtaining travel documents is easy are known as "dunki" flights. (PTI)

## NIA attaches 4 properties of Lawrence Bishnoi syndicate members in 3 states

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday attached four properties owned by members of the Lawrence Bishnoi organised terror-crime syndicate in three states, an official said.

This action is another major step towards demolishing the terrorist-gangster nexus in the country, the spokesperson of the federal agency said.

The properties -- three immovable and one movable -- were attached in a coordinated action in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the official said.

The spokesperson said the NIA found that all these properties were "proceeds of terrorism" and used for hatching terror conspiracies and executing serious crimes. The attached properties include a flat at the Gombi Nagar Extension in Lucknow, which belonged to Vikas Singh, a harbourer of the terror gang in Uttar Pradesh.

Two other properties attached in the action are located in Bhisshanpur village in Punjab's Fazilka and these are

owned by accused Dalip Kumar alias "Bhola" alias "Dalip Bishnoi", the spokesperson said and added that an SUV, registered in the name of Joginder Singh of Yamunanagar in Haryana, was also seized.

Citing findings of investigations, the official said Vikas Singh is an associate of Lawrence Bishnoi who has harboured terrorists, including those involved in the rocket-propelled grenade attack on the Punjab Police headquarters in December 2022.

Joginder Singh, the father of gangster Kala Rana, a close associate of Lawrence Bishnoi, was facilitating the syndicate's members by allowing them to use his SUV for transporting arms and ammunition for promoting terrorist acts, the official said.

The property belonging to accused Dalip Kumar was being used as a shelter or warehouse for storing and concealing weapons, and also for harbouring terrorist group members, the spokesperson said.

The NIA had registered a case against the organised crime syndicate of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and his

associates under the UA(P)A in August 2022.

The agency's investigations showed that the gang had its mafia-style criminal networks in several states of the country.

Members of these networks were involved in many sensational crimes such as the murders of popular Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala and religious and social leaders like Pardeep Kumar, the official said and added that they were also involved in large-scale extortions from businessmen and professionals.

The official said investigations have also revealed that many terror conspiracies were masterminded from abroad, including Pakistan and Canada, or by leaders of organised terror syndicates operating from prisons in India.

The spokesperson said as part of its efforts to disrupt and dismantle such terror and mafia networks and their support infrastructure, the NIA has adopted several targeted strategies in recent months, including attachment and seizure of properties derived from "proceeds of terrorism". (PTI)

## NCRTC brings policy to rent out RRTS stations, trains for film shoots, events

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** The National Capital Region Transport Corporation on Saturday introduced a policy to rent out Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) trains and premises for shooting films, documentaries and commercials. In October last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the RRTS, India's first, and flagged off a Namoo Bharat rapid transit train that can run at a speed of 180 kmph.

With this, the 17-km priority section between Sahibabad and the Duhai Depot of the 82-km Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor was opened for the public. Spaces, such as RRTS stations and Namoo Bharat trains, are now available for short-term hire for shooting films, documentaries and commercials, officials said.

The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) also said its or the RRTS' premises can also be "rented out for



events other than shootings". "If Namoo Bharat trains are required during the night hours (non-revenue hours) then booking of events can also be considered," it said in a statement.

"With the proliferation of OTT platforms and the digital landscape, there has been a surge in

the utilisation of public transport systems, particularly metro rail systems, as backdrops for filming feature films, documentaries and web series," the NCRTC said.

"The NCRTC's decision to open its doors to such activities provides a lucrative opportunity for filmmakers seeking dynamic

and modern shooting locations," it said. RRTS stations are painted in striking blue and beige colours, and are also well-lit, airy spaces and suffused with natural light, according to the NCRTC.

The schedule and booking fee for hiring NCRTC premises, including per scheduled hour of occupancy for commercial purposes, are ₹ 2 lakh for all stations of the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut corridor, ₹ 3 lakh for Namoo Bharat trains and station, and ₹ 2.5 lakh for depots and other sites, the statement said.

"The 82-km Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor stands as India's pioneering RRTS corridor to be implemented in the country. This corridor will encompass 25 stations, inclusive of two depot stations," the NCRTC said. The officials said in addition, local transit services are slated to be offered for the RRTS network covering 13 stations within a span of 23 km. (PTI)

**BHUBANESWAR, Jan 6:** A man who was declared dead four days ago because of a mistaken identity and found to be alive later, succumbed to his injuries on Saturday, officials of the hospital concerned said. With the death of Dilip Samantray, who was found to be under treatment in a private hospital on Friday, the toll in the AC compressor explosion in the same medical facility rose to three.

Samantray was initially declared dead on December 30, but he was found under treatment on Friday. The man, however, died on Saturday afternoon, the hospital's CEO Dr Smita Padhi said.

"We tried our best, but he couldn't be saved. The patient's heartbeat and oxygen level reduced drastically. As per the procedure, we will hand over the body to the police. If required, a DNA test will be conducted. We will collect samples," she told reporters.

Of the four injured persons admitted to the hospital after the De-

cember 29 evening blast, three have died. They were: Sritam Sahu (29), Dilip Samantray (34) and Jyoti Ranjan Mallik (34). All were employees of a firm engaged by the hospital for AC maintenance.

Samantray, a resident of Khurda district, was declared dead on December 30, and a body was handed over to his family which cremated it. His wife died by suicide out of grief the next day.

Actually, it was Jyoti Ranjan Mallik's body. Doctors said the confusion was created as the persons' faces were beyond recognition because of the burn injuries due to the blast that occurred on the roof of the hospital.

Samantray's mother alleged that her son was killed by the hospital. On the cremation of the first body, she said, "The doctors gave us a different body. We believed them and cremated it. After the funeral was over, the hospital authorities on Friday said Dilip was alive."

"Subsequently, we reached the hospital and requested the doctors to allow me to meet my son. When I called him by his name, he responded by shaking his head," said Dilip's mother.

She said after her daughter-in-law's death by suicide, the family found solace in the news that Samantray was alive.

"But all our hopes were shattered again," she said.

Dilip's brother alleged that he died of medical negligence.

Hi-Tech Hospital CEO Dr Smita Pandhi claimed that the treatment of the four patients started after they were identified by the outsourcing company.

"We can hardly do anything if someone is wrongly identified," she said. The hospital also blamed the family for the mistaken identity and offered to conduct a DNA test. Bhubaneswar Deputy Commissioner of Police Prateek Singh said that an ACP-rank officer will probe into the matter. (PTI)



## Cong yatra to hold dialogue with people on eco inequalities, caste census, unemployment: Kharge

The yatra, which will begin on January 14, will cover 6,713 km and its participants will travel on buses and foot

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** The Congress is taking out the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra as the government did not give it a chance to raise people's issues in Parliament and the initiative is aimed at re-establishing the principles of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity enshrined in the Constitution, party chief Mallikarjun Kharge said on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference during which he unveiled the logo of the Manipur-Mumbai yatra that will be led by Rahul Gandhi, Kharge attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not visiting violence-hit Manipur, saying he has time for photo shoots at beaches and at places where temples are being constructed but does not have time for the sufferings of the northeastern state.

He also accused the BJP government of misusing agencies like the ED, the CBI and the Income Tax Department to threaten opposition leaders and said Home Minister Amit Shah is running "a big dry clean factory where every tainted leader comes out clean, pure white" after joining the ruling party.

"Unfortunate incidents took place in Manipur but Prime Minister Modi has time for photo shoots of swimming at the beach, in places where temples are being constructed, in Kerala, from everywhere you can see his photo. But why did this 'mahapurush' did not go to Manipur where people are dying, women are being raped, people are dying of cold. Is it not part of the country?" Kharge asked.

"You go to Lakshadweep, why can't you go and talk to the people in Manipur. The PM said he is enough for the opposition, but then he should go to Manipur...talk to the people there," the Congress



chief said, flanked by party general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal.

So that is why the yatra is aimed at creating public awareness about issues, he said.

