

The Sunday Statesman

INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1818

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PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT. ALWAYS IN SESSION

WEATHER

Generally clear. Likely to be hazy in the evening. Maximum and minimum temperatures likely to be around 25°C and 14°C respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max. 77% Min. 53%

TEMPERATURE

Max. 25.5°C Min. 14.8°C

SUN RISES 06:08 hrs SUN SETS 16:54 hrs

MOON RISES 16:45 hrs MOON SETS 05:58 hrs

Full Moon on 15 December

THUMBNAILS



Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu in conversation with State Health Minister Dhani Ram Shandil while enjoying a meal during 'Sarkar Gaon Ke Dwar' initiative in Kupvi area, in Shimla on Friday. ■ ANI

Cine star Allu Arjun released from jail: Actor Allu Arjun was released in the early hours on Saturday from Chanchalguda jail after spending the night there even though he had secured interim bail from the Telangana High Court. He later denied that he had caused the stampede but refrained from making any further comments since the case was still sub judice. (Page 6)

PM targets Cong in fiery tirade

Modi was replying to the debate in the Lok Sabha on the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution

NIKHIL VYAS
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday charged the Congress with misusing the provisions of the Constitution when it was in power, while asserting that his government has also amended the Constitution but only for the sake of the country's unity. "Misusing the Constitution and destroying its spirit has been a part of the Congress DNA. For us, the Constitution, its purity, and its integrity are of the greatest importance," Mr Modi said during his nearly two hours marathon reply to a two-day special debate on the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of India. "We have also made constitutional amendments... but for the unity of the country, for the integrity of the country, for the bright future of the country and with full dedication to the spirit of the Constitution," Mr Modi asserted.

He said that when the NDA got a chance to form the government in 2014, democracy and the Constitution got strengthened. Mr Modi also placed 11 resolutions before the House which included that "the Constitution should be



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks in the Lok Sabha during the debate on the Constitution in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ ANI

respected, the Constitution should not be made a weapon for political selfishness. Keeping in mind the spirit of the Constitution, those who are getting reservation should not (have them) snatched away and every attempt at reservation on the basis of religion should be stopped. India should become an example for the world in women-led development." Other key resolutions placed by the PM also included that the country's politics should be freed from nepotism, there should be freedom from the mentality of slavery, there should be pride in the heritage of

the country and there should be zero tolerance towards corruption and no social acceptance of the corrupt. Attacking the Congress, Mr Modi said: "One family of Congress left no stone unturned in hurling a blow to the Constitution." "When the country was witnessing 25 years of Constitution, at the same time the Constitution in our country was razed. Emergency was imposed, democratic systems were finished, the country was turned into a prison, citizens' rights were looted, and press freedom was curtailed," he said. "This sin on the forehead of Congress can never be

erased," he said, referring to the Emergency imposed in June 1975 by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister.

Hitting out at the Congress' frequent 'jumla' jibes at the BJP, Mr Modi said the biggest 'jumla' in India was 'Garibi Hatao'. "Congress is very fond of one word. I want to use that word today. Their favourite word, without which they cannot live, is 'jumla'... The country knows that if there was any biggest 'jumla' in India and it was used by four generations, that 'jumla' was 'Garibi Hatao'. This was such a 'jumla' which helped them in their politics but did not improve the condition of the poor," he said. He said his government has made sincere efforts to bring the poor out of poverty.

Mr Modi went on to say: "Congress tasted the blood of amending the Constitution, it started hunting for the Constitution from time to time... It kept bloodying the spirit of the Constitution. In almost six decades, the Constitution was amended 75 times. The poison that was sowed by the first PM of the country was nurtured by another Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Congress has constantly disrespected the Constitution, and reduced the importance of the Constitution."

Cong's Rahul Gandhi draws 'Constitution vs Manusmriti' parallel in Parliament

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Saturday took potshots at the BJP and its "supreme leader" Savarkar as completely critical of the Constitution. He said Savarkar had said that there was "nothing Indian about our Constitution."

The LoP cornered the BJP and said that when it talks about protecting the Constitution of the country, it is "ridiculing Savarkar." "The worst thing about the Constitution of India is that there is nothing Indian about it. Manusmriti is that scripture which is most worshippable after Vedas for our Hindu nation and from which our ancient times have become the basis for our culture, customs, thought and practice. This book, for centuries, has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Today, Manusmriti is law. These are the words of Savarkar," he said.



"I want to ask you (ruling side), do you stand by your leader's words? Do you support your leader's words? Because when you speak in Parliament about protecting the Constitution, you are ridiculing Savarkar, you are abusing Savarkar, you are defaming Savarkar," he added. The Rae Bareilly MP said when one looks at the Constitution and we open the Constitution we hear the voices and ideas of Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Mr Gandhi also cited the story of Eklavya and said that just like Dronacharya took Eklavya's thumb, the saffron party has taken the thumbs of farmers, the backward classes and the youth of the country.

Two Bills related to 'One Nation, One Election' listed for introduction in LS

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

Four days after getting a nod from the Union Cabinet, two Bills related to "One Nation, One Election" are listed for introduction in the Lok Sabha on 16 December.

As per the list of business, Union Law and Justice Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal will introduce the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

The first amendment Bill relates to simultaneous elections of Lok Sabha and State assemblies; the other Bill seeks to align elections for assemblies in Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir and Puducherry.

The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is intended to appropriately amend the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963, the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.

On 12 December, the 'One Nation One Election' Bills were approved by the Union Cabinet, paving the way for their introduction in Parliament.

Kerala protests against Centre's demand to pay for Wayanad airlifting costs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
14 DECEMBER

The Kerala government has strongly protested the Indian Air Force's (IAF) renewed demand that Kerala reimburse the outstanding Rs. 132 crore airway bill incurred by

the Ministry of Defense during disaster-related humanitarian operations since 2019, including during the Wayanad landslide.

In a letter to the Kerala Chief Secretary, a joint secretary in the rank of Air Vice Marshal in the Ministry of Defence's Department of Military Affairs had raised the demand for

settlement of outstanding airlift charges since 2019.

Speaking to media persons in Thrissur, Kerala Revenue Minister K. Rajan took strong exception to the communicate that stipulated that Kerala urgently remit the operational costs sustained by the IAF for search, rescue and relief operations during natural disasters, calling it the latest example of the Centre's discrimination towards Kerala.

MPs from Kerala, including Priyanka Gandhi, also staged a demonstration outside Parliament on Saturday over the issue, raising the slogan: "Kerala is a part of India".

South Korean National Assembly votes to impeach President Yoon



AGENCIES
SEOUL, 14 DECEMBER

The South Korea's National Assembly voted on Saturday to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol over his botched imposition of martial law.

Mr Yoon will be suspended from his duties as soon as the impeachment resolution is delivered to his office, while Prime Minister Han Duck-soo will serve as acting president, reports Yonhap news agency. An impeachment motion against Mr Yoon passed 204-85, with three abstentions and eight invalid ballots, with all 300 lawmakers casting their ballots.

Mr Yoon's People Power Party (PPP) decided shortly before the proceeding to take part in the vote but opposed impeachment.

The result showed 12 PPP lawmakers broke from their party line to vote in favour of impeachment.

A two-thirds majority was required to approve the motion, with the opposition bloc accounting for 192 of the 300 members of Parliament. The first attempt to impeach Mr Yoon last Saturday failed after nearly all PPP lawmakers boycotted the vote.

(More on Page 10)

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Dilip Ghosh slams anti-India protests in Bangladesh

The former Bengal BJP president has been touring north Bengal for the party's membership drive

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SILIGURI, 14 DECEMBER

Reacting to the current situation in Bangladesh and the anti-India sentiments expressed by some sections of its population, former BJP state president and former MP Dilip Ghosh reacted sharply today. He likened such sentiments to the actions of “street dogs” and “mosquitoes.”

Speaking to reporters, Mr Ghosh said, “How many people know about Bangladesh in the world stage? But everyone knows about Bharat, a nation capable of taking on China and Pakistan. India’s diplomatic stance is on the right track. The Indian foreign secretary has visited Dhaka and directly urged the authorities to put an end to the unrest. We are closely monitoring the situation and its developments.”

Referring to Bangladesh’s



Nagendra Mission and Bengali Citizens Forum hold a protest march against alleged atrocities on minorities in Bangladesh, in Kolkata on Sunday. (File photo) by ANI

dependence on India, Mr Ghosh commented, “What they are saying is no different from the barking of dogs. Bangladesh heavily relies on India for water, food grains, medical assistance, and various other resources. Without India’s support, how will they survive?”

As part of the BJP’s ongoing

membership campaign, Dilip Ghosh has been touring north Bengal. After visiting Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri, he reached Siliguri today, focusing on Siliguri Regulated Market for the drive. Highlighting the party’s goal, Mr Ghosh stated: “We are confident of reaching our target of 50 lakh members. However, the new

online registration system, which requires individuals to provide detailed profiles, is taking more time than the previous missed-call method.”

Mr Ghosh revealed his plans to attend a significant event tomorrow in Siliguri, the *Laksho Konthe Geeta Pathi* (Chanting of the Gita by a Hundred Thousand Voices),



organised at Kawakhali.

Addressing recent developments in the R G Kar corruption case, including bail for former education minister Partha Chatterjee, Mr Ghosh said, “The CBI is under tremendous pressure due to the volume of investigations in West Bengal, as people no longer trust the state police. The lack of adequate staff in the CBI is delaying charge sheet submissions. However, the judiciary is functioning correctly, and investigations are moving forward.”

Vijay Diwas: Military tattoo at Fort William

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 14 DECEMBER

The Military Training Area astride Fort William, Kolkata, is set to come alive with an awe-inspiring display of skill, precision and valour on 16 December, as the Indian Army hosts the annual military tattoo to commemorate the 53rd Vijay Diwas.

Open to the public, this landmark occasion promises to draw a massive turnout from across the city and state, offering a unique opportunity to witness the prowess of the Indian Armed Forces up close.

The celebrations will showcase a diverse array of military performances. Highlights of the event include a range of equestrian feats by army riders and their majestic horses post a spectacular Fly Past by the Army Combat Helicopters. Adding to the thrill, will be a breathtaking display of combat manoeuvres demonstrated by the Indian Army Aviators. The programme also features an exhilarating mix of events including Kalari Payattu (a traditional Indian martial art), bhanga, mule trick riding, dog show and an



advanced robotic mule display.

Visitors will also enjoy a sterling performance of martial music by the Army Band and an impressive weapon and equipment display showcasing some of the latest military technologies.

This grand celebration is

more than just an event – it is a heartfelt tribute to the valour, dedication and indomitable spirit of the Indian Armed Forces. It promises to captivate the audience and leave everyone with an indelible impression and a deep connection with the legacy of Vijay Diwas.

STF arrests arms dealer in Asansol

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
ASANSOL, 14 DECEMBER

The Special Task Force (STF) of West Bengal Police arrested Mohammed Arif, a resident of Jharia in Jharkhand from Chandmari in Raipur area under Asansol North police station today along with illegal arms and ammunition.

Sources said that acting on a specific tip-off, the officers of STF zeroed in on the house of the alleged illegal arms dealer and nabbed Mohammed Arif (40).

STF officers have seized three semi-automatic 7 mm

pistols and six empty magazines from his house after search operations. He has been handed over to Asansol North police station after his arrest.

Asansol North police station has sent him to court yesterday and took him into 10 days police custody for further investigations.

On 23 November 2024, the Special Task Force arrested an illegal arms dealer in the Kult area and had also seized a huge quantity of arms and ammunition from his possession. At that time, one-shot pipeguns, 50 numbers

of 8mm cartridges, and four 9 mm cartridges were seized by STF.

After the recent attack on a councillor of Kolkata Municipal Corporation by hired killers of neighbouring states, chief minister Mamata Banerjee had expressed her annoyance on the entry of illegal arms, ammunitions and supri killers so easily to this state and had directed DGP Rajeev Kumar to take strict actions, after which state police special task force started raids and arrests in the bordering areas of Bihar and Jharkhand with Bengal.

Lok Adalat settles ₹2.5 cr accident claim for Durgapur resident

KANCHAN SIDDIQUI
DURGAPUR, 14 DECEMBER

The country’s highest ever motor accident death benefit, amounting to Rs 2.5 crore for a single fatality, was settled by a Lok Adalat Bench here today, 12 years after the accident and the sum was handed over by a public sector insurance major to the mother, widow and daughter of the deceased engineer.

Ashis Kumar Boral of Durgapur steel township, after passing out from IIT, Kharag-

pur in 1995 was engaged as project manager of Bhushan Power and Steel – a private steel maker in Odisha. On 17 January, 2012, Boral, while travelling along NH-55 met with a fatal road accident at Balimi in Dhenkanal district of Odisha. A speeding lorry had rammed into his vehicle killing him afterwards.

In 2013, Sikharani Boral and Sushweta Boral, mother and widow of the deceased engineer had moved a petition against the country’s oldest public sector insurance major,

National Insurance Company as the ‘killer’ lorry was insured by the PSU company.

Today, after a brief hearing, the Lok Adalat judge Mohammed Rafik Alam ordered Rs 2.5 cr as compensation for the deceased’s bereaved mother, widow and daughter. The order also indicated about a penal interest at 6 per cent rate, if the amount wasn’t delivered to the engineer’s dependents within a month. B K Sathyaprakash, national chief manager of the National

Insurance Company (NIC) said, “We made no delay and delivered the cheque to the family today to regard the country’s highest motor accident compensation by a Lok Adalat.”

Mr Sathyaprakash added, “We need to check speed as roads haven’t expanded compared to the increasing number of vehicles.” The NIC, top officials said, has disbursed Rs 1,090 crore last year against motor accident deaths across the country.

The country recorded

22,000 road accident cases in the last one year. Ayub Ansari, advocate on record, for the distressed Batabyal family, said, “Many killer vehicles vanish from the scene soon after the accidents and it becomes hard to trace them. Now, if the government makes lifetime ‘third party’ insurance under General Insurance Company, the mother agency mandatory for vehicles similar to the lifetime tax, the remedy for the victim families may be expedited.”

Asansol boy tops Indian Statistical Service exam

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
ASANSOL, 14 DECEMBER

Sinchan Snigdha Adhikary, a resident of Ismile in Asansol has topped the Indian Statistical Service (ISS) Examinations held by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) in the country.

He secured 738 marks. The 27-year-old is an ex-student of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Asansol.

His father, Pradip Adhikary is an employee of Asansol Mines Board of Health and mother Sujata Adhikary is a homemaker. Despite all odds and struggles in his life he was determined to do something in his life and after cracking the prestigious ISS Examination, he has made the state proud.

In the medical JEE examination, had 168 and in engineering JEE examination, he ranked 7th. But despite these results in JEE, he had joined Indian Statistical Institute and after completing his bachelors degree, later completed the masters also.

“Throughout his educational career, he was a brilliant student. He refused to study MBBS and engineering after higher secondary examina-



tions and chose statistics. We never thought that he will top in the ISS examinations of the UPSC in the country,” said his father Pradip Adhikary.

“Many people visited our house today to congratulate him. We belong to a middle class family and had really struggled to finish his studies. But today all our hard work has been paid back with such a result,” said mother Sujata Adhikary.

He did not have any social media account and kept himself away from the cell phone. He had not taken any special coaching or joined any class to crack this prestigious all India examination.

The cadre posts of ISS officers are posted in 40 different ministries of the central government and ISS officers generally serve in various departments and ministries as directors and secretaries.

Cuffs on civic volunteer in alleged molest case

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BIRBHUM, 14 DECEMBER

Chiranjib Singh, a civic police volunteer posted under Mohammad Bazar police station of Birbhum was arrested, allegedly for molesting a minor girl.

The accused used to stay near the house of the victim. In November, in the absence of family members of the girl, he entered her house and allegedly molested her.

Few days ago the victim told her ordeal to her mother, after which her parents lodged a complaint at the police station.

Mohammad Bazar PS has started a case under the POCSO Act and arrested the civic police volunteer. The accused has also threatened her with dire consequences if she dared to tell her parents about the incident.

The police will seek custody of the accused to get further details, said sources.

Sanjay Roy, the civic police volunteer of Kolkata Police was arrested for rape and murder of a postgraduate trainee doctor of RG Kar Medical College Hospital in August.

NF Railway enhances safety with new infrastructure

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SILIGURI, 14 DECEMBER

The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has installed ‘Thick Web Switch Point’ machines with clamp-type locking at 31 stations across its zone to enhance safety features during November 2024.