"We tried to raise issues in Parliament but the government did not allow us to do it. As many as 146 opposition MPs were suspended for the first time in India's history. The issues 28 parties wanted to raise, they were not allowed to do so. The PM did not come to Parliament (to listen to us) and the session got over. We are going to tell the people about the issues," he said.

"We will also hear out the problems of the people. This platform is not just to convey our point of view but to listen to people's problems as well," he said.

Kharge slammed the government for bringing new labour laws and criminal laws, and said that bringing such legislations were signs of a dictatorship.

"This Yatra is aimed at saving and re-establishing the four pillars mentioned in preamble of constitution -- justice, liberty, equality and fraternity," Kharge asserted.

Rahul Gandhi has taken a big

step by undertaking this yatra and the whole party is with him in this fight, the party chief said.

In a post on X, Gandhi said, "We are coming back among our own people, against injustice and arrogance -- by raising the slogan of justice. I pledge that on this path of truth, the journey will continue until we get the right to justice."

Kharge said INDIA bloc leaders and members of the civil society have also been invited to join the march along its route.

Asked about electoral benefits, Kharge said the party's task is to get justice for the people and for that it does not need to count seats.

"We have to make people aware what the government is doing, giving vote or not depends on the people. We are going to share the pain of the people," he said.

Kharge asserted that through the yatra, the party will raise basic social, political and economic issues of the people. He said issues such as economic inequalities, caste census, unemployment and farmers' problems will be discussed during the yatra. The Congress president also released the logo and the slogan, 'Nyay Ka Haq, Milne Tak' of the Bharat Jodo

Nyay Yatra.

Alleging that the BJP government was intimidating the opposition leaders by misusing the agencies like the ED, the CBI and the Income Tax Department, Kharge said the government was trying to arm twist people to toe their line.

Taking a dig at union home minister Shah for inducting people whom the BJP had dubbed corrupt earlier, Kharge said there is a "big dry clean factory with Shah, where every tainted leader comes out clean, pure white".

The same leaders who are supposed to be tainted when in the Congress, turn clean once they join the BJP, he alleged. In a post on X, Ramesh claimed that most of the people of the country are frustrated and disappointed.

"There is a famine of jobs. Farmers' income did not double. Inflation and inequality are at their peak. Injustice is being done to the public. Against this injustice Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is going to start from Manipur to Mumbai under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi," he said.

"All of you must join the Yatra to raise your voice for justice in favour of youth, farmers, women, Dalits, tribals and backward people," Ramesh said.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "Justice to every victim, rights to every deprived. From Manipur to Mumbai from 14th January Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, until we get justice."

The yatra, which will begin on January 14, will cover 6,713 km and its participants will travel on buses and foot.

The yatra being organised ahead of the 2024 general elections will cover 110 districts, 100 Lok Sabha seats and 337 assembly segments in 66 days. (PTI)

## 2 arrested after they light bonfire in running train to beat the cold

**ALIGARH (UP), Jan 6:** Two men were arrested for lighting a bonfire in a running train after a gateman alerted authorities to smoke emanating from a compartment of the New Delhi-bound Sampark Kranti a Express, averting a major disaster. According to an official of the Railway Protection Force (RPF) at Aligarh, the incident occurred on January 3 night when the gateman posted at a railway crossing near Barhan railway station observed a flash of light and smoke from a coach of train which was coming from Assam. He immediately informed his superiors at the Barhan railway station after which an RPF team arranged for the train to be stopped at the next station Chamraula. Simultaneously, as they were combing through the running train, they found that some men had lit a bonfire inside a general coach with dung cakes to get relief from the extreme cold conditions.

The fire was immediately doused before any major damage could occur and the train then proceeded to Aligarh Junction where 16 persons were detained. The RPF Commandant posted at the Aligarh railway station, Rajiv Verma, told reporters on Saturday that two youths - identified as Chandan (23) and Devendra (25) - who belong to Faridabad admitted that they lit the bonfire for some comfort. (PTI)

## Mahadev app case: ED acting at behest of its political masters, alleges Bhupesh Baghel

**RAIPUR, Jan 6:** Former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday alleged the Enforcement Directorate had mentioned his name in its supplementary charge sheet in the Mahadev betting app case as part of a "political conspiracy" at the behest of its "political masters".

The Congress leader also alleged the federal agency has been fraudulently arresting people and pressuring them to give statements against him and his associates.

The ED in its second prosecution complaint (charge sheet) filed before a special court in Raipur on January 1 stated that alleged courier Asim Das, arrested in the Mahadev betting app case, who claimed he had been sent to "deliver" cash to Bhupesh Baghel, has retracted his denial of having made the charges.

"The way the ED has mentioned my name in its supplementary charge sheet is completely part of a political conspiracy. The ED, at the behest of its political masters, has been fraudulently arresting people and pressuring them to give statements against me and my associates. The allegations of money transactions made in these statements are baseless," Baghel wrote on X.

"Asim Das, from whom the money was recovered, had said in his handwritten statement from jail that he too has been deceived and implicated and that he never delivered money to any politician or people associated with them. Now the ED has claimed that he has withdrawn his statement. Everyone knows that under which pressure all this has been happening," he said.

The ED has the complete recording of the day of the incident when money was allegedly recovered from Asim Das which means the entire incident was pre-planned and engineered by the federal agency, according to Baghel.

"We have been saying from the beginning that ED has been using assault and threats and pressuring (accused in the case) to frame me and my associates. This has become very clear from the new ED document," he added.

Baghel also claimed the investigation into the Mahadev App scam was ordered by him when he was chief minister.

"I wanted this entire gang to be exposed and prevent this offence which has been pushing youth towards gambling. Based on the (previous) Chhattisgarh government's investigation, the ED launched a

probe into it as a case of money laundering. But unfortunately, the ED has made the investigation a weapon of political pressure and defame," he said.

The senior Congress leader further alleged that politics in the Mahadev App matter makes it clear that the objective is to save real criminals and benefit the BJP by spreading political propaganda.

The ED arrested Asim Das last November from a Raipur hotel just before the first phase of the Chhattisgarh assembly polls. It had claimed that Das "admitted that the seized funds (Rs 5.39 crore cash) were arranged by the Mahadev app promoters to be delivered to one politician 'Baghel' for upcoming election expenses in Chhattisgarh".

During his production before the court later last year, Das submitted that he had been framed as part of a conspiracy and that he had never delivered cash to anyone.

The ED has now informed in its second prosecution complaint (charge sheet) that Das recorded a fresh statement on December 12 last year in which he "retracted from his November 3 statement (made) under the influence of someone who arrived with his (Das's) advocate". (PTI)

## My rebellion was for saving Shiv Sena: CM Shinde

**MUMBAI, Jan 6:** Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde on Saturday said he rebelled against Uddhav Thackeray's leadership and split the Shiv Sena in June 2022 only to save the party.

Launching the campaign of the Sena faction led by him for the Lok Sabha elections at Rajgurunagar in Pune district at a 'Shiv Sankalp' rally, he also defended his government's record on the investment front.

"I took the stand with honesty and with the intention of saving the party," said Shinde who toppled the Uddhav Thackeray-led coalition government of the Sena, Congress

and NCP, and formed an alliance with the BJP to become chief minister. Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray could have become Maharashtra's chief minister when the party came to power (in alliance with the BJP) for the first time in 1995, but he made another party worker (Manohar Joshi) chief minister instead, Shinde said.

"(Someone said) I have promised that I will make a Shiv Sena worker chief minister but then he himself became CM," Shinde said, taking a jibe at Uddhav Thackeray.

Thackeray, who broke off a decades-old alliance with the BJP in 2019 on the issue of the chief minister's post, had defended his decision by stating that he had promised his late father that a Sena worker would once again get the top post in the state. Shinde, meanwhile, also responded to the criticism his government is facing over big-ticket projects going outside Maharashtra. Of ₹ 1.37 lakh crore-worth investment deals signed at Davos last year, 85 per cent of the deals materialised, he claimed.

"In the preceding two-and-half years, Gujarat had overtaken Karnataka and Maharashtra, but in the last year and a half, we have regained the top rank," the chief minister said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## India's maiden solar mission

Saturday's event was about only placing the Aditya-L1 in the precise Halo orbit.

"It was moving towards the Halo Orbit but we had to do a little bit of corrections to put it in the right place. So something like a 31 metres per second velocity had to be given cumulatively to the satellite to keep it at the right orientation," he told reporters. Explaining further, Somanath said Halo orbit is that which moves around the L1 point with a size of six lakh km in one dimension, over two lakh km in another dimension and one lakh km in one more dimension, forming an egg-shaped orbit. "So in this new orbit, it had to be placed very precisely. If you don't do the correction today then it can escape from this point (L1). We will not allow it to escape. There are some contingencies but I am telling you mathematically it can escape. So it has been done very precisely," he added. What the ISRO scientists have achieved is exact placement based "on our measurement and very correct prediction of the velocity requirement."

The space agency further said the orbit of Aditya-L1 spacecraft is a periodic one which is located roughly 1.5 million km from earth on the continuously moving Sun - Earth line with an orbital period of about 177.86 earth days. "This specific Halo orbit is selected to ensure a mission lifetime of 5 years, minimising station-keeping maneuvers and thus, fuel consumption and ensuring a continuous, unobstructed view of sun."

"The success of this insertion not only signifies ISRO's capabilities in such complex orbital manoeuvres, but it gives confidence to handle future interplanetary missions," ISRO added.

A Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C57) launched the Aditya-L1 spacecraft from the second launch pad of Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota, on September 2 last year.

After a flight duration of 63 minutes and 20 seconds, it was successfully injected into an elliptical orbit of 235x19500 km around the Earth then. It underwent a series of maneuvers thereafter and headed L1, having escaped the Earth's sphere of influence. The spacecraft carries seven payloads to observe the photosphere, chromosphere and the outermost layers of the Sun (the corona) using electromagnetic and article and magnetic field detectors. "Using the special vantage point L1, four payloads directly view the Sun and the remaining three carry out in-situ studies of particles and fields at the Lagrange point L1, thus providing important scientific studies of the propagatory effect of solar dynamics in the interplanetary medium," according to the space agency.

The suits of Aditya L1 payloads are expected to provide the "most crucial information" to understand the problem of coronal heating, coronal mass ejection, pre-flare and flare activities and their characteristics, dynamics of space weather, and propagation of particles and fields, officials said.

The major science objectives of the Aditya-L1 mission are:

- Study of the Solar upper atmospheric (chromosphere and corona) dynamics.
- Study of chromospheric and coronal heating, physics of the partially ionized plasma, initiation of the coronal mass ejections, and flares.
- Observe the in-situ particle and plasma environment, providing data for the study of particle dynamics from the Sun.
- Physics of the solar corona and its heating mechanism.
- Diagnostics of the coronal and coronal loops plasma: Temperature, velocity and density.
- Development, dynamics and origin of coronal mass ejections (CMEs).
- Identify the sequence of processes that occur at multiple layers (chromosphere, base and extended corona) which eventually leads to solar eruptive events.
- Magnetic field topology and magnetic field measurements in the solar corona.
- Drivers for space weather (origin, composition and dynamics of solar wind). (PTI)

## Development of Brahmaputra's north

its tremendous potential to grow and prosper, remain neglected for decades after decades under dark ages of Congress government. No sincere effort was ever taken by successive Congress governments, both at the centre and the state, to make an effort to bring in progress and development to the north bank of Brahmaputra.

Under the inspiring leadership of the Prime Minister, the north bank is getting its due attention with efforts made to result in rapid progress and development. The work is going on a rapid pace in the construction of roads, bridges; enabling infrastructure that are pre-requisite for development of any region.

This will not only ensure smooth transportation but also provide employment avenues, commercial interest and trading activities for the people of the region to benefit economically.

With the eradication of middle men from the government welfare schemes, the people are already availing direct benefit of government's welfare efforts, making a true transformation in their quality of lives.

I am sure this solid foundation in the northern bank of Brahmaputra will herald a new age of progress and development for Assam and the region." The meeting was also graced by the minister of education, govt of Assam and MLA of Dhemaji, Ranaj Pegu; chief electoral member, Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council, Tankeswar Sonowal; president, All Assam Sonowal Kachari Students Union (AASKU), Debananda Cheleng among others.

## Goyal remains optimistic about USD

continue to grow, aiming at reaching USD 2 trillion by 2030 from the current USD 770-775 billion," Goyal said. He highlighted the potential of the jute industry, stating that with "contribution from the jute sector and concerted efforts from the Centre and state governments, we can achieve new heights".

India currently exports around ₹ 1,500 crore worth of jute. Goyal, who also holds the portfolios of textiles and consumer affairs, food and public distribution, urged industry players to increase the figure.

He also asked the jute sector to showcase products at the upcoming Bharat Tex 2024, the world's biggest-ever textiles event, to be organised from February 26-29 in New Delhi. Goyal also highlighted the achievements of the central government and appealed to the people of West Bengal for their support in the upcoming general elections. (PTI)

## Rhinos step into Laokhowa-

rhinos have entered probably "through the second addition of Orang National Park and the recently restored (evicted areas) of Arimari", she said. Other than rhinos, the protected area also has 10 tigers.

The eviction drive was carried out from February 13 to 15 last year, which led to a clearing of 1,282 hectares of forest land and 817 hectares of unsurveyed government land. Ghosh said 75 frontline positions, including that of deputy ranger, have been filled up in the area, reaffirming the government's commitment to strengthen the landscape and restore the lost glory of the forest. (PTI)

## Infrastructure witnessing rapid growth

to attain saturation of flagship schemes of the government by ensuring that the benefits of these schemes reach all targeted beneficiaries in a time bound manner. (PTI)

## UN humanitarian chief calls Gaza

Israel's air, ground and sea assault in Gaza, aimed at obliterating Hamas, has killed more than 22,400 people, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory.

The count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants. The three-month conflict has displaced some 85% of Gaza's residents, and the United Nations has identified more than 37,000 structures destroyed or damaged in the war so far. The U.N. children's agency UNICEF said Friday that most young children and pregnant women aren't getting enough nutrition, with fewer than 200 aid trucks entering Gaza every day - less than half the pre-war level - and distribution hampered by the fighting. A survey by UNICEF found that 90% of children under the age of two are eating two or fewer of the five essential food groups each day, mainly bread or milk. A quarter of pregnant women said they only eat one food group per day. UNICEF says cases of diarrhea among children under the age of five have risen from 48,000 to 71,000 - an indication of poor nutrition. Normally, only 2,000 cases of diarrhea are reported each month in the Gaza Strip.

Israel cut off food, clean water, medicine, electricity and fuel deliveries to Gaza immediately after the Hamas attack. In response to U.S. pressure it allowed a trickle of aid in through Egypt in late October, and the number of trucks has increased from about 100 to up to 200 every day.

Israeli authorities have repeatedly said there is enough food in the territory, and that they have taken the necessary steps to allow aid in, blaming any shortages on U.N. bodies.

But U.N. associate spokesperson Stephanie Tremblay reiterated Friday that "the current response is only meeting a fraction of people's needs." She repeated what U.N. Secretary-General said last month: "It's a mistake to quote the effectiveness of the humanitarian operation in Gaza based only on the number of trucks. An effective aid operation in Gaza requires security. It requires staff who can work in safety. It requires good logistical capacity and the resumption of commercial activity." Tremblay said until those requirements are met, Gazans will not receive enough aid. Nonetheless, the U.N. World Food Program reported that in December it reached 975,000 vulnerable people with food across Gaza and in the West Bank, she said.

In an indication of difficulties getting aid into Gaza, some international efforts are resorting to dropping supplies from planes. France announced Friday that French and Jordanian C-130 planes dropped a total of seven tons of medical aid to the Jordanian field hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis in a joint operation overnight. "The humanitarian situation remains critical in Gaza," French President Emmanuel Macron said Friday on X, formerly Twitter. "In a difficult context, France and Jordan delivered aid to the population and to those who are helping them." The aidrop, a first from a Western country in the Gaza Strip, was agreed during Macron's recent visit to Jordan, where he met with King Abdullah II last month, the French presidency said. (AP)

## DDA to host kite festival at 'Baansera' on Jan 13-14

More than 25,000 special variety of Bamboo saplings, brought from Assam were planted here

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) will host a two-day kite festival at a sustainability-themed bamboo park here next week, officials said on Saturday. International kite festival 'Patang Utsav' will be held on January 13-14 at 'Baansera' bamboo park, located at Sarai Kale Khan on banks of river Yamuna.