“N F Railway has been making constant efforts to make train journeys safer and more secure. It continues to adopt technically advanced measures to upgrade and maintain its infrastructure,” said chief public relations officer (CPRO) K K Sharma.

To further enhance efficiency and safety, NFR has carried out various upgrades and replacements in its existing signaling system across

several sections. In November 2024, sliding booms were commissioned at four level crossing gates in Katihar, one in Alipurduar, and two in the Lumding division.

Electric lifting barriers have been replaced at two level crossing gates each in the Katihar and Tinsukia divisions to improve safety. Additionally, 8.013 km of signaling cable was newly laid at various stations in the Tinsukia, Lumding, Rangiya, and Alipurduar divisions.

An automatic fire detection and alarm system has been commissioned at Rahamatpur and Arariya Court stations in the Katihar division as part of safety measures to protect railway properties.

System integrity testing was conducted at 25 level crossing gates across the N F Railway. A total of 381 signaling batteries of various capacities were replaced in all five divisions, ensuring better reliability of safety equipment. Modern communication systems are being utilized to control train movements, providing visual information to drivers and operators.

“Infrastructural upgrades in the railway system ensure the safe operation of trains, and their reliability and maintenance directly impact railway capacity. The N F Railway is dedicated to delivering a superior, punctual, and safer railway experience for all its customers,” Mr Sharma added.

<p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL Office of the Director Institute of Psychiatry-COE 7, D. L. Khan Road, Kolkata-700025 Phone No. 033-2223-6048</p> <p>TENDER NOTICE The Director, Institute of Psychiatry-COE, invites bids through e-tender from reliable Firm/Distributor/Manufacturer for the supply of Medicine. Interested bidders may please visit the website: http://wb.tenders.gov.in & https://www.lopkolkata.ac.in for details. Tender ID: 2024_HFW_783530_1. Pre-bid meeting on: 16/12/2024 12:00 Noon. Sd/- Director, Institute of Psychiatry-COE Kolkata-25. ICA- T22972(3)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL E-Tender Notice of H&FW Deptt. NIT No. of DHFWS/APD/CONST/24-25/01dt. 16/12/24 and Tender Ids [2024_HFW_783606_1]. CMOH, Alipurduar hereby invites E-Tender Notice for ‘Setting up X-Ray Room & Dark Room along with provision of lead door at Birpara SGH in the district of Alipurduar’. Bid submission closing date: 01/01/2025 at 05:00 p.m. Other details may be seen from the website: https://wb.tenders.gov.in & www.wbhealth.gov.in & www.apdhealth.in Sd/- CMOH Alipurduar. ICA- T22974(4)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL TENDER NOTICE E.E Berhampore Division-I, PWD invites online e-tender for the work of Day to Day operation of pump motor set at Circuit House and D.M.Bungalow, Berhampore in Two shift from 6:00 A.M to 2:00 P.M. and from 2:00 P.M to 10:00 P.M. for 365 Days under Berhampore Division No.1 (PWD) during the 2024-25. (Estimate Cost = Quoted Amount) Tender ID: 2024_PWD_784160_1. Notice Inviting e-Quotation No. WBPWD/EE/BD-Ie-NIQ - 10/2024-25 of EE/BD-I, PWD. Bid Submission start date (time/online): 19.12.2024 at 2:02:04 P.M. and end date (time/online): 27.12.2024 at 2:30 P.M. N.B.-Any corrigendum/and addendum, if issued for this eNIQ will be published in website only. Details will be available from the web site http://wb.tenders.gov.in and notice board of this office on all working days within office hours. Sd/- Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Berhampore Division-I. ICA- T23024(2)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL e-TENDER NOTICE e-Tender is invited by the Assistant Engineer, Hasnabad Sub-Division, PHE Dte. On Behalf of Governor of West Bengal vide Ref. No. WB/PHE/IAE/HSD/NIT-24/HSD OF 2024_25 and ID: 2024_PHEd_782373_1, 2024_PHEd_782373_2, 2024_PHEd_782373_3, 2024_PHEd_782373_4, 2024_PHEd_782373_5, 2024_PHEd_782373_6, 2024_PHEd_782373_7, 2024_PHEd_782373_8, 2024_PHEd_782373_9, 2024_PHEd_782373_10, 2024_PHEd_782373_11, 2024_PHEd_782373_12 for construction of OHR, land development & construction of pump house for different PWSS. Details will be available in the website wb.tenders.gov.in last date for submission of tender is 06.01.2025 upto 2.00 p.m. Hours. Corrigendum if any will be published at the above website only. Sd/- Assistant Engineer, Hasnabad Sub-Division, PHE Dte. ICA- T23016(2)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL PWD TENDER NOTICE EE,PWD, Hooghly Construction Division invites online e-Tender for the work of 1.Patch Repairing & Rehabilitation of Kotulpur Arambagh Road from ch. 36.00 kmp to ch. 42.00 kmp (excluding 3nos. Rigid Pavement Stretches) in different stretches under Hooghly Construction Sub-Division-I, Arambagh under Hooghly Construction Division, PWD during the year 2024-25. Estimated Amount: 4284261.00 Tender ID: 2024_PWD_783584_1. 2. Installation of Table Top Speed Breaker as Traffic Calming measure in front of 5 nos. spot on Tarakeswar-Chawkidighi road from 0.00 km to 2.20 km under Hooghly Construction Sub-Division-III under Hooghly Construction Division, PWD during the year 2024-25. Estimated Amount: 1962703.00 Tender ID: 2024_PWD_783584_3. 3. Installation of Table Top Speed Breaker as Traffic Calming measure in front of 6 nos. spot on Tarakeswar-Chawkidighi road from 2.20 km to 13.00 km under Hooghly Construction Sub-Division-III under Hooghly Construction Division, PWD during the year 2024-25. Estimated Amount: 1840799.00 Tender ID: 2024_PWD_783584_3. 4. Name of Work (Repair of Veterinary Officer's quarter, SAHC, Uluberia, Howrah. (ii) Repair of Veterinary Pharmacist's quarter, SAHC Uluberia, Howrah (iii) Repair of 4 number of Group-D quarter at SAHC Uluberia, Howrah. Estimated Amount: Rs. 32,27,119.00. Tender ID: 2024_WBPWD_783957_4. Bid Submission end date 28.12.2024 at 12:00 PM. Details will be available from the website: http://wb.tenders.gov.in and notice board of this office on all working days within office hours. Sd/- Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Howrah Construction Division. ICA- T23023(3)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL TENDER NOTICE Tender Ref. No.: WBPWD/EE/KNED/e-NIT30/24-25. Tender ID: 2024_WBPWD_783224_1. Online Tender is hereby invited by the Executive Engineer, P.W.Dte, Kolkata North Electrical Division, P-5, CIT Road, 2nd Floor, Mouali, Kolkata-34, from the eligible contractors for the following works: Name of Work: Electrical Installation work for Fire Pump power supply at Birla Institute of Technology at 56 BT Road, Kolkata 700050. Bid submission start: 16.12.24 at 1:00 AM. Bid Submission end: 23.12.24 at 01:00 PM. Bid opening Date: 26.12.24 at 01:00 PM. Details of eNIT, BOQ & tender documents may be downloaded from https://wb.tenders.gov.in Sd/- Executive Engineer, P.W.Dte, Kolkata North Electrical Division. ICA- T23092(3)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL PWD TENDER NOTICE EE/KNED/PW Dte. invite online e-tender for the work "Operation of Bedcum Passenger lift at IBTM & IM, Manikata under North Kolkata Health Electrical Sub-Division, PWD.(2024-25)". Tender ID: 2024_WBPWD/EE/KNED/e-NIQ-125/24-25. Tender ID: 2024_WBPWD_783002_1. Bid Submission Start Date (online): 18/12/2024.1:05 PM. Bid Submission Closing Date (online): 24/12/2024 upto 3:00 PM. Corrigendum if any will be published in website only. Details of NIT and Tender Documents may be downloaded from http://wb.tenders.gov.in Sd/- Sd/- Chakraborty/EE/KNED/PW Dte. ICA- T22991(2)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL E-Tender Notice Tenders are invited from reputed firms for the Works abridged NIT No. - CMOH/BANKURA/NIT-28(02)/2023-2024(2nd call) vide Memo No-5658 Dated- 10.12.2024. Related to schemes of "Electrical works at 05 nos RH, Bankura to comply with the AER norms prior to installation of the X-Ray machines with CR system" under Health Deptt. The last date & time of online bid submission: 20.12.2024 at 10:00 hrs. visit www.wb.tenders.gov.in Sd/- Secretary DH&FWS & CMOH, Bankura ICA- T22987(3)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER NIT No. WBPWD/EE/HCD/e-NIT-13/2024-25. of Executive Engineer, P.W.D, Howrah Construction Division. (1) Name of Work: Renovation work of main Hospital building at Chandipur Manikpur RH. under Uluberia I Block, Howrah. Estimated Amount : Rs. 22,50,289.00. Tender id : 2024_WBPWD_783957_1. (2) Name of Work Repair work of Primary Health Centre at Duhla Simla PHC, under Uluberia I Block, Howrah. Estimated Amount : Rs. 11,81,886.00. Tender id : 2024_WBPWD_783957_2. (3)Name of Work Repair work of Primary Health Centre at Barberia PHC, under Uluberia I Block, Howrah. Estimated Amount : Rs. 19,08,072.00. Tender id : 2024_WBPWD_783957_3. (4) Name of Work (Repair of Veterinary Officer's quarter, SAHC, Uluberia, Howrah. (ii) Repair of Veterinary Pharmacist's quarter, SAHC Uluberia, Howrah (iii) Repair of 4 number of Group-D quarter at SAHC Uluberia, Howrah. Estimated Amount: Rs. 32,27,119.00. Tender ID: 2024_WBPWD_783957_4. Bid Submission end date 28.12.2024 at 12:00 PM. Details will be available from the website: http://wb.tenders.gov.in and notice board of this office on all working days within office hours. Sd/- Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Howrah Construction Division. ICA- T23023(3)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL NOTICE INVITING TENDER Bid ref. no.-WBMSCL/NIT-735/2024 Dated-12/12/2024 SITC of DG Distribution Panel with Existing 750 KVA & 250 KVA DG Sets for Emergency Power Backup of the Hospital Building at Asansol 55H, Paschim Bardhaman. Last date of submission of bid (online)- 30.12.2024 at 03:00 P.M. the tender document can be downloaded from www.wbmsc.gov.in & www.wb.tenders.gov.in on or after 15.12.2024 at 03:00 PM. Clarification requests, if any may be sent to cpce@wbmsc.gov.in Sd/- General Manager, WBMSCL & Joint Secretary to the Govt. of W.B. ICA- T22986(3)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL NOTICE INVITING TENDER Executive Engineer PWD Diamond Harbour Divn. invites WBPWDEHDH e_NIT_16_2024_25 for the works:- Emergent Patch Repairing work of Srirampur Road from Ch. 0.00 km to 1.00 Km in patches near Diamond Harbour Division/ P.W.D. in the District of South 24 Parganas during the year 2024-25. Estimated Amount- Rs 5,53,645.00. Tender Id- 2024_WBPWD_782841_1. Bid submission Starting date :- 11.12.2024 & Bid Submission closing date 24.12.2024 at 12:00 P.M. may be seen & downloaded from the official website of P. W. D http://tender.wb.nic.in Sd/- Executive Engineer PWD Diamond Harbour Divn ICA- T22988(2)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL PWD TENDER NOTICE Executive Engineer, Krishnagar Division, Sector Social, P.W.Dte. invites online e-tender for 01 (one) no. work of (i) Repair of baths and toilets and replacement broken overhead tank at Old Hindu Hostel in the premises of Krishnagar Government College. Estimate Amount: Rs. 3,45,821.00. Tender ID : 2024_WBPWD_782897_1. Bid Submission Closing Date (online): 23.12.2024 upto 02.00 p.m. Corrigendum if any will be published in the website only. Details of NIT and tender Documents may be downloaded from https://wb.tenders.gov.in Sd/- EE Kng. Divn. Ss PWDtce. ICA- T22989(2)/2024</p> <p>GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL PWD TENDER NOTICE EE/Bankura Division , Sector Social, P.W.Dte. invites online e-tender for the work "Preparation of DPR including Drawing, Estimation and BOQ for Implementation of Fire protection system for different building of Raipur Channel Pump House, Boundary Wall & WTA works at Jagr Chilahansa DTW within Tulangan-I Block under Coochbehar (A-I) Division vide e-Tender Id: 2024_WRDD_784723_1. Last date & time of Bid submission is 23.12.2024 upto to 6.00 pm. Other details may also be seen from the office notice board & in https://wb.tenders.gov.in website. Corrigendum if any will be published in website only. Sd/- Executive Engineer (A-I) Cooch Behar (A-I) Division Cooch Behar ICA- T22983(3)/2024</p> <p>The West Bengal Power Development Corporation Limited (A Govt. of West Bengal Enterprise) Corporate Identity No. U40104WB1985SGC039154 Sagarighi Thermal Power Project P.O. Monigram, P.S. Sagarighi, Dist.- Murshidabad, Pin - 742237</p> <p>Notice Inviting E-Tender Ref. No.: WBPDCI /Tend-Adv/24-25/STPS/CC-2806 Dated: 11.12.2024 NIT No.: WBPDCI/SGTTPP/NIT/E3195/24-25 E-Tenders in prescribed format are invited at https://wb.tenders.gov.in by the General Manager SGTTPP, WBPDCI from eligible Agencies/Companies in 3 (three) Part bid system for "Procurement of different sizes of Filter bags for running maintenance, AHPMM, Stage-1, SGTTPP, WBPDCI". Tender Document Download Start Date: 14.12.2024 at 03:00 PM. Bid Submission End Date: 04.01.2025 at 03:00 PM. Contact Person: Mr. Anu Mandal, DGM & HCO (Purchase Dept.), Phone: 8336904045, E-mail: amandal@wbpdcl.co.in For details please visit: https://wb.tenders.gov.in ICA- T22864(3)/2024</p> <p>The West Bengal Power Development Corporation Limited (A Govt. of West Bengal Enterprise) Corporate Identity No. U40104WB1985SGC039154 Santalidhi Thermal Power Station P.O. Santalidhi Thermal Plant, Dist.- Purulia, Pin - 723146</p> <p>Notice Inviting E-Tender Ref. No.: WBPDCI /Tend-Adv/24-25/STPS/CC-2813 Dated: 12.12.2024 NIT No.: WBPDCI/STPS/NIT/E3794/24-25 E-Tenders in prescribed format are invited at https://wb.tenders.gov.in by the General Manager STPS, WBPDCI from eligible Agencies/Companies in 2 Part bid system for "Procurement of 600 NB MS SW Pipes for Old Intake Water Pipe Lines of STPS through CAPEX 2024-25 under CIP department, STPS". Tender Document Download Start Date: 16.12.2024 at 15:00 hrs. Bid Submission End Date: 30.12.2024 at 14:00 hrs. Contact Person: Mr. D. Biswas, Sr. Mgr. (Purchase), STPS, Mobile No: 8336904045, E-mail: dbiswas@wbpdcl.co.in For details please visit: https://wb.tenders.gov.in ICA- T23035(2)/2024</p>

MORE
TENDER
ADS ON
PAGE 6

Fund release for Awas Plus scheme: East Burdwan will provide houses for 79,309 beneficiaries under Bangla Awas Plus houses and the disbursement of the first installment of funds will begin from Monday. The list of beneficiaries include some names prioritized in 2022, along with 6266 names of those who'd directly forwarded their appeal to the chief minister, said Ayesha Rani A, DM, East Burdwan on Saturday. The DM said, "We've also accommodated 931 flood-hit families in the list of beneficiaries." Bhatar block has the highest number (6994) of beneficiaries and Ausgram-II has the lowest (1529) number of beneficiaries.

TMC slams BJP's membership drive, calls it farce

The BJP presently has 12 Lok Sabha MPs from Bengal and two Rajya Sabha MPs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 14 DECEMBER

The Trinamul Congress has described the repeated expressions of dissatisfaction by the BJP's central leadership over the party's membership drive as a source of comic relief.

The BJP's target was to enrol one crore members, but so far, they have only managed to approach the 25-lakh mark. Despite repeated instructions, the desired progress has not been achieved, raising doubts about whether the membership target can be met. Amidst this scenario, Sunil Bansal (*photo*), the BJP's central observer for West Bengal and national general secretary, held a meeting with BJP MPs from Bengal. According to sources, Bansal convened a meeting in Delhi on Monday, where several MPs, including Shantanu Thakur, Jayanta Roy, and Saumitra Khan, faced sharp criticism. It was



reported that they failed to recruit more than 50,000 members each, prompting Bansal's displeasure.