The festival will have major attractions including a theme pavilion, which will be set up for displaying "history of kites, in the form of a kite gallery showing use of kites during times of war, fighter kites, significance of kites in India," a senior official said.

A classical 'Patang Bazaar' would also be put up for people to buy kites, the DDA said in a statement, adding, "professional kitists will be coming to the festival showcasing innovative kites".

Additionally, traditional food and handicrafts stalls shall also be set up for public along with cultural performances by folk artists show casing India's cultural diver-



sity. Exclusive activities have been planned for kids as well in the form of a kids zone, the officials said.

"It will be an excellent recreational opportunity for people to visit the festival along with their family and kids to enjoy the festival on the auspicious occasion of Lohri, Makar Sankranti, Bihu and Pongal," it added.

Makar Sankranti falls on Janu-

ary 14, and a large number of people fly kites in various parts of the country on that day.

To enhance the ecological character of Yamuna floodplains and make it more people friendly by making it attractive as a recreational and cultural venue, Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena had laid the foundation of 'Baansera' in August 2022 and it was developed in six months.

More than 25,000 special variety of Bamboo saplings, brought from Assam were planted here. 'Baansera' aims at providing the people of Delhi with the much needed public spaces in the capital on one hand, and also ensure that the rich biodiversity of the flood plain is preserved and maintained, the official said.

DDA's projects for restoration and rejuvenation of the floodplains of the Yamuna are being carried out as an initiative to enhance the ecological character of the floodplains and to make them accessible to the public at large.

The 'Baansera' project, conceived and led by the LG himself, will take such initiatives to the next level, the officials said.

In September 2023, Saxena had inaugurated a musical fountain at 'Baansera'.

The musical fountain was installed in one of the three water bodies at the park to provide people of Delhi with a new leisure place. (PTI)

## Julia Garner boards Blumhouse, Universal's 'Wolf Man' movie

LOS ANGELES, Jan 6: Emmy-winning actor Julia Garner will play the female lead in Blumhouse & Universal's "Wolf Man". The project will reunite Garner with actor Christopher Abbott after they starred together in her first feature film "Martha, Marcy, May, Marlene" (2011), reported Variety. Filmmaker Leigh Whannell, who directed 2020's "The Invisible Man" for Universal and Blumhouse, will helm "Wolf Man", which is about a family that is terrorised by a lethal predator. Garner, who won an Emmy for her performance in Netflix's "Ozark", will play the role of the mother, while Abbott, known for "A Most Violent Year" and "It Comes at Night", will take on the part of the father.

"Wolf Man" is written by Whannell and Corbett Tuck and Lauren Schuker Blum and Rebecca Angelo. It has a release date of October 25, 2024 in the US. The movie will be executive produced by Hollywood star Ryan Gosling, who was earlier going to star in the project but passed on the role. Abbott joined the film in December 2023.

Ken Kao, Bea Sequeira, Mel Turner and Whannell are also executive producing "Wolf Man". (PTI)



## Leslie Bibb, Jason Isaacs, Michelle Monaghan join 'White Lotus' season 3

MUMBAI, Jan 6: Actress Madhuri Dixit, whose recent Marathi production 'Panchak', has shared the modus operandi of the creative process and operations between her and her husband, Shirram Nene.

Speaking to the media, she said, "My job is of the creative head. I look for scripts, and the casting, and everything is done and Ram looks after the finances of the film, how the workflow is going to happen, and how the budgets are going

to get done. So in a film, we are like the left brain and the right brain. We have divided our jobs accordingly. It's a great partnership."

Talking about 'Panchak', which has been shot in picturesque Konkan, coastal Maharashtra, Madhuri said that it is a situational comedy which looks at what happens to a family when an elder passes away under a Panchak, five constellations poised at the wrong time and place to bring seemingly

bad luck and worse, the demise of 5 family members in the next year.

The film examines what length people will go, to undo such things and how superstition and fear become the comic canvas in which their lives operate.

The film has been produced by superstar Madhuri Dixit and Shirram Nene as their second film in RnM Moving Pictures, in collaboration with PVR. (AGENCIES)



## Ishan Shukla's 'Schirkoa: In Lies We Trust' to premiere at IFFR 2024

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: "Schirkoa: In Lies We Trust", a sci-fi animation movie from first-time filmmaker Ishan Shukla, will have its world premiere at the 2024 edition of the

International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR). The movie, which features an ensemble voice cast of Golshifteh Farahani, Asia Ar-

gento, Soko, Shabaz Sarwar, Tibu Fortes, King Khan, Denzil Smith and John Sutton, will be screened as part of the festival's Bright Future programme, a press release said.

According to the IFFR organisers, the segment showcases a selection of feature-length debuts, characterised by original subject matter and an individual style, representing the cutting edge of contemporary filmmaking.

"Schirkoa: In Lies We Trust" chronicles the story of a dystopian world where people are made to wear paper bags over their heads to dissolve differences.

The well-oiled system starts crumbling when whispers of a land where freedom reigns begin to spread.

The hero, a fresh council member in love with a free-spirited girl, finds himself involved in a complicated net of incidents that open his eyes to a new reality, the of-

icial plotline read. The movie is based on Shukla's 2016 short film of the same title, which was screened at over 120 international film festivals, won multiple awards and was longlisted for the Academy Awards.

"Schirkoa: In Lies We Trust" is the culmination of my decade-long journey dedicated to crafting a film that transcends boundaries and mediums. I am truly exhilarated that this narrative, reflecting our zeitgeist, is on the brink of being unveiled to the world," Shukla said.

The animated film also features guest voices of filmmakers Karan Johar, Shekhar Kapur, Anurag Kashyap, actor-singer Piyush Mishra, Filipino director Lav Diaz and French auteur Gaspar Noe.

"Schirkoa: In Lies We Trust" is an Indo-French-German co-production between Red Cigarette Media, Shukla's Vadodara-based animation studio, Dissidenz Films and Rapid Eye Movies, in association with Civic Studios and French Sofica Cofinova 18. It is executive produced by Civic Studios' founder Anushka Shah and co-produced by Samir Sarkar.

The International Film Festival of Rotterdam will be held from January 24 to February 4. (PTI)



International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR).

The movie, which features an ensemble voice cast of Golshifteh Farahani, Asia Ar-

## AJAY DEVGAN RETURNING FOR 'RAID 2', MOVIE TO RELEASE IN NOVEMBER 2024

MUMBAI, Jan 6: Actor Ajay Devgn is officially returning for the sequel to his 2018 hit "Raid", the makers announced on Saturday.

Titled "Raid 2", the movie is being directed by Raj Kumar Gupta, who also helmed the first part that saw Devgn playing the role of IRS officer Amay Patnaik.

The sequel, which is started production, is backed by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, and Kumar Mangat Pathak and Abhishek Pathak under their banners T-Series and Panorama Studios, respectively.

The film will be released in theatres on November 15, 2024, T-Series announced on its social media handles.

"The wait is over! Ajay Devgn is back as IRS Officer Amay Patnaik in #Raid2, ready to bring another true case to the big screen on 15th November 2024," the studio posted on Instagram.

"Raid", which also featured Saurabh Shukla and Ileana D'Cruz, was based on



the real-life raid conducted by the officers of the Income Tax Department in the 1980s.

According to the makers, "Raid2" will celebrate the "unsung heroes of the Income Tax Department" and narrate a true case from their books.

The movie has started

shooting in Mumbai and will also be extensively filmed in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Devgn will be next seen in "Maidaan", a period sports drama, as well as Rohit Shetty's "Singham Again" and Neeraj Pandey's "Auron Mein Kahan Dum Tha". (PTI)

## I don't like to put pressure on myself: Konkona Sensharma on directing



NEW DELHI, Jan 6: Actor Konkona Sensharma says she has ideas for a series and a feature film but she will not go forward with them unless she is completely convinced.

The actor made a critically acclaimed debut as a director with the 2016 film "A Death in the Gunj", and followed it up with "The Mirror", an equally-praised segment in anthology series "Lust Stories 2" last year.

"I am trying to develop a series and I have an idea for a feature but I don't like to put

any pressure on myself because if it does not turn out nicely, then I will be the first person to abandon it. My standards are quite high," the 44-year-old actor told PTI.

Sensharma said she would direct but not "very often".

"Imagine directing something you are not entirely convinced of and wasting everyone's time and money, the whole thing makes me shudder. In that sense, it is easier to act than to direct," she said. Acting is where Sensharma wants to focus and she

is looking for well-written characters, which are hard to come by. And the actor found one in Abhishek Chaubey-directed "Killer Soup".

In the Netflix crime show, Sensharma plays Swathi Shetty, an aspiring chef who wants nothing but the world to enjoy her paya soup. But an accident sets off a series of mishaps and hasty cover-ups that land her and her lover in hot soup. Also starring Manoj Bajpayee, "Killer Soup" will premiere on Netflix on January 11. (PTI)

## Alan Cumming knows it is 'annoying' he's never 'struggled' in his career

LOS ANGELES, Jan 6: BAFTA winning actor Alan Cumming refuses to pretend he ever "had it hard" in his professional life because he's always had plenty of opportunities lined up in high-profile projects and never had to worry about where the next job came from.

He said: "Young actors ask me, 'What was it like when you were struggling?' and I have to say, 'I don't know'. I made my film, theatre and TV debuts before I left drama school. Annoying," reports Female First UK.

He told The Times newspaper: "My first job in London was my own show, 'Victor and Barry', at the Donmar

Warehouse, quickly followed by a show at the Royal Court that got me nominated for an Olivier. Annoying. The first time I ever worked in New York it was to star in a Broadway musical. The gods have shined. It's important not to pretend that I have had it hard in my work."

As per Female First UK, the 59-year-old star has spoken in the past about the abuse he, his brother Tom and mother Mary suffered at the hands of his dad Alec, but he is dismissive of "pocket psychology" that would suggest his turbulent home life led him into acting in order to gain the approval of audiences.

He said: "I don't buy into that because I've known lots of incredible artists with totally happy childhoods. However, I have muddied the waters a bit. I said in the book (memoir 'Not My Father's Son') that the qualities I had to have to engage with a raging human adult when I was little, these are also the qualities that make you a good actor."

He continued: "Reading the room, listening, acting — well, monitoring your behaviour to minimise its negative consequences, which I suppose is what acting is. But I don't think I am an actor because my father hit and abused me.

I'm sure Meryl Streep had a very happy childhood."

Alan also feels "very lucky" to still be working, having recently looked back on old interviews he'd done and realising how many of his peers at the time are no longer in the spotlight.

He said: "More often than not, I have to say, it would be women. There is this ruthless turnover of people in showbiz, but also it was fascinating to see this emphasis on youth laid out in front of me. So to have a career that is so long is going against the tide, to still be doing what I love, I feel very lucky." (AGENCIES)



INDIA THRASHED AUSTRALIA IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> T20 MATCH

## Mercurial India Women wary of Australia backlash in search of T20I series win



**NAVI MUMBAI, Jan 6:** A mercurial Indian Women's team will be keen to produce another all-round show as they look to seal the three-match series against Australia in the second T20I here on Sunday.

Putting behind the disappointment of a 0-3 hammering in the ODIs - marred by poor efforts in all areas - India Women came out firing on all cylinders in the first T20 to thrash Australia by a huge nine-wicket margin for the first time in

history. Criticised for being sloppy in the ODIs, India were spectacularly athletic in the field on Friday, while the bowlers led by young Titas Sadhu did not allow Australia to get away at any stage in the first half of the opening T20.

Shafali Verma (64 not out) and Smriti Mandhana (54) then shared 137 runs India's best opening partnership against Australia in T20I history to take them home.

It was a near-perfect night for the 19-year-old Sadhu (4/17), who set the ball rolling with three powerplay wickets, while spinners Deepti Sharma and Shreyanka Patil too claimed two wickets each to support the young pacer.

The Indian team also brought up their fielding several notches higher to save plenty of runs. The catching was good too with skipper Harmanpreet Kaur herself holding on to four chances.

Even Titas did well on one occasion to snaffle her fourth wicket when Ashleigh Gardner gave a return catch on her follow through.

"Behind every match or every good performance, there are hours of hard work that is for any given match," Titas told the media after the match.

"I felt like our fielding effort was brilliant because a bowler can't give her best until and unless she is supported by all the nine players inside

the ground."

India's comprehensive win on Friday night at the DY Patil Stadium has put them in pole position to push for a first-ever series win against Australia at home, for they have beaten them in an away series 2-1 in 2015-16.

But accomplishing this task would be easier said than done given India will have to show consistency and at the same time, watch out for Australia's fightback who will be determined to celebrate legendary Ellyse Perry's 300th international game.

"Really excited for Sunday, actually. I think it's a great opportunity for our team to celebrate someone who has been, you know, at the forefront of our game and sort of seen the evolution of women's cricket right around the world in Ellyse Perry," Australia captain Alyssa Healy said.

"The opportunity to be a part of her 300th fixture, everyone's really excited for her. She doesn't want to talk about it. I've already brought it up at breakfast this (Friday) morning. She doesn't want to talk about it. It makes her feel old."

Australia had their in-form batter Phoebe Litchfield notching up yet another significant score of 49 and teaming up with Perry again to set a platform for a 79-run fifth wicket stand.

But the visitors lost wickets in heaps on either side of the Litchfield-Perry rearguard, which they need to address. (PTI)

## IOA cannot exercise control over WFI; UWW should lift ban: WFI chief tells world body chief Lalovic



**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** The WFI has reminded United World Wrestling that as per the international body's rules and the IOC charter, the Indian Olympic Association "cannot exercise any control" on the newly-elected body, and asked the UWW to immediately lift the provisional suspension it imposed in August last year.

The newly-elected Wrestling Federation of India chief Sanjay Singh, whose body was suspended by the sports ministry three days after it came to power and an IOA ad-hoc panel was re-instituted to run the sport, in his letter to UWW president Nenad Lalovic has also said that any influence by the IOA in wrestling should be deemed "illegal" by UWW.

"Pursuant to the election, the newly-elected body has taken charge of the WFI and is managing its affairs, and we await the lifting of the provisional suspension imposed by the UWW," said Sanjay Singh in his letter to Lalovic on Friday, a copy of which is with PTI.

"We understand that we continue to be an affiliated member of the UWW. However, there is a provisional suspension imposed by the UWW which was to be vacated after holding of the elections of the WFI as mentioned in your letter dated 23rd August 2023."

Sanjay, who won the polls on December 21 by a huge margin, also drew UWW's attention to a Delhi High Court order which prohibits IOA's interference in the affairs of the National Sports Federations.

"We would also like to draw your attention to a judgment of the High Court of Delhi against the IOA which was passed on 16th August 2023, which stated

that the IOA cannot exercise any control of authority over a National Sports Federation. Any influence by the IOA would be illegal, NSF's are independent entities."

Sanjay, a close associate of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, also pointed out that when the Indian courts, the UWW rules and the Olympic charter all profess autonomy of NSF's how could the IOA breach those rules.

"As can be seen whether it's the Courts in India, the UWW rules or the Olympic Charter, all three mandate the autonomy of the NSF's and the IOA even otherwise cannot be any controlling factor to accept or reject an election of a NSF which would be as per its own constitution.

"Hence, we request you to accept the elections of the WFI as has been done in the past many decades by the UWW and lift the provisional suspension of the WFI. The IOA also does not and cannot approve any election of any other NSF in India as well. It would not be fair to put the WFI as an exception for something that is not even legally correct," he added.