Meanwhile, Trinamul Congress (TMC) state general secretary and spokesperson Kunal Ghosh (*photo*) mocked the situation, calling it laughable. He said, "The BJP, which claims to be the principal opposition party in Bengal, is struggling to find members. Their leaders and workers are going to weddings and other occasions to ask people to join. Is this how you increase member-



of the state, such as AIIMS hospitals, railway projects, or industrial units, to counteract the momentum of the Trinamul Congress. On the other hand, the Trinamul Congress has already started preparations for the 2026 Assembly elections. The results of the recent six Assembly constituencies reflect their efforts. Furthermore, chief minister Mamata Banerjee's government has announced that the first installment of the housing scheme funds will be distributed to beneficiaries by 31 December. This proactive governance has created challenges for the BJP in Bengal.

Bail to RG Kar accused: Left, Cong protest against CBI

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 14 DECEMBER



Hardly 24 hours after the court granted bail to Prof (Dr) Sandip Ghosh and Abhijit Mondal, two accused in the heinous incident of rape and murder of a postgraduate trainee doctor at R G Kar Hospital on 9 August, CPM, Congress and the SUCI, along with doctors' bodies hit the streets in the city on Saturday afternoon to protest against the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for its failure to submit charge sheet (CS) to the court within 90 days.

The CPM-led Left Front and the Congress today staged protests at various points in the city, alleging that the CBI has failed to deliver justice in the case.

They also alleged that the ruling Trinamul Congress (TMC) in West Bengal and the BJP-led Centre have a "tacit understanding".

The Congress took out a procession from Rabindra Sadan area to CBI's office at Nizam Palace along the AJC Bose Road in the southern

The criminals are being granted bail because the investigating agency is failing to act properly and do justice to the cases," alleged SFI leader Debanjan De.

West Bengal Junior Doctors Front (WBJDF) marched from Karunamoyee to the CBI office at CGO Complex in Salt Lake. Parents of the victim PGT doctor also took part in the protest rally and said, "We don't know what the CBI is doing but at the same time we have to go ahead with legal battle seeking justice for our daughter. Don't give up hope."

In a separate protest programme, doctors of Abhaya Mancha, a platform formed after the incident, also staged agitation at Rani Rashmoni Avenue this afternoon demanding justice for the victim. The Sealdah court had on Friday granted bail to Prof Ghosh and Mr Mondal in the rape and murder case.

They were granted bail after the CBI failed to file a charge sheet against them within the mandatory 90-day period.

Sarovar Portico Kolkata Rajarhat opens in city



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 14 DECEMBER

Sarovar Portico Kolkata Rajarhat opened its doors to the public recently. This state-of-the-art property marks a significant collaboration between the real estate major, Jain Group and Sarovar Hotels, a renowned name in the mid-market hospitality sector. The launch was graced by Mr Ajay K Bakaya, chairman, Sarovar Hotels & director, Louvre Hotels India, Shrayans Jain, vice-chairman, Jain Group and Rishi Jain, managing director, Jain Group.

Sarovar Portico Kolkata Rajarhat is strategically located near the airport and with proximity to the

IT hub and International Convention Centre, the hotel aims to cater to business and leisure travellers alike.

"At Jain Group, we are committed to expanding our footprint in the hospitality sector. Sarovar Portico Kolkata Rajarhat embodies our vision of providing world-class amenities and impeccable service to our guests. After the success of Holiday Inn Kolkata Airport, this property is our second venture in New Town, furthering our Vision 2030 of establishing 1,000 rooms across upscale and mid-market segments in West Bengal," said Shrayans Jain, vice-chairman, Jain Group.

One detained in Golf Green murder case



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 14 DECEMBER

A severed head was recovered from Kolkata's Golf Green area, leading to the detention of one individual for questioning. According to police sources, the detained person is a relative of the deceased.

Authorities are investigating whether he has any connection to the woman's murder. By Friday night the police identified the deceased woman as a resident of South 24-Parganas. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed that night to probe the matter. CCTV footage from the area was reviewed, which led to the detention of the suspect. However, the rest of the woman's body has not yet been found. Investigators are still unclear about how many pieces the body was dismembered into or what weapon was used. Police have indicated that the detained individual

is a relative of the deceased. They are examining whether he was directly involved in the murder. Investigators are also exploring whether the killing was the result of strained personal relationships.

On Friday morning, the severed head of the woman was discovered in a garbage heap behind a multi-storey residential building in south Kolkata's Golf Green area. The head was wrapped in plastic. News of the incident caused widespread shock in the area. Questions arose regarding the identity of the head and how it ended up there. Upon receiving the information, Kolkata Police officials arrived at the scene, accompanied by sniffer dogs from the dog squad. Subsequently, the police, along with the specially trained dogs, visited a residential complex in Azadgarh for further investigation. Residents of the complex were also questioned.



With the inspiration of
Hon'ble Chief Minister

Mamata Banerjee

A bouquet of entrepreneurial
services being offered
by organizing statewide
programme

Shilper Samadhane-MSME Camps
as a part of celebration of MSME Month
2nd – 20th December 2024



6 day camps covering the whole state at all Blocks, Municipalities and Municipal Corporation offices

Participating Departments: MSME & Textiles, Food Processing Industries & Horticulture, Agriculture, Technical Education Training & Skill Development, Minority Affairs & Madrasa Education, Backward Classes Welfare, Higher Education and Panchayat & Rural Development



What's on Offer

MSME & Textiles

- Receiving new applications under Bhabishyat Credit Card, documents submission and facilitation for sanction of old cases
- Enlisting of artisans and weavers on the state portal
- Udyam Registration, GeM onboarding and application for PAN
- Receiving application for:
 - West Bengal Artisans Financial Benefit Scheme
 - Death Benefit Scheme for Artisans & Weavers of WB
 - West Bengal Handloom & Khadi Weavers Financial Benefit Scheme
- Resolution of delayed payment issue for micro & small enterprises
- Finance Clinic for micro and small enterprises

Food Processing Industries & Horticulture

- Services under MIDH Scheme, RKVY Scheme, State Development Scheme of Horticulture and WBFPS-2021 Scheme

Technical Education, Training & Skill Development

- Registration of industries under the Industry-led Training Programme & Rozgaar Seva Portal
- Collection of Letter of Intent on requirement of training from industry

Higher Education

- Student Credit Card-new applications/ document(s) collection from existing applicants

Panchayat & Rural Development

- Credit linkage to SHGs under Anandadhara

Agriculture

- Registration for Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) for agri-entrepreneur, FPOs, SHGs etc.
- Facilitation of clearances and bank approvals of AIF projects

Minority Affairs and Madrasa Education

- Submission of application for Term Loan
- Microfinance
- Registration for availing skill development programme

Backward Classes Welfare

- Term Loan application for MSEs, Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) – All categories
- Application Form for Short Term Skill Development Programme with employment support

District Level programme: District level workshop/ sensitization/ disposal of pending applications with power/land/ pollution/fire etc.

Entrepreneurs and eligible applicants are requested to contact the nearest Block Office/Municipality/Corporation/DIC to know about the details of the programme.

Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Textiles, Government of West Bengal

ICA-D2072(6)/2024

WB CM congratulates successful candidates from state in ISS exam

CM Mamata said our students are showing improved performances in IAS & IPS examinations too

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 14 DECEMBER

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee today congratulated the two candidates from Bengal for clearing the UPSC-conducted prestigious Indian Statistical Service Examination this year.

In her post in X handle, Miss Banerjee wrote, "While I congratulate the two successful winners, Sinchan and Bittu, I note that our emphasis on encouraging our children for all India competitive examinations has been yielding concrete results. Our students are showing improved performances in IAS and IPS examinations, too. The Satyendranath Tagore Civil Services study Center of the state government has already become a centre of attraction for young and ambitious students, who want highly subsidised top-grade support for these examinations. They



will lead Indian bureaucracy again".

Meanwhile the chief minister today expressed delight on National University of

Juridical Sciences, Kolkata being awarded A+ grade by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).

Talking about the achievement, Miss Banerjee in a separate post in her X handle wrote, "Glad to know that the state-aided National Uni-

versity of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata has been awarded A+ grade by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). Among other things, its introduction of Forensic science studies and its tie-up with Cambridge university and King's college, London, etc have been valued.

"The most important and noteworthy thing is the Government of West Bengal by the amendment of the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences Act in 2018, has provided 5% of the total students of NUJS complete tuition fee waiver, and our students from economically weaker sections have thus gained access to this premier center of education. NUJS is the only National Law university in India to do this, and it has been our contribution.

"Let advanced education be combined with social equity and let such efforts be thus recognized."

Locals allege illegal digging of Jalangi river embankment

BISWABRATA GOSWAMI
KRISHNANAGAR, 14 DECEMBER

A shocking act of alleged environmental disregard has put Krishnagar's Jalangi river in the spotlight, as councillor Palash Das of ward 25 stands accused of unauthorised digging near the riverbank. The creation of a massive pond beside the Immersion Ghat has sparked fury among residents and environmental activists, who claim the act not only violates laws but endangers the delicate ecosystem of the river.

The construction, which has resulted in a large square-shaped pond adjacent to the river bund, has raised eyebrows among residents and environmental activists. While Das claims that the work is being carried out to clean the area for the convenience of locals who use it for bathing, many believe there are ulterior motives behind the activity.

A local resident, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "The purpose for digging is clear. Either it will be used for fishing or for some vested interest. The councillor has



violated every government rule."

Environmental activist Amitava Sengupta, who has been campaigning to save the Jalangi river from pollution and other threats, condemned the actions. "We have been working tirelessly to protect the river and raise awareness among the public to prevent pollution or any obstruction to the riverbed. Such unauthorised activities, especially by a public official, are unacceptable and pose a serious threat to the local ecosystem," Sengupta said.

Rita Das, chairperson of Krishnagar municipality, expressed surprise at the developments. "I was unaware of this activity. No permission

has been granted for any work along the riverbank. If the councillor is indeed responsible, I will lodge complaints with the district magistrate and the irrigation department to ensure this illegal activity is halted immediately," she said.

Additional district magistrate Pralay Roy Chowdhury also pledged swift action. "I am not aware of who is digging on vested land, but if any unauthorised digging or construction is taking place, I will take immediate steps to stop it. I will also inform the irrigation department to intervene," he said.

The incident has sparked widespread criticism, with many demanding stricter enforcement of environmental and land regulations. Activists have called for accountability, emphasising that unauthorised activities like these could disrupt the ecological balance and exacerbate the challenges facing the already fragile Jalangi river.

Authorities are expected to investigate the matter and take appropriate legal action to prevent further damage.

IISCO Steel Plant launches recycled paver blocks in colourful shades

DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY
BURNPUR, 14 DECEMBER

The IISCO Steel Plant (ISP) of Sail in Burnpur launched an innovative project aimed at converting LD slag, a by-product of steel manufacturing, into environmentally sustainable paver blocks.

Its manufacturing unit was inaugurated today by DIC B P Singh at Burnpur amidst an enthusiastic gathering of officials. Lauding the efforts of the cross functional team involved in the project he termed it as a significant milestone towards SAIL-ISP's commitment to advancing sustainable practices and integrating eco-friendly solutions into its operations.

The project is the result of seamless collaboration across multiple departments, led by the civil maintenance department and supported by the mechanical maintenance, MRD, WRM Electrical,



The production cost of these paver blocks is around 40 per cent lower than the prevailing market price for similar products, making it a cost-effective solution for beautifying the area while also promoting resource optimisation.

and central electrical maintenance teams. The unit uses LD slag, cement, sand, colour, hardener, and water input

to produce paver blocks in multiple hues. The blocks will be used to beautify the plant premises and the sur-

rounding township.

With a production capacity of approximately 600 paver blocks (or 300 square feet) per day, the facility will recycle approximately 2.5 tons of LD slag daily, transforming industrial waste into valuable construction materials.

The production cost of these paver blocks is around 40 per cent lower than the prevailing market price for similar products, making it a cost-effective solution for beautifying the area while also promoting resource optimisation.

The introduction of this facility aligns with SAIL-ISP's broader goal of reducing the environmental impact of steel production. By reusing LD slag, the project not only reduces waste but also contributes to the company's ongoing efforts towards achieving a circular economy, further enhancing the company's leadership in sustainable industrial practices.

RALLY FOR JUSTICE



Congress State President Subhankar Sarkar along with others take part in a rally to the CBI office at Nizam Palace to protest against bail granted to Sandeep Ghosh and Abhijit Mondal in RG Kar Hospital rape and murder case in Kolkata on Saturday. ■ SNS

Asansol division's Madhupur station being redeveloped for better efficiency

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
ASANSOL, 14 DECEMBER

Madhupur station, a vital location in the Asansol division of Eastern Railway, is undergoing significant redevelopment with a focus on creating modern infrastructure for improved train operations and passenger services. The ongoing projects, including the development of a coaching complex, SPART shed, and facilities for a 140-ton breakdown crane, aim to enhance the station's capacity to manage critical railway operations efficiently.

The divisional railway manager (DRM), Asansol of Eastern Railway along with nominated branch officers, visited Madhupur today to inspect the progress of these ongoing works.

A state-of-the-art coaching complex is being constructed at Madhupur station to streamline the maintenance of long-distance trains originating from Jasidih and nearby areas. This facility, being developed at a cost of Rs 21.29 crore, will feature a 600-meter-long maintenance pit with catwalks, stabling lines, a sickline shed equipped with an EOT crane for coach repairs, and associated infrastructure such as service buildings, a compressor room, and a 50,000-gallon water tank. Electrification



of the stabling lines and other facilities will further enhance its operational efficiency. This modern complex will enable the station to handle train maintenance locally, reducing dependence on other hubs and improving punctuality.

To ensure swift restoration of train operations during derailments or other unforeseen incidents, Madhupur station is also being equipped with a 140-ton breakdown (BD) crane. This critical equipment, along with the associated infrastructure being developed at a cost of Rs 6.06 crore, will be pivotal in removing obstacles from railway tracks and replacing damaged coaches. The foundation work for the crane shed has already commenced, marking a significant milestone in strengthening Madhupur's capacity to manage emergencies effectively. Additionally, the construction of a dedicated shed for the

self-propelled accident relief train (SPART) is in progress, with Rs 2.42 crore allocated for the project. The foundation work is complete, and structural erection is underway. This facility will enhance the station's readiness to respond to accidents, ensuring quicker restoration of services and minimising disruptions to train operations.

To further improve efficiency and accommodate the increasing rail traffic, a comprehensive yard remodeling project is being executed at the station at an estimated cost of Rs 40 crore. The project includes the construction of a new platform to reduce congestion, extension of existing rail lines and platforms to accommodate longer trains, and the removal of unused lines to make way for new, fully functional ones. A dedicated shunting neck is also being built to streamline train operations.

Vehicle with govt sticker hits e-cart, kills 2

At Joyrampur Bridge crossing, barely 1 km from Monteswar market, the four wheeler suddenly rushed in and hit the cart, killing Rudra and Aziza Khatun on the spot. The four wheeler couldn't be traced as yet, the police said.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 14 DECEMBER

An elderly patient and an electric rickshaw operator died and two health workers suffered grave wounds when a speeding four wheeler bearing a West Bengal government board rammed into the e-rickshaw from the opposite end in Monteswar in East Burdwan on Saturday morning.

Paresh Rudra (55), the e-rickshaw operator had picked up Biswanath Roy (79), a patient from Shyam Nabagram village and was supposed to take him to Monteswar Block Hospital. On their way, Rudra also picked up Nazma Khatun and Aziza Khatun, both paramedics engaged at the state's Kadambini health unit.

At Joyrampur Bridge crossing, barely 1 km from Monteswar market, the four wheeler suddenly rushed in and hit the cart, killing Rudra and Roy on the spot. The four wheeler couldn't be traced as yet, the police said.

Classified

SITUATION WANTED

B.COM. wide experience in administrative functions, Accounts (Tally), Internet, Office Packages, H.R., seeks changes. 9038378278.

RETIRED: 36 years experience in accounts. M: 8961598636.

SEEKING job opportunities as "Marketing Personnel" in a reputed concern. Cont. No. 7003560578. E-mail: pradipmal1975@gmail.com

CHANGE OF NAME

I, RAHIMA Sardar, W/o. Lt. Noorislam Sardar, P.O. + Vill.: Thakurachak, P.S. Bakultala, 24 Pgs (S) 743338 in my husband's L.R. Parcha wrongly written father-in-law's name. I am in place of Mahmud Sardar vide 1st Class Judicial Magistrate affidavit Baruiip 12-10-24 No. 9310. Mahmud Sardar & Mahmudali is same & identical person.