He said the elections were held in a free and fair manner under the directives of the Supreme Court and the IOA was notified at every step.

"All this (elections) was done transparently and the IOA was well aware of the entire process as the same was being done from the office of the IOA only. All successful candidates were also issued due certificates of election by the Returning Officer," he said.

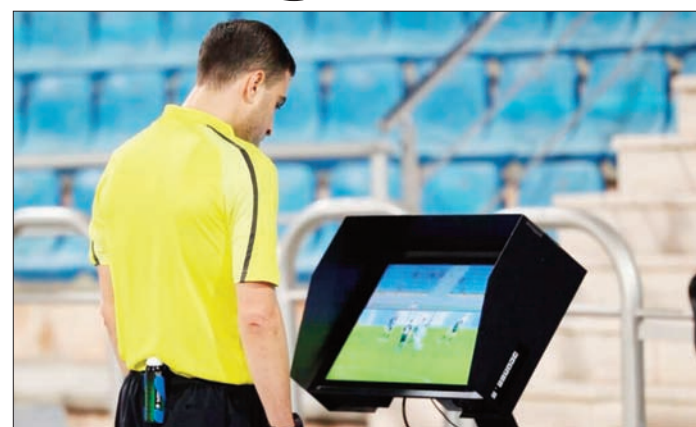
Sanjay also pointed out that the ministry had issued a letter confirming the successful completion of the poll process. (PTI)

## AIFF evaluates possibility of implementing 'AVRS' in India

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** The AIFF has written to the International Football Association Board, the body that determines the laws of the game, to explore the possibility of India participating in the trial of the 'Additional Video Review System' (AVRS).

The VAR technology, which was first used in FIFA events in 2016-17, supports the decision-making process of the referee in four game-changing situations: goals and offences leading up to a goal, penalty decisions and offences leading up to a penalty, direct red card incidents, and mistaken identity.

"Our prime objective here is to reduce the margin of error by empowering match officials with the technology to assist in their decision-making." All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Kalyan Chaubey said in a media release. "While we will continue



to work to implement VAR, I feel that, to begin with, AVRS can be a great option for a country like India.

"AVRS would help us study the impact of the technology, train our match officials with the new concept, and assess its adaptation by players, coaches, and clubs

alike," he added.

The President's recommendation aims to consider the extension of the existing technical infrastructure to accommodate an 'on-demand' video review request from the referees through a multi-angle, multi-camera broadcast feed.

Several countries across the globe use VAR in their domestic club competitions after it was first introduced in Australia and the United States.

However, its mass adoption is limited due to financial and infrastructure requirements set out in FIFA's Implementation Assistance and Approval Programme (IAAP).

The President has suggested the AIFF Referee Department undertake the study to seek FIFA's suggestions and approval. Throughout a match, the VAR team constantly checks for clear and obvious errors related to four match-changing situations. The VAR team communicates with the on-field referee only for clear and obvious mistakes or serious missed incidents. But it is ultimately the on-field referee who will take a call whether he needs help from the VAR. (PTI)

## Bhatia, Theegala tied-ninth in Sentry, Scottie Scheffler takes lead

**KAPALUA (US), Jan 6:** Akshay Bhatia, the wiry left-handed Indian-American golfer, shot a fine 64 to rise into the Top-10 of the Sentry, the opening event of the 2024 PGA TOUR season. Bhatia, who earned his maiden breakthrough win last season, shot 69 in the first round and is now 13-under and three shots behind the leader Scottie Scheffler.

Overnight leader Indian-American Sahith Theegala added 69 to his first round 64 to lie Tied-9th alongside Bhatia. Bhatia had a bogey-free round, while Theegala had five birdies and one bogey.

World No. 1 Scheffler, who won his last start at the Albany in Tiger Woods' Hero World Challenge, continued his fine form as he carded a nine-under 64 after his first round 66 to get to 16-under at the par-73 Plantation course.

Scheffler leads England's jet-lagged Tyrrell Hatton (69-62), Brendon Todd (67-64) and Sungjae Im (65-66). Hatton took just over 25 hours to get from London to Maui and it included a mechanical delay and a three-hour layover in Los Angeles. Yet he shot 62, which was his lowest round as a pro. The scores were as all 59 players broke par.

Scheffler was voted PGA TOUR Player of the Year for the second straight time. Now he is ready to start another fine season.

FedExCup champion Viktor Hovland made an eagle putt from just over 50 feet on the closing hole for a 67 that left him two shots back in a group that featured Collin Morikawa (67), Chris Kirk (65) and Byeong Hun An (64). (PTI)

## Noted sports organiser Ratul Baruah passes away

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Jan 6:** Ratul Baruah, a noted sports organiser and an active participant of the Assam students' agitation (1979-85) breathed his last at his residence at Dhekorgorah outskirts here on Friday night.

Baruah, a sexagenarian, is survived by his wife, a daughter besides a host of relatives. He was the founder-president of Jorhat District Taekwondo Association and was a well-known trainer of the sport and had con-

tributed to making Taekwondo popular amongst the youngsters.

He was a sports pensioner of Assam Government and also a former secretary of West Jorhat Sports Association. He was also involved in social activities.

The last rites of Baruah was performed at the Tarajan Crematorium Ground on Saturday in the presence of large number of friends and well-wishers besides his relatives. His demise has been widely mourned here.



## Working on attacking variations, hope to get into top-10 by April: Lakshya on Games qualification

**NEW DELHI, Jan 6:** Lakshya Sen is aware that his Olympic qualification is still in choppy waters but said he has been working on his "variations" and "deceptions" during the off-season to regain his world's top-10 position and seal his Paris Games berth.

The 22-year-old from Almoraa is currently ranked 17th in the Olympic Games qualification rankings and needs to stay inside the top 16 by April-end to make it to the Paris Games.

"To secure the spot I still have to work a little more harder in terms of getting good results, and once that is done, the qualification won't be an issue," Sen told PTI during an interview ahead of his departure to Kuala Lumpur on Sunday. "For me, right now the main concern is to go deep into the tournament in the next few months until April and then ranking will

follow. As of now, we are not in a comfortable stage in the qualification ranking. "I would like to improve my ranking and come in the top-10 by the end of qualification."

Commonwealth Games champion Sen claimed the Canada Open Super 500 title in July, besides three semifinal finishes at the Thailand Open Super 500, US Open Super 300 and Japan Open Super 750 last season.

However, Sen also made 11 first-round exits, including the last seven events, in the season which ended with a loss in the Senior National Championships in December. Despite the rough waters and high tides, the former world No. 6 has not allowed it to dampen his spirits and has worked on the "variation of his attack" during the last few weeks to regain his form in the new season.

"I was not at my best, I was try-

ing to fight every game but somehow I couldn't find that momentum. I really can't pinpoint one aspect. I mean, physical aspect would be one but there are few other on-court things," Sen said.

"I played a lot of tournaments in 2023, I didn't get time to prepare well or work hard on fitness. Last six weeks I have had time to train. So my fitness level has improved, last few weeks I have been focusing on on-court training, gradually increasing the intensity.

"I worked on some specific things like playing more sharper strokes from the backcourt, being confident enough to keep the shuttle in play." The next three weeks will be crucial for Sen as he competes at the Malaysia Open Super 1000, India Open Super 750 and Indonesia Open Super 500.

Sen admits he had lost the sting in his attack and has not been able

to sustain his aggressive game in three games as opponents started reading his game.

"Yes, I mean, when you play higher-ranked players, the opponents start reading your game and they don't allow you to attack like before," said the 2022 All England finalist, who will open his campaign at the Malaysia Open against China's Weng Hongyang.

"When you play those many matches and there are so many videos, people tend to read your favourite shots which I use when I am in good position. So people are ready for my game.

"So, I have been working and have to keep working on the variation aspect of my attack, have to keep them guessing, use a bit more deception. It is a matter of constant learning for me.

"I feel more confident now. With all that I have done in the last

few weeks, I am hoping it will help me in the next 2-3 months, especially physical fitness the work that I have put in."