I, KALYAN Mondal, residing at 122, Swin Hoe Lane, P.O.: Kasba, P.S.: Kasba, Kolkata-700042, Dist.: 24 Parganas (South) hereby declare that I have changed my minor son name, Tatsav Mondal to Aviraj Mondal according to the Affidavit made before the Notary Public at Bankshall Court (Kolkata-700001), vide No. 1297 dated: 12-12-2024. I want to keep my minor son's name as Aviraj Mondal in every document and the same is to be used in every purpose in future.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, BHARAT Ghosh, R/o. G-17/7, Karunamoyee Housing Estate, Salt Lake, Sector 2, Sech Bhaban, Kolkata-700091 in my some documents my name written Bharat Chandra Ghosh. Vide an affidavit sworn before the 1st Class Judicial Magistrate at Kolkata on 10-12-2024 Bharat Ghosh and Bharat Chandra Ghosh are one and same identical person.

PROPERTY

SALE, godown 1000 sq.ft. at 5th floor, location South City Anmol Infra Park, Jagdishpur, Howrah, 711115. Contact: 9883364314.

TENDER

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders are invited within 15 days for exterior painting of approx. area of 3 lakh sq.ft. at Hudco Housing Estt. For details please contact:
1. 9830131584
2. 9836163094

PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform all concerned that Mr. Amit Kumar and Mrs. Komal Singh, residing at 82, Dharmatala Road, Salkia, Howrah, intend to mutate their property located at 83, Dharmatala Road, P.S.: Malipanchghara, Dist.: Howrah (Mutation Case No. 4430/24, 4433/24), measuring 2 cothans 08 chittaks 00 sq.ft., under Deed No. 1 00955/24. The seller in this transaction is Barun Kr. Maity and others. The mutation is being processed under the General Power of Attorney No. 00942/23, registered in Book I at the DSR-I, Howrah office, where Asutosh Maity and others have appointed Barun Kr. Maity (S/o. Biswanath Maity) as their attorney for property located in Malipanchghara, Sheet No. 26, LR Dag No. 259, 260, L.R. Khatian No. 24, 114, 172. Any person who wishes to contest the mutation may appear before the Town Survey Unit, Howrah, within 30 days from the date of this notice.

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'Surest way to ensure degeneration is to put an institution or individual beyond scrutiny'

He said that today's institutional challenges from within and without often stem from the erosion of meaningful dialogue and authentic expression

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

Vice-President, Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday emphasised on the need for self audit, saying that self-audit is very important.

"The surest way to bring about degeneration of an individual or an institution, it will keep it or the gentleman or gentle lady from scrutiny. You are beyond scrutiny, your degeneration is assured. And therefore, self-audit, an audit beyond self, is essential".

Addressing as Chief Guest at the 50th Foundation Day Programme of IP&TAFS at ICWA here, he said: "Today's institutional challenges from within and without often stem from the erosion of

meaningful dialogue and authentic expression. Both outpouring of expression and meaningful dialogue are priceless jewels of democracy. Expression and communication complement each other. Harmony between the two is the key to success."

Underlining the importance of core values in any democracy, Dhankhar said that, "Democracy thrives not just on systems, but on core values.....It has to be centred on the delicate balance of expression and dialogue. These twin forces, expression and dialogue, shape democratic vitality. Their progress is measured not by individual positions, but by the broader societal benefit. India's democratic journey exemplifies how diversity and vast demo-



graphic potential can fuel national progress. As we chart our path for-

ward, we must recognize that democratic health and economic productivity are

inseparable partners in national development". "The ego in us is irre-

pressible, we have to work very hard to control our ego. Ego serves no one, but damages most the person who possesses it", he said.

Addressing the civil servants, the Vice President further said that, "Modern civil servants must be tech savvy, facilitators of change, transcending traditional administrative boundaries. Service remains our cornerstone. Your roles as administrators, financial advisors, regulators and auditors must evolve to meet tomorrow's challenges. This evolution demands that we transform service delivery from traditional methods to cutting-edge solutions."

Stressing on the cross departmental coordination and synergy between them,

he stated, "Cross-departmental collaboration becomes vital in an interconnected world. This is very important you see. We must be in synergy together, we must be in sync with each other. I have quite often impressed on everyone, the doctrine of separation of powers is nothing but that the three institutions, the judiciary, the executive and the legislature, must act in tandem and togetherness. They must act in harmony".

"Trust me, there will ever be issues in the family or in the system. Issues are organic. Issues help us go forward like a failure. A failure is not a setback, it propels you to attain success next time", he added.

Urging the civil servants to bridge the digital divide,

Dhankhar said that, "Focus on bridging the digital divide through innovative financing models for rural technology adoption. I'm so happy to note it's a priority with the Minister. With the world's largest youth population, which we call demographic dividend envy of everyone in the world, India's demographic dividend offers unprecedented opportunities. Your digital initiatives must harness this young talent pool through skilled development and digital entrepreneurship."

Minister of Communication & Development of North Eastern Region, Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, Member Finance, Digital Communications Commission Manish Sinha, and other dignitaries were also present on the occasion.

Congress, BJP exchange heated words over couple's suicide in MP's Sehore

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHOPAL, 14 DECEMBER

A war of words broke out between the ruling BJP and the opposition Congress in Madhya Pradesh over the tragic suicide of a businessman and his wife, who allegedly faced harassment by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Businessman Manoj Parmar and his wife Neha were found hanging in their house in Ashta town of Sehore district on Friday.

According to sources, the police recovered a suicide note, reportedly addressed to the President, the PM, opposition leader Rahul

Gandhi, and several others. In the suicide note, the deceased businessman allegedly held the ED responsible for his and his wife's extreme steps.

Manoj Parmar's children had gifted a gullak (money bank) to Rahul Gandhi when his 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' crossed Madhya Pradesh.

Madhya Pradesh Congress Chief Jitu Patwari reached Ashta on Saturday and met the three children of the deceased couple. Patwari alleged that the suicide was a 'state-sponsored murder' and accused the BJP of using central agencies against those who supported the Congress. Former MP CM and Congress

Rajya Sabha Member Digvijaya Singh also demanded Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman conduct an inquiry into the matter through the ED Director.

Countering the Congress charges, MP BJP spokesperson Ashish Agrawal said the suicide was a tragic incident, but the Congress was trying to exploit it for political gains and selfish interests.

Meanwhile, the ED issued a statement informing that search operations were carried out at four places in Sehore and Indore linked to Manoj Parmar and others on 5 December in connection with an ongoing investigation into bank fraud.

Maha ministry portfolio pie to get 'final touches' on Sunday

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, 14 DECEMBER

Even after three weeks of intense and hectic negotiations and lobbying as well as the intervention of the BJP's top brass in Delhi, sources said on Saturday evening that the list of Maharashtra's cabinet ministers and ministers of state is yet to be finalised and will be given "final touches" only by Sunday morning.

Sources also said that lobbying and slugfest for various ministries is still on. Meanwhile, it is learnt that the three parties have agreed on a formula of BJP (21), Shiv Sena (12) and NCP (10) ratio to divide the ministerial portfolio pie.

The BJP is likely to get home, revenue, water

resources, rural development, agriculture, social justice and OBC welfare, while the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena may get urban development, industries, excise, public works, water supply, transport and sanitation. The NCP is likely to get finance, food and civil supplies, housing and co-operation.

The BJP ministerial candidates include Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil, Mangal Prabhat Lodha, Girish Mahajan, Pankaja Munde, Chandrashekar Bawankule, Ashish Shelar, Rahul Kul, Ganesh Naik and Shivendra Raje Bhosale.

The Shiv Sena list of ministerial candidates include Sanjay Shirsat, Gulabrao Patil, Shambhuraj Desai, Bharat Gogawale, Tanaji Savant, Nilesh Rane, Ashish Jaiswal. The



Pawar-led NCP's ministerial candidates are Chhagan Bhubal, Aditi Tatkare, Dhnanjay Munde, Anil Patil, Ashish Jaiswal, Dharmarajbaba Atram.

During the swearing in ceremony in Nagpur, around

30 cabinet ministers are expected to be administered the oath of office and secrecy. As far as the total strength of the ministry is concerned, the government can have 43 ministers, which is 15 percent of the total strength of the 288-

member Maharashtra Legislative Assembly.

Fadnavis was sworn in as the Chief Minister on December 5 along with two Deputy Chief Ministers, Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, by Governor CP Radhakrishnan in Mumbai.

Samvidhaan showdown in LS: BJP reminds LoP Rahul of 1975 Emergency to blunt Congress attack

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

The Day 2 debate on 75 years of the Constitution's adoption witnessed fresh fireworks in the Lok Sabha, with the Congress and BJP members engaging in fierce verbal exchanges on Saturday.

Following Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi's volley of charges, BJP MP Anurag Thakur hit back at the Congress by reminding it of the 'past misdeeds' during late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's regime.

The BJP MP also taunted LoP Gandhi over flaunting a copy of the Constitution and claimed that the latter himself remains uninformed and clueless about the nitty-gritty of the sacred book.

"There are some who carry the Samvidhaan (Constitution) in their pockets but can't tell the numbers of pages," he said in a searing jibe at the



LoP.

He said that the Congress makes tall claims about the Constitution and safeguarding its spirit but its own government led by late PM Indira Gandhi murdered democracy by imposing Emergency.

Earlier, LoP Gandhi led the Opposition's charge in the Lok Sabha, seeking to corner the government on multiple fronts including unemployment, deprivation of backward communities over reservations and more.

Responding to his charges,

the BJP lawmaker also cited 'preface and foreword' from the Constitution book and said that it was scripted by the most crafted and finest talents of the country and the Congress was trying to demean them.

He said that it was the power of the Constitution that compelled the then PM Indira Gandhi to end the Emergency. "Congress MP says that the government is fooling the youth and cutting opportunities for them. I want to say that it was the Congress government

under which the brutal massacre of the Sikhs took place," said Thakur, amid desk thumping by the Treasury Benches.

He further asked the Congress members to stop hiding behind the Constitution over its failures and refrain from 'misguiding and misleading' the public with its canards and lies.

The debate on 75 years of the adoption of the Constitution will conclude today, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement.

The first day of the debate saw heated exchanges with Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi leading the Congress charge and Defence Minister deflating the claims.

The second day of the debate started with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju showing the mirror to the Congress, over its claims of championing the spirit of democracy.

Navy chief to visit Indonesia to deepen maritime ties

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

Adm. Dinesh K Tripathi, Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS), will embark on a four-day official visit to Indonesia on Sunday.

This visit is part of ongoing efforts to further consolidate bilateral defence relations between India and Indonesia, in line with the deepening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, with a focus on enhancing Naval Cooperation.

During the visit, the CNS is scheduled to engage in bilateral discussions with top level Indonesian Government and defence officials, including Mr Sjafrie Sjamsuddin, Defence Minister of Indonesia, General Agus Subiyanto, Commander of Indonesian Armed Forces and Admiral Muhammad Ali, Chief of Staff of Indonesian Navy.

The discussions are expected to cover a broad spectrum of defence cooperation areas, particularly maritime security,



joint training initiatives, and exploring avenues for further strengthening the operational collaboration between the two navies.

The visit underscores the strong maritime ties between the two countries conforming to the shared vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo Pacific.

The existing maritime cooperation between the two Navies encompasses a range of activities, including joint exercises, port visits, and

training initiatives aimed at building capacity. Currently, the 43rd India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol is underway (10-18 Dec) along the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).

Adm. Tripathi's engagements in Indonesia are expected to further strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the two navies, ensuring enhanced collaboration in areas of mutual interest, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

Goods train splits into two parts after its coupling breaks in Bihar

AGENCIES
PATNA, 14 DECEMBER

A goods train split into two parts after its coupling broke near the Kharia-Pipra halt on the Bhagalpur-Jamalpur in Bihar on Saturday, affecting the traffic on the route.

The incident occurred at 8.58 a.m., affecting trains' operation on both the up and down lines for several hours.

After the train coupling broke, 10 coaches and the engine moved forward, leaving 20 coaches behind.

Railway authorities rushed to the spot and took prompt action to resolve the situation.

The 10 forward coaches were brought to Kalyanpur station, while the remaining 20 were transported to Sultanganj station to clear the tracks.

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THUMBNAILS

3 dead after overhead water tank collapses in Arunachal Pradesh: Three students of a private school were killed and two others injured after an overhead water tank collapsed and fell on them in Arunachal Pradesh's Naharlagun area on Saturday, police said. According to the police, the incident took place at St. Alphonsa School in Model Village at around 9 am. "Three among five died and treatment of two others is underway," Naharlagun Superintendent of Police Mihin Gambo said. "An overhead water tank wall of St. Alphonsa School in Model Village, Naharlagun collapsed and fell on some students of the school. The injured students were rushed to Tomo Riba Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (TRIHS) Medical College & Hospital," the SP added. The deceased are class 9 students while the injured belong to classes 6 and 8, the police said. The police have detained the school principal, owner, and four other staff members for questioning, they said. "Initially we have detained six persons including the owner of the building, and principal of the school and we will take legal action against them. All three deceased students are Class 9 students. Among two injured one is a Class 6 student and another is a Class 8 student," Mihin Gambo said.

'Determined to raise standards of education'

Revanth Reddy said that the govt endeavours to upgrade students' skills

AGENCIES

HYDERABAD, 14 DECEMBER

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy said on Saturday that his government is determined to raise the standards of education.

He said the government has decided to instil confidence in Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Backward Classes (BCs) and Minorities. The Chief Minister said that the government endeavours to upgrade the students' skills and make them partners in the reconstruction of Telangana State.

He launched the uniform diet plan for residential schools and welfare hostels across the state. Speaking at the programme held at TG Social Welfare Residential School at Chilkur in Rangareddy district, he said the government introduced a uniform diet plan in all Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Minority residential schools and hostels.

Voicing concern over the incidents of food poisoning in residential schools and hostels, the Chief Minister asked the staff to discharge their duties with full respon-



sibility.

"A girl died recently due to food poisoning. The grieving parents must have undergone a lot of trouble. Rich and the poor show their affection towards their children equally. Parents reposed faith in us and sent their children to hostels. We should be responsible," he said and called for taking precautions to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

The Chief Minister announced that he will visit residential schools during his every official tour in the state. Stringent action will be initiated against those who fail to perform their duties, he said.

He suggested setting up Mess Management committees by including and asking the officials to empower the students to monitor the food they consume every day.

Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, ministers, and senior officials participated in the programme held at different places in the state. They will visit residential schools and hostels on Saturday and Sunday and have lunch with the students.

The Chief Minister stated that a new menu has been prepared as per the enhanced diet charges.

He mentioned that for the first time in 10 years, the

government has enhanced diet charges in welfare hostels by 40 per cent. Cosmetic charges have also been enhanced by 200 per cent.

About eight lakh students are studying in SC, ST, BC and Minority residential schools in the state.

He said for the last few years, a misconception was created that those studying in private schools are more talented than the students in government schools. "Our government is working to clear this misconception," he said.

Revanth Reddy claimed that it was former Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao who started residential schools in united Andhra Pradesh. He mentioned that many students who studied in residential schools went on to become IAS and IPS officers.

The Chief Minister alleged that the previous government of BRS did not give importance to basic amenities, diet and cosmetics in residential schools and hostels.

"Since ours is a people's government, we increased the diet and cosmetic charges in a single stroke," he said and claimed that nowhere in the country the charges were enhanced to this extent.

Cine star Allu Arjun released from jail



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD, 14 DECEMBER

Actor Allu Arjun was released in the early hours on Saturday from Chanchalguda jail after spending the night there even though he had secured interim bail from the Telangana High Court.

He later denied that he had caused the stampede but refrained from making any further comments since the case was still sub judice.

Meanwhile, chief minister A Revanth Reddy said that instead of watching the movie quietly at the theatre Allu Arjun had come in an open car and greeted his fans which threw the situation out of control, leading to the stampede that left a woman dead and her nine-year son still battling for

his life at the hospital.

After his early morning release from jail, actor Allu Arjun met various film fraternity members who came to his residence. He also thanked his fans across the country for their support.

He said, "We are extremely sorry for the family. I will be personally there to support them in whatever way possible. It was purely accidental. I was inside the theatre watching a movie with my family. The accident happened outside. It was of no direct connection to me. It was purely unintentional... I have been coming to the same theatre for the last 20 years and have been to the same place more than 30 times. Never had such an accident happened before."