Sen will have his mentor Vimal Kumar to guide him in the Asia leg as he will be travelling with him for the next three tournaments. He will also have his elder brother Chirag Sen, who recently won the Senior National championships.

Badminton coach DK Sen, who is also Lakshya's father, feels his son needs to have an element of unpredictability in his game, and that will come with more variation. "International badminton is extremely competitive, matches are very close and the difference between players is by inches. So, I feel he needs to mix it up by playing more slices, attacking tosses and slow drops. He needs to be unpredictable, there has to be a surprise element in his game." (PTI)

# Warner leads Australia to victory in his final test match, completing a 3-0 sweep over Pakistan



**SYDNEY, Jan 6:** David Warner scored 57 runs to help lead Australia to an eight-wicket victory over Pakistan on Saturday in his final test match, ending a 112-test career as a winner on his home ground.

With Australia needing only 11 runs to claim its third consecutive victory in the three-test series, Warner was out lbw off the bowling of Sajid Khan. He walked off the Sydney Cricket Ground to loud applause as he waved to the crowd.

The only other wicket to fall in Australia's second innings was when opener Usman Khawaja was also adjudged lbw off Khan's bowling for a six-ball duck.

Pakistan scored 313 and 115 and Australia responded with 299 and 130-2. Marnus Labuschagne scored 62 and was at the crease with Steve Smith (4) when the match ended. Australia quickly took Pakistan's

three remaining wickets on Saturday morning to set a 130-run victory target with almost two full days remaining.

After Josh Hazlewood (4-16) ran through Pakistan on Day 3, the visitors offered little resistance before they were all out. Mohammad Rizwan (28) and Aamir Jamal (18) put on 42 for the eighth wicket, but Pakistan folded quickly once Nathan Lyon had Rizwan caught at leg slip.

Lyon also bowled Hasan Ali to end the innings, finishing with figures of 3-36.

Warner had earlier led the team onto the field to start the day, while "Thanks Dave" with his trademark leap also painted on the ground in front of the Members Stand.

Australia won the first test in Perth by 360 runs and the second by 79 runs at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. (AP)

## If India produce turning tracks, it will negate bit of their strength in seam attack: Bairstow



**LONDON, Jan 6:** England wicketkeeper batter Johnny Bairstow feels if India opt for turning pitches during the five-Test series later this month, "it will negate bit of their strength in their seam attack".

England had lost the Test series 1-3 to India on spin-friendly tracks during their 2021 tour of the country.

"India can produce different pitches: it doesn't have to turn. We've seen how potent their seam attack has been recently," Bairstow told Sky Sports.

"Look, I'm sure the pitches will turn: it's whether or not they'll turn from day one, which potentially negates a bit of their strength in their seam attack. We know how strong they are," he added.

The 34-year-old added that he does not want to overthink the challenge of facing spin bowling in India.

"Obviously, the last time Axar and Ashwin played well. You forget that in that first Test match, the guys played really well, Rooty (Joe Root) got a double in the first Test match in Chennai and then conditions changed quite drastically."

"We know that it's the quality spinners, especially in India, we know that they are going to come at us. Whether Axar plays, whether he doesn't play. Whether Jadeja plays or Kuldeep plays, who knows?"

"We'll have to wait and see. But there's no point in overthinking things before their squad's announced before we see the pitch and the conditions

that (are) in front of us."

Bairstow said the onus will be on the entire team and not just the spinners to pick wickets.

"I think it will be the whole bowling attack's effort to go out there to take 20 wickets but it's not just the spinners. The seamers have got a big job to do, the batters in the field have massive jobs to do."

With fellow wicketkeeper Ben Foakes earning a recall to the England team for the series, Bairstow is unsure who will be donning the wicketkeeper's gloves in India.

"I've not spoken to anyone about that. As long as I'm over there, as long as I'm fit and firing, the selection decisions will be taken out of my hands. But look, I'm fairly happy with where I'm at, whether I'm keeping, batting or whatever it is."

Defending champions England had a miserable ODI World Cup in India last year and with the Test series soon approaching, Bairstow wants to "get himself into a position where he can go and take on an Indian Test".

"I've been getting my ankle right, just training in the gym pretty hard, catching up with friends and family."

"Having come back from the injury that I had, it was a pretty full-on summer... it's been great to just have a bit of a refresh, have a bit of time with the family and just to make sure the ankle is as good as it can be."

The five-Test series starts on January 25 in Hyderabad. (PTI)

## Sports Fiesta 3.0 to kick off on Jan 21

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Jan 6:** The Sports Fiesta 3.0, organised by the Leo Club of Guwahati South and Guwahati Gold, will kick off at South Point School on January 21. Altogether, nine sports competitions will be held on the same day, as stated by Manas Debnath, IPP Leo Club of Guwahati South. The competitions in the nine sports disciplines are Chess, Long Jump, Sprinting, Relay Race, Deadlift, Badminton, Arm Wrestling, and Carrom. Students must be aged 7-25 years to participate in the mentioned games. It is worth mentioning that the Leo Club of Guwahati South and Guwahati Gold have been involved in various developmental works for the benefit of students and have also been organizing various sports events in the state.

## Australia take top spot on WTC table, India drop to second

**DUBAI, Jan 6:** Australia, following their eight-wicket win in the third and final Test against Pakistan at Sydney are on 56.25 percentage points and have pushed India to the second spot in the latest World Test Championship (WTC) standings issued by ICC on Saturday.

Pat Cummins' side is 2.09 percentage points ahead of Rohit Sharma's India, who have 54.16 points. India, though, have played just four Tests during the current WTC cycle, while Australia have played eight.

India had taken the top spot following their memorable seven-wicket win against South Africa in Cape Town earlier this week, but Australia crushed Pakistan on Saturday at the SCG to displace India at the top. Australia are the reigning World Test champions, having beaten India in the final at The Oval last summer.

Australia will next play a two-Test series against the West Indies at home, while India will be up against England in five home Tests. (PTI)

## In South Africa, fuller length doesn't work: Mukesh

**CAPE TOWN, Jan 6:** He should have played ahead of Shardul Thakur and Prasad Krishna in the Test series opener against South Africa but when Mukesh Kumar finally got his chance at Newlands, the Indian team realised what exactly it missed during the mauling in Centurion.

While the seasoned duo of Mohammed Siraj (7 wickets) and Jasprit Bumrah (8 wickets) did the bulk of the damage, Mukesh was the ideal third seamer with four wickets in the second Test, which included two top-order dismissals in the second innings.

He was bowling slightly back of length but was still able to move the ball late.

"I think I have been able to fulfil the role assigned by the team management. I am satisfied with my bowling and best part is that I have worked hard and tried my best," Mukesh told reporters about his performance during India's series-levelling win.

A smart operator, Mukesh had quickly realised that despite being comparatively lesser in terms of pace generated by the two senior speedsters, he can't bowl too full on South African tracks.

"There's a lot of difference between bowling on these kind of tracks compared to Indian pitches," said Mukesh.

He elaborated his strategy.

"In India, when you try to bowl fuller length the ball moves in the air, but here, if you try to bowl too full, you get smashed."

"So we decided that we will bowl between 6 to 8 metre length (back of length). And since there is lot of bounce on offer you can get wickets."

Two days after India lost in Centurion, Mukesh bowled to skipper Rohit Sharma at the nets for an hour.

So what did the skipper tell you?

"He always tells us about areas to bowl when we seek feedback in the nets. They would tell us 'if you pitch the ball in this particular length and channel you can trouble us.'"

Hailing from Bihar's Gopalganj district, Mukesh's late father, who used to drive a cab in



Kolkata, wanted him to join the CISF (Central Industrial Security Force) but he failed to clear the physical test before finding his calling in tennis ball circuit in Kolkata.

Kolkata turned out to be the 'City of Joy' for Mukesh when former Bengal speedster Ranadeb Bose found the then talented but malnourished young man who was a cut above the rest.

"Ranadeb Bose has immense contribution in my development as a fast bowler. The coaches at NCA and him (Bose) are people I fall back upon if I face any technical issues with my bowling," Mukesh remembered his first coach with respect and fondness.

He is the first international cricketer from Gopalganj, and in that part of the world, he is now a celebrity.

Kids, and aspiring cricketers, make a beeline to meet him but the best part about being a 30-year-old making his international debut is that he remains firmly rooted to the ground.

"Yes, when I go back to Gopalganj youngsters come and speak to me and ask me about their

game and seek guidance. I do try and help them as much as I can. I have gifted a few bowling spikes to them," he said, smiling.

Having lived at Eden Gardens' dormitory for a better part of two years of his apprenticeship as part of CAB's Vision2020 programme, nothing came easily to him.

"Patience and process were two aspects that I always concentrated upon. Also all tips given by my coaches from formative years have come in handy," he said.

Last year, Mukesh made his Test debut on July 20, ODI debut on July 27, and played his first shortest format game for the national team on August 3.

Nearly five and half months down the line, Mukesh is now 19 international matches old.

How much of adjustment is needed?

"When you play for the country, you need to adapt and adjust to various formats. If you are playing white ball and need to play Test matches after that, then you also simultaneously need to practice with red ball." (PTI)

## Bhopal hosts cricket tournament of Sanskrit-speaking Vedic pandits; prize includes Ayodhya trip

**BHOPAL, Jan 6:** Vedic pandits clad in dhoti-kurta and with religious marks on the forehead are facing off on a cricket pitch in Bhopal as part of an annual tournament aimed at promoting Sanskrit.

The winners of the event, organised to mark the birth anniversary of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who introduced the practice of transcendental meditation to the West, this year will get to visit Ayodhya, where the consecration of the Ram temple will be held on January 22, said an organiser.

The four-day tournament began at Ankur ground in the Madhya Pradesh capital on Friday, with players and umpires communicating in fluent Sanskrit. Even the commentators narrated hits, misses and catches on the field in the ancient language.

The organisation founded by the spiritual leader, who was born on January 12, runs Vedic schools and seminaries in some parts of the country.

According to Maharishi Maitri Match Committee member Ankur Pandey, the win-

ners will be sent to Ayodhya after January 22. They will also receive a prize of ₹ 21,000, while the runners-up will get ₹ 11,000, he said.

Pandey said a dozen teams, including four from Bhopal, are participating in the fourth edition of the cricket tournament.

Another organiser said the event aims at promoting Sanskrit and sportsmanship among the Vedic family. Prizes apart, players are being honoured with Vedic books and a 100-year 'panchang' (almanac), he added. (PTI)

## New generation of athletes is not hungry enough, says Mary Kom

**MUMBAI, Jan 6:** Six-time world champion boxer MC Mary Kom feels the new generation of athletes is not hungry enough like her to achieve success and gets satisfied with just one big achievement. The Olympic bronze medalist also said that she is "super fit" at 41 years of age and hungry to "achieve more and more".

"I will fight (on), that fighting spirit only Mary Kom has... I have that something unique from other sports stars," Mary Kom, who has not ruled out turning pro in the coming years, said during an event on Saturday.

"I am 41 years (old), I cannot fight any international (amateur) competition from this year because there is that age limit. But I want to continue for one, two or three years," she said.

Mary Kom added that the current generation, despite having more facilities and options in sports as compared to when she took up boxing, is not hungry enough.

"I am super fit, I want to achieve more and more, that hunger I have. This young generation, they (become) one (time) champion and finished, they are satisfied, (they) settle down. This is the difference," she said.

"If, like me, they have that spirit and that hunger, we will have so many medals in our country,"

Mary Kom added.

Incidentally, India returned with the richest-ever haul of 107 medals from the Asian Games in Hangzhou last year with many athletes winning multiple medals.

Mary Kom said she was pleased with the rise in number of young women taking up boxing.

"My hard work has paid off and now there are so many Mary Kom's coming up. I feel so proud to be a girl, a mother, an Indian... so many are following my footsteps," she said.

The boxing icon added that while training and right kind of guidance was crucial for young athletes, hunger and inner drive is what makes the difference.

"Training is tough. Inner hunger and drive are most important. Now, facilities are better. In 2001 when I started my career, no one knew women in boxing," she said. Mary Kom opined it requires a lot more determination to clinch a medal in individual sport compared to team events.

"(In) football, cricket and basketball (you) still have a chance... in individual sport, you lose and finish in one second. It comes from inside, chahе kuch bhi ho jaye medal lena hai (you have to win a medal irrespective of what happens). If you're not willing, nothing can happen," she added. (PTI)



## If I had my time again, I'd bite my tongue a little bit more: Warner

**SYDNEY, Jan 6:** Well aware that he has not been "everyone's cup of tea", the enigmatic David Warner says he would have toned down a bit if he were to start all over again.

Warner walked into Test sunset on Saturday, ending a glorious career in the most befitting manner, guiding Australia to an eight-wicket victory over Pakistan for a 3-0 series sweep.

In his final outing in the traditional format, the 37-year-old was not his customary, belligerent self but still made a 75-ball 57 at the SCG, his home venue.

"Over the years, I haven't been everyone's cup of tea but for me, I've played the game as hard as I can and trying to do my best for the team," Warner told host broadcaster "Fox Cricket".

"If I had my time again and I knew that, I probably would show a little bit more patience with myself and I'd bite my tongue a little bit more."

Warner has been seen as an aggressive, and, at times, slightly nasty, character ready to not just sledge but also engage in verbal volleys with opposition players, especially during the early part of his career.

He was the central figure in the infamous ball-tampering scandal in 2018 in South Africa, for which he copped a one-year suspension from first class cricket and a lifetime ban from Australian team leadership.

"I think a lot of people don't get to see or meet or know the person. From when I first started, I was that chirpy little fella that was out there," Warner said.

"That was my role in the team...to go out there and get under the batter's skin and the opposition's skin and yeah, it did boost me a little bit because they came at me when I batted."

"But they saw it early days, and I think your first impression, you don't get a second chance at that and you know, I've tried to rebuild that trust and faith."

Warner insisted he was able to change his approach in his later years in top-flight cricket, attributing it to a self-imposed drinking ban.

"I went two years where I was being called the Reverend, I stopped drinking for two and a half years and really enjoyed that time," he said.

"I think people wanted the old bull back, but for me, it was going out

there and playing with pride and passion, and there's other ways to go about it. I've toned it down a hell of a lot and that's the real person that I am."

"I think the game's changed a lot as well, you're playing with a lot of the guys you're playing against. There's no need to go out there and be really chirpy and aggressive, there's other ways to do that."

Warner retires as Australia's second most prolific batter in international cricket with 18612 runs across formats after the legendary Ricky Ponting (27368). He scored 8786 runs in Tests at an average of 44.49 with the help of 26 hundreds and 37 fifties.

He also scored 6932 runs from 161 ODIs at an average of 45.30 with the help of 22 hundreds and 33 fifties. He has already announced his retirement from the ODIs but will continue to be available for T20s and domestic T20 leagues across the globe.

"It's pretty much a dream come true...has been a great 18 months for the team. On the back of a WTC win, Ashes draw and (ODI) World Cup, to come here and win 3-0 is a great achievement. I'm proud to be with a bunch of great friends here."

"I felt happy, really proud (coming to ground this morning). We're in entertainment business and I just tried to come out and showcase what I can do, play my shots and we managed to get a win on the board which is great."

Talking about his support system, he said, "(Family) is a massive part of my life. You can't do what you do without their support."

"I give credit to my parents for a beautiful upbringing, my brother Steve, and then you know came along Candice who sort of got me into line and we now have a beautiful family... I'm not going to carry on because I'll get too emotional."

The SCG painted a 'Thanks Dave' tribute on the ground with Warner's Australian Test number of 426.

"(Would like to be remembered as) exciting, entertaining, and I hope I put a smile on everyone's face with the way that I played and hopefully the young kids out there can follow in my footsteps."

"White-ball cricket to Test cricket. It's the pinnacle of our sport. So keep working hard to play the red-ball game because it's entertaining as well." (PTI)