A spokesperson from the chief minister's office said neither the government nor the chief minister harbour any grudges against the cine actor calling it "misleading propaganda".

The government permitted the movie to run special shows and enhanced ticket prices as requested. The chief minister was happy with Allu Arjun's statement against drugs.

He also said "jail manual prescribes that release of a person from jail would be before sunset so a bail order received by jail officials after the sunset is implemented soon after the sunrise." Hence the Pushpa actor was forced to spend the night because the interim bail order came after sunset.

Andhra: TDP's membership reaches 73 lakh

AGENCIES

AMARAVATI, 14 DECEMBER

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) claimed on Saturday that it has created a record of sorts in the party membership enrollment as the total number of members has reached 73 lakh.

Chairing a meeting on the membership drive at the party headquarters here, the TDP supremo and Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu congratulated the party leaders and the cadre on achieving the record. The membership drive is being conducted under the leadership of TDP national general secretary and Minister for Education Nara Lokesh.

Heads of various wings in the party briefed Chandrababu Naidu on the membership enrollment and explained that of the total number of 73

lakh members enrolled themselves, 85,000 are from the neighbouring State of Telangana. In the latest enrolment drive, 54 per cent of the members are new. They informed Chandrababu Naidu that Rajampet stood on top in the enrolment with 1.18 lakh members, and Nellore City stood in second place with 1.06 lakh. A total of 1.04 lakh members were enrolled in Kuppam, the Assembly constituency represented by Chandrababu Naidu, 1.02 lakh in Palakollu and 90,000 in Mangalagiri, which is represented by Lokesh. Expressing satisfaction over the successful enrolment, Chandrababu Naidu promised to build a strong army of party members and wanted the cadre to further work to ensure that in every four persons in the state, one should take the party mem-

bership.

The Chief Minister also assured the party leaders and cadre that besides extending welfare programmes to them, programmes to empower them both politically and financially will be implemented more effectively.

He further stressed the need for also taking up programmes like skill development, taking the government welfare schemes closer to the cadre and leaders besides providing them better opportunities to sustain them financially. He also promised steps to increase their per capita income. Besides giving priority on a merit basis to those who are striving hard for the development of the party, Chandrababu Naidu said that efforts also will be made at every stage in the party to sustain their families financially.

Kerala CM writes to PM Modi urging him to withdraw VGF repayment norm for Vizhinjam project

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 14 DECEMBER

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking to intervene and withdraw the finance ministry's norm making it mandatory for the state to repay the Viability Gap Fund (VGF) for the Vizhinjam seaport project in installments.

Chief Minister Vijayan, In his letter, pointed out that since the Union Finance Ministry introduced the VGF scheme in 2005, never in the past such a payback has been demanded by the Finance Ministry under the VGF scheme.

The Chief Minister said that the Vizhinjam Interna-



tional Seaport project would be the only case in the country where the Government of India has demanded repayment of the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) assistance provided.

Earlier, the Union Finance Ministry has rejected the Kerala government's plea to

reconsider its decision requiring the state to repay the Viability Gap Fund (VGF) for the Vizhinjam Seaport project in installments.

"As the Rs 817.80 crore provided by the Government of India is to be repaid on a Net Present Value (NPV) basis, this would result in repayment

of Rs 10,000 to 12,000 crore from the state exchequer in actual terms, computed on projected interest rates and revenue realisation from the port over the period of repayment," CM Vijayan said in his letter.

If the payback is insisted by the union government,

the assistance provided would not be a capital grant but would be a loan, he said. This clearly is contrary to the very intent of the scheme," CM Vijayan added.

The chief minister pointed that the state government had requested the Union Finance Ministry to cancel the new stance taken on the VGF repayment issue, but it was rejected.

Chief Minister Vijayan also mentioned in the letter that similar conditions were not included when VGF was sanctioned for the Outer Harbour project of the Tuticorin port.

Stating that Vizhinjam also deserves the same consideration as given to the Tuticorin Port, the Chief Minister requested the Prime Minister's intervention for a favorable decision on the issue related to the VGF repayment of the Vizhinjam project.

Kerala HC reserves order on plea for CBI probe into ADM Naveen Babu's death



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOCHI, 13 DECEMBER

The Kerala High Court, on Thursday, reserved its order on a plea moved by Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Naveen Babu's wife, Manjusha, seeking a CBI investigation into her husband's death.

The counsel of Manjusha submitted before the court that the inquest report

indicates the presence of bloodstains on the undergarments of the deceased. However, there is no mention of any blood or stain in the postmortem findings. This discrepancy leaves the source of bloodstains on the undergarments unexplained, raising suspicion, advocate John S Ralph, counsel for Manjusha, argued before the court.

Manjusha, Naveen Babu's wife, moved the high court seeking a CBI probe into her husband's death, claiming that the state police investigation is not proceeding in the right direction.

Arguing for handing over the probe relating to the death of Naveen Babu to the Central Bureau of Investigation, Manjusha's counsel submitted that as the inquest was conducted before the postmortem, it was incumbent upon the investigating officer to seek clarification from the medical examiner regarding this observation. The possibility of the deceased sustaining internal injuries

cannot be ruled out.

He submitted that in all cases of unnatural deaths, viscera are preserved and sent for toxicological analysis to rule out the possibility of poisoning. However, in this case, neither the viscera nor blood samples were preserved or submitted for examination.

It's unclear how Naveen Babu, weighing 55 kg, could have hung himself from a small rope. The marks on the neck found during the inquest wasn't mentioned in the post-mortem report, he submitted.

Naveen Babu's wife has alleged that the accused, former president of the Kannur District Panchayat, P P Divya, possessed significant political influence, raising concerns that the investigation might be sabotaged. Kannur ADM Naveen Babu was found dead at his official residence in Pallikkunnu, Kannur, on the morning of October 15. He allegedly took his life after facing public humiliation and corruption accusations made by PP Divya, then the Kannur District Panchayat President, at the farewell meeting on October 14. Divya had accused him of intentionally delaying the issuance of an NOC to Prasanthan to start a petrol pump at Chengalai in Kannur.

T E N D E R

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OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE

The Divisional Railway Manager (Mechanical)/ E.C. Railway-Samastipur and on behalf of the President of India invites Open E-Tender under Single packet system from experienced and financially capable tenderers for the following works in E-tendering mode of IREPS web portal of Indian Railways :-

Sr. No.: 1, Tender Notice No: M/TC-36 of 2024 (Open E-Tender) Dt.- 09.12.2024, Name of Work: Annual Maintenance of Automatic Fire/Smoke Detection System with alarm system and Automatic fire detection system cum automatic/ manual fire suppression system of make Sanrok in LHB LHB AC Power car, Panty Car & LHB AC Coaches at SPJ Division for one year, Tender Value (In Rs.): 22148352.20, Earnest Money in Rs.: 260890.00, Completion period of work: 365 Days.

1. Receiving date and time for E-Tender made on IREPS web portal: 31.12.2024 upto 15.00 hrs.

2. Opening Date and time for e-tender: 31.12.2024, 15.30 hrs.

3. Web site particulars where complete details of tender document can be seen on Website-www.irps.gov.in.

ADME (C&W)
E.C.R/Samastipur
PR/01690/SPJ/MECH/T/24-25/40

EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

No.SG/DE/OT/04/24

S.N. 1. Name of the work with its location : Alteration in Siemens RRI (Route Relay Interlocking) at SEB Station in connection with: Provision of over run line at DN 1st loop and 2nd Loop at SEB Station. 2. Approx cost of the work: Rs. 1,45,68,494.16/- (One Crore Forty Five Lakh Sixty Eight Thousand Four Hundred Ninety Four and Paise Sixteen only). 3. Earnest Money: Rs. 2,22,900/- (Two Lakh Twenty Two Thousand Nine Hundred only). 4. Closing date & time for Submission of e-tendering: 03.01.2025 upto 12.30 Hrs. 5. Website particulars where complete details of tender can be seen etc.: www.irps.gov.in

Divnl. Signal & Telecom Engineer
East Central Railway, DDU
PR/01694/DDU/S&T/T/24-25/28

Telangana Tourism Development Corporation Limited.

"Tourism House" # 3-5-891, Himayatnagar, Hyderabad-500029.

e-Procurement Tender Notice No. 19/SE/TGTD/2024-25. Date: 30.11.2024

Sl. No.	Name of the work	Est. Cost Crores
1.	Development of Passenger Ropeway at Khammam Fort, Khammam, Telangana.	Rs. 14.00

Further tender & corrigendum details can be seen @ www.tender.telangana.gov.in

R.O. No.: 794-PP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2024-25

Sd/- Superintending Engineer,
TGTD Ltd. Hyderabad.

Simultaneous Polls

The concept of ‘One Nation, One Election’ represents a bold attempt to overhaul India’s electoral system, addressing issues of cost, governance, and electoral fatigue. While the idea appears promising on paper, its implementation is fraught with challenges, both constitutional and political, that could reshape the nation’s democratic fabric in unforeseen ways. At its core, this initiative aims to synchronise elections for the Lok Sabha, state assemblies, and Union territories, eventually extending to local bodies like municipalities and panchayats. Proponents argue that such synchronisation would reduce the financial burden of frequent elections and ensure smoother governance by minimising disruptions caused by the model code of conduct. However, these perceived advantages come with significant complexities that merit close scrutiny. The implementation of simultaneous elections requires extensive constitutional amendments. For example, altering Articles 83 and 172 to align the durations of Parliament and state legislatures demands a two-thirds majority in both Houses of Parliament. Given the current parliamentary arithmetic, achieving this is an uphill battle. Subsequent phases of the plan, such as synchronising elections for local bodies, will also require ratification by at least half the state legislatures, highlighting the enormous legislative challenges. Moreover, any such amendments must be assessed for their impact on the federal structure. In a country as diverse as India, the autonomy of states is a cornerstone of governance. Aligning elections could inadvertently shift the balance of power toward the Centre, raising concerns about the erosion of federal principles. Political and logistical hurdles further complicate this vision. Smaller regional parties, which rely on state-specific issues to build their voter base, view synchronised elections as a threat to their relevance. Many fear that simultaneous polls would amplify the influence of national parties, leaving little room for regional voices. Securing the support of these stakeholders will require careful negotiation and assurances that their concerns are addressed.

Logistically, the scale of conducting nationwide elections at once is daunting. It demands an extraordinary deployment of manpower, security, and resources. Local body elections, in particular, add another layer of complexity, as they require unique preparations like the coordination of electoral rolls between the Election Commission of India and state Election Commissions. These challenges could strain institutional capacities and potentially affect the quality of elections. While the initiative reflects a long-term vision for electoral reform, its timing raises questions. Introducing such a proposal just months before the Delhi elections suggests a political motive, with the move possibly serving as a tool to project the ruling party’s commitment to efficiency and reform.

However, failing to build consensus could reveal the inherent limitations of this ambitious agenda. The vision of ‘One Nation, One Election’ offers an opportunity to streamline India’s electoral process, but its realisation demands careful consideration of constitutional integrity, political consensus, and logistical readiness. Above all, any reform must strengthen India’s democratic fabric without undermining the diversity and autonomy that define it.

Misuse of law

The suicide of a Bangalore-based tech professional has reignited concerns over the misuse of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, which addresses cruelty by husbands or their families toward women. While this law serves as a crucial safeguard against domestic abuse, cases like this highlight its potential exploitation, leading to devastating consequences for men and their families. Section 498A was introduced to protect women from physical and mental abuse, a deeply entrenched social issue in India. However, over time, its broad provisions ~ such as immediate arrest without preliminary investigation ~ have been criticised for creating opportunities for misuse. Reports of false allegations, extortionate financial demands, and protracted legal battles suggest a need for reforms that balance protecting women with preventing undue harassment of men and their families. In this case, the tech professional reportedly faced a slew of legal accusations, coupled with demands for exorbitant settlement amounts. Denied access to his child and allegedly ridiculed in court, he felt cornered by a system he believed was biased against him. His despair culminated in a tragic decision to end his life, leaving behind detailed suicide notes and a video that recount a harrowing tale of alleged abuse, extortion, and systemic failure. Data underscores the complexity of this issue. According to recent statistics, thousands of cases are registered under Section 498A each year, alongside a significant number of dowry-related deaths. While many cases are genuine and highlight the grim reality of violence against women, false accusations can have equally severe consequences, ranging from reputational damage to financial and emotional ruin.

The judiciary has recognised these challenges, with the Supreme Court issuing guidelines to prevent arbitrary arrests and mandating mediation in family disputes. However, these measures seem inadequate in addressing the deeper systemic flaws that often leave men vulnerable to exploitation under the guise of justice. Reform is urgently needed. Family courts should prioritise expedited hearings to prevent prolonged mental and financial strain on either party. Mediation should be strengthened as a prerequisite to litigation, ensuring that disputes are resolved amicably whenever possible. Furthermore, mechanisms to penalise false accusations must be enforced to deter misuse of the law. Timely resolution of such cases not only prevents personal tragedies but also upholds the integrity of the legal system, ensuring justice is delivered fairly and promptly. At the same time, it is crucial not to undermine the original intent of Section 498A, which remains a vital tool for addressing domestic violence. Gender-sensitive laws must strike a delicate balance ~ safeguarding the vulnerable without becoming instruments of harassment. The tragedy of this tech professional’s death is a stark reminder of the human cost of systemic imbalance. It is imperative for policymakers, legal experts, and society to engage in a nuanced dialogue about gender-sensitive laws, ensuring that they uphold justice for all while protecting against their misuse. Without such introspection, the risk of more lives being destroyed by systemic gaps remains unacceptably high.

Taiwan imbroglio

The US State Department has urged China to exercise restraint. It reminded Beijing that a routine transit by President Lai should not be used as a pretext for military pressure. There is overwhelming opinion across the world that the scale of Chinese deployment targeting the entire island chain stretching from Japan to Borneo is a clear demonstration of China’s intention to intimidate Taiwan militarily by exerting control over critical waterways. No wonder, Beijing’s military posture around Taiwan in recent years has raised fears of conflict in the region



China’s ruling Communist Party claims the self-governing democracy of Taiwan as its own territory despite never having controlled it, and has not ruled out taking the island by force. It views unofficial interactions between Washington and Taipei as a violation of its sovereignty. Taiwan’s leadership rejects China’s territorial claims over it.

China seems to be determined to integrate the democratic island of Taiwan with the mainland. China has upped the ante in recent times by increased military activities in Taiwanese waters to intimidate and with the intention to bring Taiwan into submission.

That would not be as simple a proposition as Beijing might imagine. Despite that Beijing has used economic doles with Taiwan’s limited diplomatic allies. The intention is to diplomatically isolate Taiwan by coercing those allies to switch allegiance; Beijing would be too credulous to think that Taiwan has no friends.

But Beijing is not deterred. In the latest move, China fielded its largest maritime deployment around the Taiwan Strait and Western Pacific in decades. This surge of Chinese military activities put Taiwan on high alert.

The Chinese provocation came as Taiwan braced for expected military drills after President Lai Ching-te sparked Beijing’s ire by making unofficial stops in Hawaii and the US territory of Guam during a weeklong South Pacific tour, which wrapped up on 6 December.

The visit was Lai’s first to the United States since becoming president in May. The leader, who has long faced Beijing’s wrath for championing Taiwan’s sovereignty, used his travel to tout solidarity with like minded democracies.

Chinese authorities voiced firm opposition to Lai’s trip, referring to him as a “separatist.” His travel came after the US approved new arms sales to Taiwan, which

prompted China to vow “strong countermeasures.”

China has used military drills to voice dissatisfaction over visits by US or Taiwanese officials to each other’s soil. In May, days after Lai’s inauguration, China launched two days of large-scale military drills surrounding Taiwan in what it called “punishment” for so-called “separatist acts.” It called those drills “Joint Sword-2024A.”

China then conducted “Joint Sword-2024B” drills in October, after Lai said during a National Day address that the island was “not subordinate” to China.

The latest military movement by China appears to differ from those two drills, including in its geographic breadth. China refuses to react to questions, saying “the Taiwan issue is China’s internal affair, and China will firmly defend its national sovereignty.”

On 9 December, Taiwan claimed that multiple formations of Chinese naval and coast guard vessels were moving in regional waters and around the Taiwan Strait. Lt. Gen. Hsieh Jih-Sheng, deputy chief of the General Staff for Intelligence claimed an “astounding” number of Chinese vessels were deployed at a scale that “could block external forces”.

Around 90 Chinese navy and coast guard ships were in the waters near Taiwan. Beijing issued no comments on why so many vessels were deployed. Beijing often announces such military drills in advance.

China neither acknowledged nor refuted Taiwan’s claim of its large-scale deployment. Hsieh also claimed that the PLA naval deployment was not only targeting

Taiwan but the geographic spread stretched into waters past the first island chain, which encompasses Japan, Taiwan, parts of the Philippines and Indonesia. The larger Chinese objective seems to be to challenge the US as the dominant power in the Pacific.

Taiwan is the first to feel the Chinese heat as the PLA’s activities exerted military pressure, specifically when Chinese forces have significantly raised their posture around the Western Pacific. Taiwan’s discomfort is understandable.

If China blocks outside forces from entering the first island chain, it could pose a survival threat to Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion, potentially cutting off naval access by outside forces seeking to aid the island.

The maritime deployment was the largest since China began holding large-scale war games around Taiwan in the mid-1990s. Taiwan authorities also reported a significant increase in PLA aircraft operating around the island. It detected 47 such jets within 24 hours on 9 December. It transpired that the PLA had designated seven zones of reserved airspace to the east of its coastal Zhejiang and Fujian province.

Taiwan is alarmed by the unprecedented scale of Beijing’s naval deployment of its largest naval fleet in nearly three decades to the waters around the island. Thus, this is a more significant threat than previous iterations.

This marked the largest Chinese naval manoeuvre since the 1996 military drills surrounding Taiwan’s presidential elections. There were indications that the aircraft were simulating attacks on foreign naval vessels and practicing

how to repel civilian and military planes as part of a “blockade exercise”.

The Chinese ships were deployed from its northern, eastern and southern theatre commands. The vessels conducted “grey zone harassment”, which Taiwan’s coast guard described as deliberate provocation short of conflict that included regular military incursion by air and sea.

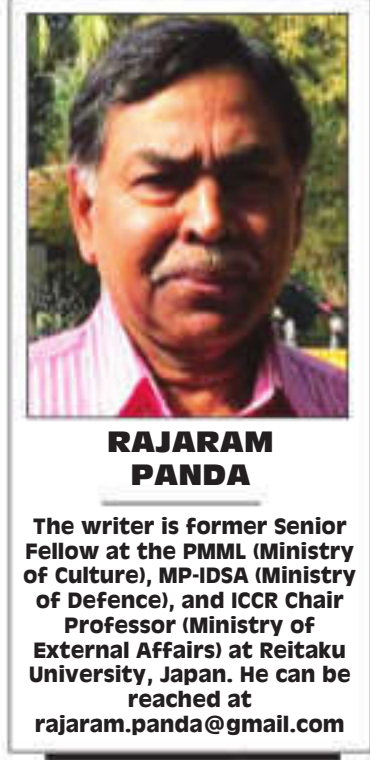
Taiwan appealed to Beijing as a “civilised neighbour” to cease its “troublemaking”. While the Taiwanese defence ministry activated combat readiness exercises and warned that unilateral provocations could destabilise peace in the region, it reminded Beijing that its actions would not be appreciated by the international community.

While Beijing has not described the nature of its military activities closer and within Taiwanese waters, Taiwan has described these as China’s training exercises. This shows that Taiwan is exercising extreme restraint despite provocations in order not to escalate matters. However, “training” can develop into drills, and drills can become war.

The US State Department has urged China to exercise restraint. It reminded Beijing that a routine transit by President Lai should not be used as a pretext for military pressure.

There is overwhelming opinion across the world that the scale of Chinese deployment targeting the entire island chain stretching from Japan to Borneo is a clear demonstration of China’s intention to intimidate Taiwan militarily by exerting control over critical waterways.

No wonder, Beijing’s military posture around Taiwan in recent years has raised fears of conflict in the region. It is expected that China will uphold the true meaning of freedom of navigation, uphold the international “rules-based order” and avoid any escalation.



RAJARAM PANDA
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Legacy threatened

SIR, Nepal’s objection to the Agnipath scheme and its refusal to send its youth for service in the Indian Army has put a 200-year historical legacy in jeopardy. Over the past six years, no new Nepali Gorkhas have been recruited into the Gorkha Regiment. Meanwhile, China is attempting to exploit this situation.

In 1809-1814, Maharaja Ranjit Singh first established a battalion of the brave and aggressive Gorkha tribe. The British later adopted this concept.



In 1947, under a tripartite agreement with Nepal and Britain, the Indian Army began recruiting Nepali Gorkhas. The Gorkha Regiment includes both Nepali and Indian Gorkhas. The regiment has displayed immense bravery in numerous battles.

Currently, 30,000 Nepali Gorkhas are in active service in the Indian Army, while 90,000 retired soldiers are receiving pensions. The Indian Army has seven Gorkha Regiments and over 40 battalions. With recruitment from Nepal halted, the structure of the Gorkha Regiment is undergoing changes. To fill the gap left by Nepali Gorkhas, the Indian Army has started recruiting soldiers from the Kumaon and Garhwal regions of Uttarakhand.

The cohesive structure of the regiment strengthens the cultural, linguistic, and social bonds within its units, motivating soldiers on the battlefield.

Some retired officers of the

Gorkha Regiment fear that allowing non-Gorkhas into the regiment may harm the camaraderie within its units due to the disruption of its ethnic identity.

The absence of Nepali Gorkhas in the Indian Army marks a significant shift, especially as China seeks to capitalize on this situation.

Nepal’s decision to oppose the Agnipath scheme and refuse its youth’s participation in the Indian Army has placed the 200-year legacy of the Gorkha Regiment’s valor and aggressive historical heritage in jeopardy.

Yours, etc.,
Dattaprasad Shiroadkar,
Mumbai, 11 December.

BRIDGE THE GAP

SIR, The Draft UGC Regulations 2024 have proposed major changes to India’s higher education system with an aim to make it more flexible, inclusive, and aligned with global standards. While the vision seems ambitious, the real challenge will emerge in the course of implementation.

It is unanimously accepted

DIGHA AIRPORT

SIR, Apropos the local page news report ‘Jagannath temple at Digha will open on 30 April next year: Mamata’ published on 12 December, an airport at Digha beckoning both pilgrims and tourists from not only the length and breadth of India but also beyond the frontiers of this country is a prime necessity.

This will boost the tourism industry at Digha. Darjeeling, a tourist resort, boasts of Bagdogra airport. By the same token, an airport at Digha is nothing out of the ordinary.

Yours, etc., Anindya Ghosal,
Burdwan, 12 December.

that many colleges and universities in India are underfunded and understaffed ~ making it difficult to adopt such sweeping changes.

For example, the academic bank of credits, which allows students to transfer credits between institutions and industries, requires robust infrastructure and cooperation among institutions, something that is currently lacking in most parts of the country.

It has to be admitted that there is a glaring rot in India’s higher education system. While there may be limitations, the Draft UGC Regulations 2024 offer a forward-look-

ing framework for transforming India’s higher education system.

However, their success depends on addressing the systemic issues that have long plagued the sector. If implemented effectively, these reforms have the potential to empower students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

But to get there, policymakers, institutions, and educators must work together to bridge the gap between vision and reality.

Yours, etc.,
Shovanlal Chakraborty,
Kolkata, 12 December.

A MEMBER OF THE

ANN
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Gender and Genocide in Bangladesh

History is complicated; simplifying it is the work of politicians. My research on Bangladesh challenges the national memory of the 1971 war, as represented at the Liberation War Museum. The national archive on display at the museum feeds nationalism by creating a national memory of the 1971 war and reminds people of the common suffering encountered by the collectivity.

My work investigates how gender has operated in service of Bangladeshi nationalist ideology. The representation of women’s experiences at the museum lacks complexities of gender and seeks erasure of any experience that deviates from the nationalist narrative. The images in the archives of the war museum tell the story of a nation’s unease with women’s place in nationalist discourse.

Gender in Bangladesh, similar to everywhere else, is not a homogenous or unified category. Gender as a social construct creates social subjects whose experiences vary based on their belonging to different identity groups. Examining gendered experiences of war helps us understand the complex social relationships that construct gender in the first place and lead to the gendered experiences of war situated at the intersection of religion, ethnicity and class.

During the war of 1971, many women were militarized and wanted to defend their nation in the war efforts, but they were not able to find an entry point into

The Daily Star

a male-dominated battlefield. They were encouraged to provide support in assisting and nurturing roles, instead of engaging in combat.

Aroma Dutta and her mother Pratiti Devi Ghatak come from a prominent political and cultural Hindu family in South Asia. The partition of India divided Ghatak’s family, as some members of her family migrated to Calcutta, India and others remained in Dhaka, East Pakistan. Her brothers, Ritwik Ghatak, an acclaimed filmmaker, and Manik Ghatak, a Bengali poet and novelist left Dhaka.

Mahasweta Devi is Manik Ghatak’s daughter and an influential postcolonial feminist writer whose work has been translated from Bengali to English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

The stories featured in Mahasweta Devi’s Imaginary Maps concern women in tribal India haunted by the region’s colonial history, or as Spivak calls them “gendered subaltern subjects.” Spivak writes, “Mahasweta invites us to realize that, in the context of this fiction, for the subaltern, and especially the subaltern woman, ‘Empire’ and ‘Nation’ are interchangeable names.”

For subaltern gendered subjects, the empire-nation reversal means the substitution of one system of difference for another as the political goals of the old colony are carried forward by the new nation, as was the case in 1947 when the British left India.

In post-1947 Pakistan and in Bangladesh after the liberation war of 1971, Hindus not only found themselves targeted due to their religion but their experiences have also been excluded from the dominant narratives on nationalism.

Aroma Dutta’s grandfather Dharendra Nath Dutta, a renowned Congressman from East Bengal, was against the partition of India. At the time of the partition, he was offered the position of the first Chief Minister of West Bengal, which meant opting for India instead of Pakistan, but more importantly it would mean leaving his home in Comilla. He declined the offer and played a crucial role in the politics of East Pakistan.



Urban voters must turn out in larger numbers

DR. R.K. SINHA

The results of the Maharashtra and Jharkhand Legislative Assembly elections are now out, and new governments have been formed in both states. The Chief Ministers and some ministers have also taken their oaths.

In the Maharashtra Assembly elections, over 65 per cent voter turnout was recorded, the highest in the last 30 years. This is significant for two reasons: first, it shows an almost 4 per cent increase compared to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, and second, it is close to the average national voter turnout of around 65–66 per cent.

But the question arises — can this voter turnout percentage be considered sufficient for a strong democracy? Certainly not! Then, what can be done? This is a serious issue that all responsible citizens of the country need to think about — how can voter turnout be increased in elections?

As mentioned above, the Maharashtra Assembly elections recorded the highest turnout in the last 30 years. Maharashtra's data is noteworthy because the state has the largest urban population in the country. Historically, it has lagged behind the national average due to low voter turnouts in cities and towns.

However, a closer look at Maharashtra's data reveals that voter apathy in urban areas has not entirely disappeared. For example, Western Maharashtra's Kolhapur district recorded a high voter turnout of 76.25 per cent, followed by Gadchiroli — a region often in the news for Maoist activities — at 73.68 per cent. In contrast, Mumbai city district recorded a low voter turnout of 52.07 per cent. Similar figures were observed in other urban districts like Pune, Thane, and Mumbai suburban.

On the positive side, voter turnout has improved overall across

the state. The credit for this change, though slow and gradual, goes primarily to the Election Commission of India. This time, the Election Commission was quite proactive in increasing voter turnout. Its campaign involved social media and local celebrities, from cricketers to film stars. Measures like setting up polling stations in high-rise buildings and residential societies, and introducing a token system to reduce wait times were also implemented. High-voltage campaigns by political parties also helped increase voter participation. Maharashtra's improved voter turnout is reassuring for Indian democracy.

That said, urban areas across the country generally see lower voter turnouts. From Shimla to Surat, urban voter apathy remains consistent. This trend is not new. During the first three decades of elections, urban voter participation was much better. However, since the 1980s, the gap between urban and rural voter turnout has widened. Urban apathy needs to be understood. Urban India contributes 60 per cent to the GDP and a significant share to taxes. However, the condition of cities continues to deteriorate.

Take Delhi, for instance. The city's pollution levels have become so severe that life has become difficult for residents. Delhi is now the most polluted capital in the world. In recent years, major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Bengaluru have been paralyzed by floods during the rainy season. Life in these cities came to a halt for several days. Waterlogging on roads caused traffic jams, disrupted rail services, flooded homes, and forced schools and colleges to shut down. These recurring issues highlight the poor state of urban planning and infrastructure.

It is important to understand that urban India is the backbone of the



country's economy. Almost the entire service sector is concentrated in cities. According to census data, 31 per cent of the population lives in cities, although non-governmental estimates suggest the urban population is much higher. Cities provide employment opportunities, and they are where the dreams of the country's youth are realized.

But the neglect of cities leads voters to become disillusioned with their representatives. They feel that when their leaders are ineffective, there is no point in voting. Voters are repeatedly let down by their representatives.

Hence, elected representatives must understand that if voters are to be drawn to polling stations on a large scale again, the responsibility does not rest solely on the Election

Commission. Representatives must also maintain direct contact with the public and show sensitivity toward their issues.

You might recall that during the last Lok Sabha elections, the scorching heat gripped almost the entire country. Despite this, voters stepped out of their homes to cast their votes. On election day, temperatures in many places exceeded 42 degrees Celsius. It wasn't easy to campaign or stand in long queues at polling stations in such harsh weather. Yet millions of voters braved the heat and exercised their democratic right.

This is encouraging and a positive sign for our democracy. People understand that their votes shape the nation's destiny. That's why they step out to vote.

However, the already proactive Election Commission must make polling stations more accessible and attractive to draw even more voters. Improvements such as sufficient parking, comfortable waiting areas, and voting facilities for differently-abled individuals can make a significant difference. Currently, differently-abled individuals face considerable challenges at polling stations. This needs serious attention.

In summary, increasing voter turnout in panchayat, municipal, assembly, and parliamentary elections is not solely the Election Commission's responsibility. This requires coordinated efforts at multiple levels.

(The writer is a former Member of Parliament.)

POLITICAL DIARY KALYANI SHANKAR

Looking ahead to a year of promise

Nostradamus, the renowned French astrologer and seer, has made intriguing predictions about global affairs and India's future for the year 2025.

The 16th-century seer has been credited with predicting significant events that have shaped our world, from the Covid-19 pandemic to the moon landing. Nostradamus predicted that the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war may end in 2025. Both nations would experience severe floods and volcanic eruptions due to climate change. According to the New York Post, Turkey and France may significantly facilitate the peace process between Ukraine and Russia. He also foretold an 'ancient plague' in England in 2025, which could be a reference to a resurgence of a historical disease.

Nostradamus had also predicted that 2025 might witness a giant asteroid hitting the Earth or coming threateningly close to it. According to a report by the New York Post, Nostradamus wrote, "From the cosmos, a fireball will rise, A harbinger of fate." If this prediction were to come true, it could have significant implications.

As we look at the crystal ball for India's future, the year begins with the 2025 Republic Day parade. The theme is 'Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas'. The chief guest is yet to be finalised.

In 2025, India is set to experience rapid economic growth, persistent social challenges, and technological innovation. The government's significant strides in technology education and renewable energy, coupled with the potential for economic development, offer a hopeful outlook for India's future prosperity.

India's role on the global stage is poised to strengthen with

increased collaboration in trade, defence, and climate initiatives, particularly with other major economies. This potential for global influence is a reason for optimism and hope for India's future.

On the religious side, the next Maha Kumbh Mela will be held in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, from 13 January to 26 February 2025. The Kumbh Mela is a grand spiritual gathering every 12 years. Millions of pilgrims rush to the venue to take the holy bath.

On the political front, a critical issue facing the Opposition coalition, INDIA, is its cohesion. Already, some tensions have emerged. The Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have distanced themselves from the alliance. The AAP plans to contest the Delhi Assembly elections independently. The cracks within were visible in the recent Haryana, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand Assembly polls. The partners in the coalition are unhappy about the Congress' performance. They are watching how Congress performs in the upcoming Delhi and Bihar polls scheduled for 2025.

Delhi will hold Assembly elections in February, with the BJP looking to unseat Aam Admi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal. The AAP has faced many challenges, including corruption allegations against several leaders in the recent past. It has appointed Atishi as a temporary chief minister. The AAP and Congress were partners in the Lok Sabha elections but did not engage with voters.

Bihar will also have elections this year. It is politically a critical state. The ruling NDA, led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, may face intense competition from the Mahagathabandhan, headed by Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejaswi Yadav. The



BJP and the JD(U) are working to retain the state.

To fulfil the party's unfinished agenda, the Modi government is keen to implement various reforms, including "one nation, one poll," population regulation, and economic initiatives. It has already revoked Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and completed the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. However, the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code is still pending.

Two organisations - the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) - will

celebrate significant anniversaries in the coming months. The RSS will complete 100 years in September, while the CPI will begin its centenary celebrations in December. In its 100th year, the RSS' influence is widespread, making it challenging for future governments to diminish its grip over Indian politics and society. The impact of the communist parties has been reduced to a minimum as the right-wing parties are gaining momentum.

On global affairs, the Quad Summit, originally scheduled to be held in New Delhi this September, was relocated to New York due to a scheduling

conflict among the attending leaders. Now, India will host the Quad summit in 2025, a testament to its growing influence on the global stage. President Trump will likely visit New Delhi for the summit, further solidifying India's position in international affairs.

As a balance, Russian President Putin will also pay a visit, and the Kremlin has set a date early next year. It will be his first visit since the Ukraine conflict began.

In summary, 2025 will be a mixed year for India. The economy is progressing well, and foreign relations are stable, but the political situation remains unclear.

NOW AND AGAIN

CHANGING TIMES

DEVENDRA SAKSENA

Coming back from his hometown, I found my friend Mr. X unduly pensive. There was an emotional overload, no doubt, because Mr. X had visited his alma mater and old friends, after a good twenty-five years. At the time Mr. X joined college in the nearby desert town, the University was hardly five years old — more a collection of scattered buildings with few students and faculty. The university town was a small group of houses, shops and government offices, in the midst of the Thar desert.

Time and the coming of Indira Gandhi Canal had changed everything. The 'town' was now a city — with dust, swank shops, loud music and traffic jams. The university was now a beehive of activity with hundreds of students and teachers buzzing around in a conglomerate of modern buildings. Fellow students were now respected professors in the university. Mr. X was glad to see that most of his friends were doing well — they had prospered with the town.

What had not changed was the university canteen — Ramu, now with salt and pepper hair, was still in-charge. More importantly, Ramu recognised Mr. X and updated him about his friends and goings-on in the university. He also remembered the particular 'adrak chai' which Mr. X was so fond of.

Soon tea was ready and Ramu was adding the mandatory sugar and 'malai'; Mr. X had to tell Ramu to go easy on the 'malai' and sugar, which Ramu was adding in generous measure. As Mr. X rose to leave, he could not resist pointing out: "Ramu when we were students here, we were always after you to add more sugar and 'malai' to our tea, but you never obliged us. Now, when sugar and 'malai,' are anathema for me, even without asking you are adding dollops of sugar and 'malai' to my tea."

Never at a loss for words, Ramu replied: "I give sugar and 'malai' to those who deserve it. At that time, you were a student, coming to the canteen riding an old bicycle. Now, you are here with your beautiful wife, wearing a smart suit and driving the latest model car. Sir, I would fail in my duty, if I do not give you the best I have."

Mr. X was reminded of 'The Gift of the Magi' by O. Henry, which he had read in college. He also wondered about the inequity of life, which neglected the have-nots and gave only to persons who already had everything in plenty.

100 YEARS AGO

SIRDAR MURDER

ARRESTED SUSPECTS NOT IDENTIFIED

IT is stated that, except the deputies, all persons arrested in connexion with the murder of the Sirdar were confronted with eye-witnesses of the crime, who failed to identify anyone. A petition, signed by 113 deputies, was presented today to King Fuad, requesting the immediate convocation of the Chamber, and declaring that the "usurper" was using brutal force and hoping to drag from Egypt its consent to his usurpation; but Egypt would accept nothing but independence. Senators are acting similarly.

SIR GEOFFREY ARCHER

NEW GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE SUDAN

IT is understood that a Royal Decree will be issued to-morrow appointing Sir Geoffrey Archer as Governor-General of the Sudan.

EVACUATION OF EGYPTIAN ARMY

("TIMES" SPECIAL SERVICE.)

THE Khartoum correspondent of The Times states that except for a few odd details the evacuation of the Sudan by the Egyptian army is now complete.

M. HERRIOT'S SECRET

FRENCH GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY

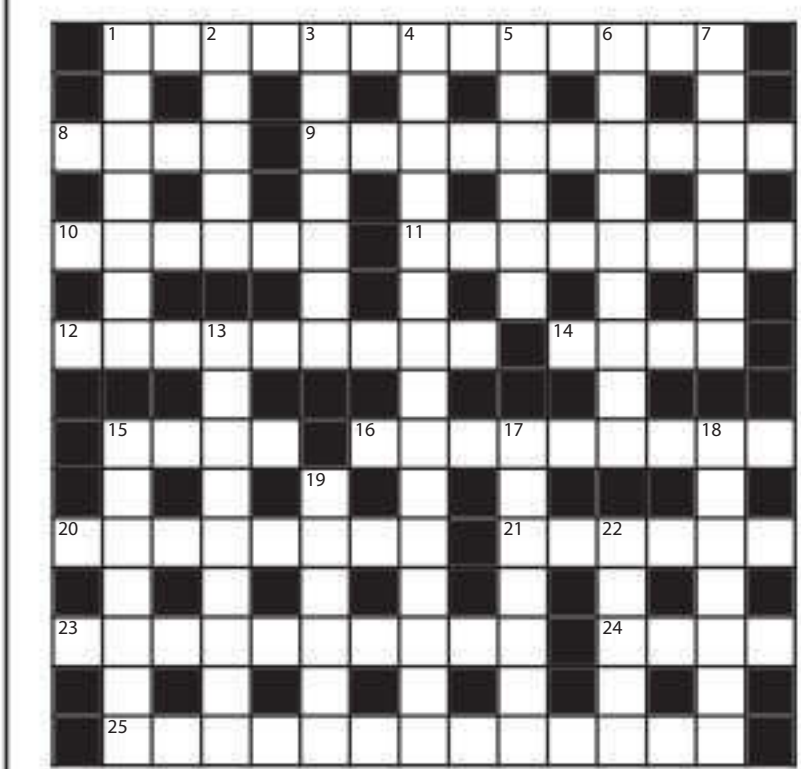
("TIMES" SPECIAL SERVICE.)

A SENSATIONAL incident occurred on Wednesday at a meeting of the French Foreign Affairs Committee. M. Herriot attended with the intention of making a statement in regard to the Government's policy, but before doing so asked that all members should undertake to keep secret anything he might say.

M. Doriot, a Communist Deputy, objected, declaring that he did not consider himself bound to do anything of the kind. M. Herriot thereupon said it would be impossible in the national interests to make any statement, and immediately withdrew from the meeting.

CROSSWORD

NO-292990



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

THE DONG IMPASSE
R V S R P O O S
O V E R T O B S T E T R I C
I N E W O M B H
K I S S O F L I F E N O S E
A O P L A E N W
A L T E T W E D
S O U T H D A K O T A
P A I L Y S R A M
H A I L Y C R O W N D E R B Y
O N D E I T L M F
D E O D O R A N T E R A T O
E U N K H A D O
L E S S E E S A B R E A S T

ACROSS

- Order outline maps in decorative cover (8,5)
- Poetry is modest but not empty when read aloud (4)
- Arranged for Heath to follow strict diet (10)
- Greek islander hiding in secret annexe (6)
- Tidied up after newspaper head has dined with editor (8)

- It's trendy to work around canines? (9)
- Wonderful father returns to Samoan capital (4)
- Revolutionary Irishman's correspondence (4)
- Typically too old to absorb sodium (2,7)
- Makes plain consomme, perhaps, having nothing to lose (6,2)

- Extraordinary feat in outskirts of Surrey gets protection (6)
- Shallow end removed — it had to help? (10)
- Vote against including Victory in the fleet (4)
- Sinner and saint helping at protest (13)

DOWN

- Back final runner at Bow? (7)

- Surprise leading group (5)
- Son runs off — and runs off quickly! (7)
- Groan, perhaps, having a change of heart? (5,10)
- Dad's outside initially mowing the grass (6)
- Guard housed by private landlord (9)
- May repackage heaters (7)

- Island's border crossing showing native loyalty (9)
- Menu's starter — a large fat duck (7)
- Forces' sweetheart is a hundred at heart — that shows guts (7)
- Budget events holding pay back (3,4)
- Transfer Anglo-Saxon notice (6)
- Furning, missing medium shaped moulds? (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

Yoon's impeachment sparks worries over military readiness

As of Thursday, six South Korean generals had been suspended from their duties

AGENCIES
SEOUL, 14 DECEMBER

President Yoon Suk Yeol's Parliamentary impeachment on Saturday sparked concerns over the readiness of the military against North Korean threats as it now faces an unprecedented gap in its top leadership.

Earlier in the day, an impeachment motion against Yoon over his failed December 3 declaration of martial law passed at the National Assembly, suspending his presidential powers, including his control over the military as the commander-in-chief.

Yoon's powers will be handed over to the acting president -- Prime Minister Han Duck-soo -- in a first since 2016 when then President Park Geun-hye was impeached.

As the military will now be led by an acting president and an acting defence minister, concerns have emerged over North Korea possibly perceiving the situation as a vacuum in military leadership and engaging in provocative acts to escalate tensions, Yonhap news agency reported.

Vice Defence Minister Kim Seon-ho currently serves as the acting defence chief after former Defence Minister Kim Yong-hyun resigned from office and was subsequently arrested over his role in the short-lived imposition of martial law.

The situation is further complicated by a transitional period in the US military leadership in South Korea, with Gen. Paul LaCamera, commander of the US Forces Korea, to be replaced by his successor Gen. Xavier Brun-



son next week.

A number of top South Korean commanders have also been suspended from their duties over their alleged role in the martial law imposition, raising further questions over the country's defence readiness.

As of Thursday, six generals had been suspended from their duties, including the head of the Army, the Capital

Defence Command and the Special Warfare Command.

Despite the apparent leadership vacuum of some key units, the military has said there are no issues with its overall readiness posture.

On Friday, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said most of the suspended commanders led units mostly tasked with counterterrorism, and are not related to frontline forces

that would immediately face North Korean troops in a contingency.

As part of efforts to maintain readiness, acting minister Kim held video talks with LaCamera on Thursday in a show of solidarity between the allies.

During the talks, LaCamera told Kim that his troops remain prepared to respond to external threats, vowing to work to 'mitigate any risks' to the two sides' planned combined training activities.

With Yoon's impeachment, Kim is likely to hold talks with LaCamera again to reaffirm the alliance's unity even in the face of domestic political turmoil.

Kim is also expected to convene a meeting of top military commanders to inspect troop readiness against North Korean threats.

South Korea: Chief of Defence Counterintelligence Command arrested in martial law probe

AGENCIES
SEOUL, 14 DECEMBER

Prosecutors arrested Lt. Gen. Yeo In-hyung, South Korea's Chief of the Defence Counterintelligence Command, on charges including insurrection on Saturday as part of an investigation into President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law last week.

A prosecution investigation team handling the case arrested Yeo immediately after a military court issued an arrest warrant for him, making him the second key figure apprehended by the team following former Defence Minister Kim Yong-hyun.

Yeo is also the first sitting military serviceman arrested in the martial law investigation, Yonhap news agency reported.

He is suspected of sending



troops of his unit to the National Assembly and the National Election Commission after martial law was imposed on December 3. The order was lifted hours later after the Assembly voted to reject it.

Charges against him also include ordering the arrest of 14 people, including the leaders of the ruling and main Opposition parties, and the procurement of computer servers at the election commission.

The military court reportedly concluded that the

charges facing Yeo were grave and that he was a flight risk when issuing the warrant.

Yeo's lawyer, Park Yong-seok, told reporters that the commander "plans to explain and refute (the charges) in detail in the future investigation or trial."

Prosecution investigations have found that Yeo had ordered his troops to arrest Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, People Power Party leader Han Dong-hoon, National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik and others without a warrant and detain them inside a military bunker at the Capital Defence Command.

Yeo's arrest is expected to add momentum to the prosecution's investigation into the martial law declaration, of which the team suspects Yoon had been the ringleader.

Macron nominates Francois Bayrou as new French Prime Minister

AGENCIES
PARIS, 14 DECEMBER

French President Emmanuel Macron has nominated Francois Bayrou as the country's new Prime Minister, the Elysee announced.

Bayrou has now been tasked with forming a government, Macron's office said. He will also make a 2025 budget to be adopted by the National Assembly, reports Xinhua news agency.

Bayrou is a centrist ally of Macron and succeeds Michel Barnier, who was ousted in a vote of no confidence on December 4.

Born in 1952, Bayrou found-



ed the centrist party Democratic Movement (MoDem) in 2007. He ran as a presidential candidate three times, in 2002, 2007, and 2012.

Following the Elysee's announcement on Friday, the President of the far-right wing party National Rally (RN), Jordan Bardella, told French news channel BFMTV that his party would not immedi-

ately censor Bayrou but added that Bayrou should "understand that he has no democratic legitimacy nor the majority in the National Assembly, which requires a dialogue with all the forces represented in the parliament."

Meanwhile, the hard-left party La France Insoumise (LFI) has announced it will launch a no-confidence vote to bring down Bayrou.

LFI has repeatedly said that the position of Prime Minister should be given to someone from the alliance of left-wing parties, which won the most seats in the snap legislative elections held this year.

Ex-soccer player Kavelashvili becomes Georgia's president in a blow to its EU aspirations

AGENCIES
TBILISI, 14 DECEMBER

Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili became president of Georgia on Saturday, as the ruling party tightened its grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

Kavelashvili, 53, was the only candidate on the ballot and easily won the vote given the Georgian Dream party's control of a 300-seat electoral college that replaced direct presidential elections in 2017. It is made up of members of

Parliament, municipal councils and regional legislatures.

Georgian Dream retained control of Parliament in the South Caucasus nation in an Oct. 26 election that the opposition alleges was rigged with Moscow's help. Georgia's outgoing president and main pro-Western parties have since boycotted parliamentary sessions and demanded a rerun of the ballot.

Georgian Dream has vowed to continue pushing toward EU accession but also wants to "reset" ties with Russia.

In 2008 Russia fought a brief war with Georgia, which



led to Moscow's recognition of two breakaway regions as independent, and an increase in the Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Critics have accused Geor-

gian Dream — established by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia — of becoming increasingly authoritarian and tilted toward Moscow, accusations

the ruling party has denied. The party recently pushed through laws similar to those used by the Kremlin to crack down on freedom of speech and LGBTQ+ rights.

Pro-Western Salome Zourabichvili has been president since 2018 and has vowed to stay on after her six-year term ends Monday, describing herself as the only legitimate leader until a new election is held.

Georgian Dream's decision last month to suspend talks on their country's bid to join the European Union added to the opposition's outrage and galvanized protests.

A diminished Hezbollah is made even weaker by the toppling of Assad in Syria

AGENCIES
BEIRUT, 14 DECEMBER

A severely hobbled Hezbollah has in no position to help defend former Syrian President Bashar Assad, a longtime ally, from the lightning-fast insurgency that toppled him. With Assad gone, the militant group based in Lebanon is even weaker.

Hezbollah was dealt a major blow during 14 months of war with Israel. The toppling of Assad, who had strong ties to Iran, has now crippled its ability to bounce back by cutting off a vital weapons-smuggling route through Syria.

Hezbollah officials are deeply concerned but defiant.

"What is happening in Syria is a major, dangerous and new change, and to know why this happened needs evaluation," Hassan Fadlallah, a Lebanese lawmaker who represents Hezbollah's political wing, said during a speech at a funeral for militants killed by Israel. "Whatever is happening in Syria, despite its dangers, will not weaken us."

Analysts say the diminishment of Hezbollah will have big consequences for Lebanon, where for decades it has been a major political player — and for Iran, which has relied on the group as one of several proxy forces projecting power across the Middle East. It is also a game-changer for Israel, whose nemesis on its northern



border is now at its most vulnerable point in decades.

The Assad dynasty, which ruled Syria for half a century with an iron fist, played a crucial role in empowering Hezbollah, which was founded in the early 1980s by Iranian advisers who came through Syria. In addition to being a

conduit for Iranian weapons, Syria also was a place where Hezbollah trained fighters and manufactured its own weapons.

As Hezbollah grew more powerful, it became a force Assad could rely on for protection in times of crisis. Hezbollah sent thousands of

fighters to bolster Assad's forces when a civil war broke out in 2011.

As insurgents swept across Syria in early December and took the city of Homs — a stone's throw from a Syrian border town where Hezbollah had a presence — many expected the militants to put up a fierce fight. After all, they did just that in 2013, preventing Assad's opponents from advancing into Damascus.

This time, Hezbollah was in disarray. Many of its top officials, including longtime leader Hassan Nasrallah, were killed in Israeli airstrikes. And months of Israeli bombardment destroyed much of its military infrastructure.

Syrians cheer end of 50 years of Assad rule at first Friday prayers since government fell

AGENCIES
DAMASCUS, 14 DECEMBER

Exuberant Syrians observed the first Friday prayers since the ouster of President Bashar Assad, gathering in the capital's historic main mosque, its largest square and around the country to celebrate the end of half a century of authoritarian rule.

The newly installed interim prime minister delivered the sermon at the Umayyad Mosque, declaring that a new era of "freedom, dignity and justice" was dawning for Syria.

The gatherings illustrated the dramatic changes that have swept over Syria less



than a week after insurgents marched into Damascus and toppled Assad. Amid the jubilation, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with allies around the region and called for an "inclusive and non-sectarian" interim government.

Blinken arrived in Iraq on a previously unannounced stop after talks in Jordan and

Turkey, which backs some of the Syrian insurgent factions. So far, U.S. officials have not talked of direct meetings with Syria's new rulers.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has worked to establish security and start a political transition after seizing Damascus early Sunday. The group has tried to reassure a public both stunned by Assad's fall and concerned about extremist jihadis among the rebels.

Insurgent leaders say the group has broken with its extremist past, though HTS is still labeled a terrorist group by the United States and European countries.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 Frightened (6)

2 Stitch (3)

3 Kneecap (7)

4 Syringa (5)

5 Mound of sand (4)

6 Wine and soda drink (8)

7 Uncompromising (4-7)

8 Mexican group (8)

9 Melody (4)

10 Musical speed (5)

11 Depending (7)

12 Unusual (3)

13 Trouble (6)

DOWN

1 Tasty (5)

2 Feeler (7)

3 Snake-like fish (3)

4 Type of musician (7)

5 Ballroom dance (5)

6 Keyboard instrument (11)

7 Blemish (4)

8 Precious stone (7)

9 Foster (7)

10 Silent (4)

11 Ardent lover (5)

12 Very keen (5)

13 Zodiac sign (3)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Honour

4 Count (On account)

8 Replace

9 Niche

10 Laud

11 Coherent

DOWN

13 Aeronautics

17 Assassin

19 Only

21 Teepee

22 Episode

23 Staid

24 Sexton

7 Demoralised

12 Hoghead

14 Concoct

15 Cactus

16 Wyvern

18 Sepia

20 Like

26 Treaty

By arrangement with The Independent

Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker

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I THINK I'M SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME HERE AT THE BAR

MAYBE YOU SHOULD SPEND MORE TIME AT HOME

I THINK THAT'S WHY I SPEND SO MUCH TIME AT THE BAR

GREG+MORT WALKER

RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson

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YOU SIT STILL, MAWSEGLAW... I'LL GATHER THE WOOD AND GET THE WATER

I WONDER WHAT GOT BROKEN?

DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski

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I DON'T KNOW... MAYBE THEY'D PAY US TO TAKE IT AWAY

NEED TO KNOW

Ambulance

FD Block Association (Amb)

9830452536, 9830181286

Happy Calculators 24400160

City Point Nurses Centre

2567-4113, 9831142623

People's Relief Committee

2380-6943/9444

24 hrs Medical Oxygen Delivery

BOC India Ltd. 9831277777

Blood Banks

Ashek Laboratory 24720333

Central Blood Bank 23510619

Life Care 2284-6940

Peoples Blood Bank

2455-5164/5557

RK Mission Seva Pratishthan

2475-3636/39

Police/Fire

Lalibazar (Police Control Room) 22143230

S. P. (North 24-Pgns)

25423005

S.P. (South 24-Pgns) 2479-3333/1311

Bhawani Bhawan

24791761/9, 247951933

Fire Service Station Salt Lake: 2357-5293;

Howrah 2666-8111; Behala 2497-6285

Civic Services

Kolkata Municipal Corporation: 2286-1000

Water: 2543-1602

Calcutta Telephones

Changed Number Announcement

1951,1952,1953

Taxi Refusal

SMS 575756: Complaint and registration

Police Toll Free No. 1073

Transport Deptt. No. 6451-6718

CESC Fault Reporting

1912 and 4403-1912

Trains

Howrah Station Old Complex 1331/1332 (Auto Telephone Numbers), 1310, 2638-7412/3542/2581 (manual), Sealdah: 2350-3535/3537

Shalimar Station: 2668-1121, Eastern Railway and South-Eastern Railway: 139.

SCRABBLE® GAMES

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T.N.S.F.A.E.A.

U.T.E.N.S.N.D.

T.A.F.N.Y.R.I.

E.L.L.V.Y.U.I.

PAR SCORE 80-90

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL

TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

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ENLARGE

INITIAL

DICTATE

PEACOCK

PAR SCORE 170-180

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL

TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

SCRABBLE® GAMES

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ENLARGE

INITIAL

DICTATE

PEACOCK

PAR SCORE 170-180

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL

TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

SUDOKU

Concepts Sudoku

By Dave Green

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Difficulty Level ★

answer to previous puzzle

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that no row, no column and no 3x3 box contains the same number. The difficulty level increases through the week.

epaper.thestatesman.com

Russia extends countermeasures against Western oil price cap

In December 2022, the European Union placed a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian seaborne crude oil, a move later adopted by the Group of Seven (G7) nations

AGENCIES
MOSCOW, 14 DECEMBER

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree extending Moscow's retaliatory measures in response to a Western price cap on Russia's oil until June 30, 2025, according to a document published.

The original decree, issued on December 27, 2022, banned the export of Russian oil and petroleum products under contracts that included the price ceiling set by the Group of Seven (G7) countries, the EU, and Australia, reports Xinhua news agency.

It has been extended multiple times, and the latest extension was to remain in force until December 31, 2024.

In December 2022, the EU placed a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian seaborne



crude oil, a move adopted by the G7. From February 5, 2023, similar price restrictions were applied to petroleum products from Russia.

Meanwhile, despite the sanctions, the revenue of Rus-

sia's large and medium-sized oil and gas enterprises increased by 34.2 per cent year-on-year in the first half of 2024, reaching 38.3 trillion rubles (about \$413 billion), local media reported on

Wednesday.

According to a study conducted by the auditing and consulting network FinExpertiza, non-resource companies also saw growth, with revenues rising by 19.5 per

cent to 98.7 trillion rubles (about 1 trillion U.S. dollars). The oil and gas sector's share of total corporate revenue in Russia increased to 28 per cent, up from 26 per cent a year earlier. Overall, corporate turnover grew by 23.3 per cent.

FinExpertiza experts attribute the significant growth in oil and gas revenue to a weak ruble and rising global oil prices.

The non-oil and gas sector, which accounted for 72 per cent of total revenue, also grew more modestly at 19.5 per cent in the first half.

Although slower than oil and gas, the non-resource segments showed strong recovery after sanctions, particularly in the manufacturing sector, with industries such as metal products, electronics, and automotive manufacturing driving growth.

Hearings are done; now the wait begins for verdict on closely-watched climate case at UN's top court

AGENCIES
THE HAGUE, 14 DECEMBER

A lawyer for a small South Pacific island nation told the world's highest court to heed her warning.

"Tuvalu will not go quietly into the rising sea," Philippa Webb said, hoping her ominous words this week would make a mark as two weeks of historic and closely-watched hearings on the threat of climate change wrapped up Friday.

The International Court of Justice took up the largest case in its history after the United Nations General Assembly asked the institution to clarify what countries worldwide are legally required to do to combat climate change and help vulnerable nations fight its devastating impact.

Tuvalu was one of several small island nations which, fearing they could simply disappear under rising sea waters, lobbied the U.N. to ask the court for an advisory opinion.



In all 96 countries and 11 international organizations spoke in the Peace Palace, including many who had never before participated in proceedings before The Hague-based court.

Even if the proceedings don't lead to a defining opinion, Nikki Reisch, the director of climate policy at the Center for International Environmental Law, says they were a giant step forward. "The hearings have really been a watershed moment for human rights, climate justice and accountability, even before a decision is out," she said.

The court has been asked to answer two questions:

What are countries obliged to do under international law to protect the climate and environment from human-caused greenhouse gas emissions? And what are the legal consequences for governments where their acts, or lack of action, have significantly harmed the climate and environment?

Countries including Tuvalu, Chile and the Philippines want countries such as the United States, China and Russia to reduce their emissions and provide financial help to alleviate the devastating impact of climate change that they feel endangers their very existence.

UK housing policy sparks debate over development, conservation

AGENCIES
LONDON, 14 DECEMBER

The Labour government's new planning policy has mandated local councils to meet the target of building 370,000 homes a year to fulfill a government promise for 1.5 million new homes in Britain over five years.

The updated National Planning Policy Framework includes guidelines for releasing land from the Green Belt - protected areas surrounding urban regions designed to prevent urban sprawl - under strict criteria, prioritizing brownfield and "grey belt" sites first.

The target of 1.5 million homes includes a focus on affordable housing, but experts like Professor Ben Clifford from University College London's Bartlett School of Planning question whether the policy effectively addresses the actual demand for affordable homes.

"There are places where some demand probably does need to be met through Green Belt review," Clifford told Xinhua news agency, emphasising the challenges of den-



sifying urban areas and regional inequalities in housing demand. However, he warned that the policy could face significant public opposition, as seen in past planning reforms.

Rosie Pearson, co-founder of the Community Planning Alliance, described the plan as a "litmus test" for the Labour government, urging it to prioritize environmental protection.

"The vast majority of UK voters believe it's important to protect nature and green spaces, which should be a last resort only for housebuilding," she said.

Recent polling by the charity revealed 78 per cent of respondents value green space preservation with strong bipartisan support for a "brownfield-first" policy. Concerns from residents mirror these sentiments.

Sid O'Neill from Cheshire lamented the ongoing loss of rural land, saying, "It's not a case of people being NIMBYs (Not In My Backyards); we all need the breathing space of open land."

Meanwhile, Beryl Dennett from Liverpool told Xinhua the so-called affordable homes still remain out of reach for many young buyers.

The Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) expressed apprehension about the policy's potential consequences.

"The broken housebuilding market is to blame for the painfully slow delivery of much-needed new homes," said CPRE CEO Roger Mortlock. He argued that focusing on brownfield sites would better address housing shortages while protecting farmland and the environment.

The CPRE welcomed the policy's commitment to affordable housing and local plans but warned that speculative applications on high-quality Green Belt land could overwhelm local authorities.

Mortlock also criticised the undefined "grey belt" policy, cautioning that it might undermine long-standing spatial protections.

Experts, for their part, highlighted historical issues. Clifford mentioned the insufficient affordable housing delivery since local authorities ceased large-scale housebuilding in the 1980s.

"Reforming the planning system alone will not resolve England's housing crisis," he added, noting the need for a comprehensive approach that tackles systemic issues in the housing market and promotes equitable growth. The debate over Britain's housing policy reflects broader tensions between development and conservation. Whether the Labour government can navigate these challenges while meeting its ambitious targets remains to be seen.

UN Security Council criticizes Taliban ban on Afghan women's medical education

AGENCIES
NEW YORK, 14 DECEMBER

The U.N. Security Council said Friday it was deeply concerned about the recent decision by Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to ban women from medical education, which could leave millions of women and girls without health care in the future.

The council criticized "the increasing erosion" of human rights under the Taliban, especially for women and girls who have been denied access to education beyond the sixth grade, economic opportunities, participation in public life, freedom of movement and other basics.

Authorities previously had not confirmed reports that Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada ordered educational institutions to stop providing medical courses for women. In Afghanistan, women and girls can only be treated by female doctors and health professionals.

In a resolution adopted unanimously Friday, the



Security Council criticized not only the medical education ban but the Taliban's "vice and virtue" directive issued in August that further restricts women's rights, including prohibiting their voices from being heard in public.

The resolution also extends the mandate of the U.N. expert team monitoring sanctions against the Taliban for 14 months.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021 as U.S. and NATO forces withdrew following two decades

of war. No country officially recognizes them as Afghanistan's government.

The U.N. has said that recognition is almost impossible while bans on female education and employment remain in place and women can't go out in public without a male guardian.

U.N. special envoy for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, told the council this week that women and girls are "facing progressive erasure from almost all walks of life."

She said the Taliban announcement in early Sep-

tember that female students would be barred from attending medical institutes and classes of higher education will have serious consequences.

"If fully implemented, this would have deadly implications for women and girls in particular, but also for men and boys, entire communities and the country as a whole — by denying Afghans a functioning health care system that is open to all."

"I have strongly urged the de facto authorities to reconsider," Otunbayeva said.

Thai police detain two suspects after a bomb in a border province killed three and injured scores

AGENCIES
BANGKOK, 14 DECEMBER

Thai police on Saturday said two suspects were in custody as authorities investigated a bombing in the north that killed at least three people and injured dozens of others.

An explosive device was thrown into a crowd during an outdoor performance at an annual festival in Umphang town in Tak province, which borders Myanmar, on Friday just before midnight, according to the Association of the Umphang Rescue Groups.

Local police said at least 48 people were injured and that police have not yet pressed charges against the suspects as the investigation



is ongoing.

Thanathip Sawangsang, a spokesperson for the Defense Ministry, told The Associated Press that local police said there was a fight between rival groups of men before the explosion and that there was no wider security threat. He said the forensic evidence showed that the explosive device was a home-made bomb.

Tak province has a heavy military presence in its border areas, including in Umphang.

Prime Minister Paetong-tarn Shinawatra expressed her condolences to the victims and their families, and ordered security personnel and relevant agencies in the area to investigate and help those who have been affected, said government spokesperson Jirayu Houngsap.

Indonesian President to grant amnesty to select prisoners

AGENCIES
JAKARTA, 14 DECEMBER

Indonesian Minister of Law Supratman Andi Agtas has said that President Prabowo Subianto would grant amnesty to several categories of prisoners, including drug users and prisoners with long-term illnesses.

According to Supratman, the move aims to reduce overcapacity in correctional facilities while addressing humanitarian concerns, Xinhua news agency reported. Prisoners suffering from chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS and individuals with mental disorders are among those eligible.

Additionally, prisoners convicted under the Electronic Information and Transactions Law for insulting the head of state will also be considered for amnesty. Supratman noted that the proposed amnesty has received Prabowo's initial

approval and will be submitted to the House of Representatives for further consideration. "We will wait for parliament's official response after submission," he added.

Indonesia's former army general, Prabowo Subianto, was sworn in as the country's eighth President in October, succeeding Joko Widodo. Prabowo has previously served as defence minister. In his inauguration speech, Prabowo pledged to serve all Indonesians. "We will prioritise the interests of the nation and state above all else," he stated in his address to the nation.

However, Indonesia is likely to consider accelerating the execution of the death

penalty for prisoners convicted of drug offences to create a stronger deterrent effect, as it came to light earlier in December. A majority of drug abuse victims are young people aged 15 to 24.

Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Budi Gunawan noted that Indonesia is facing a drug emergency, with people consuming narcotics reaching 3.3 million this year.

"We are considering expediting the execution of the death penalty for drug convicts whose sentences are final and binding," he told reporters at the national police headquarters, a news agency reported.



Benin grants citizenship to slave descendants as it faces its own role in the trade

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DAKAR, 14 DECEMBER

When Nadege Anelka first came to the West African country of Benin from her home island of Martinique, a French overseas territory in the Caribbean, the 57-year-old travel agent said she had a feeling of déjà vu.

"A lot of the people reminded me of my grandparents, the way they wore their headscarves, their mannerisms, their mentality," she said.

Feeling at home in Benin, Anelka decided to settle there last July and open a travel agency. She hopes to become a citizen by taking advantage

of a law passed in September that grants citizenship to those who can trace their lineage to the slave trade.

The new law, which was initiated by President Patrice Talon, who has been in office since 2016, is part of a broader effort by Benin to reckon with its own historical role in the slave trade.

The law is open to all over 18 who do not already hold other African citizenship and can provide proof that an ancestor was deported via the slave trade from anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Beninese authorities accept DNA tests, authenticated testimonies and family records.



Anelka used "Anchoukaj" ("Affiliation" in Antillean Creole), a website recognized by Benin to trace her heritage, proving that her ancestors

were slaves in Martinique. If her application is successful, she will receive a provisional certificate of nationality valid for three years. To get citi-

zenship, she'll be required to stay at least once in Benin during that period.

Benin is not the first country to grant citizenship to descen-

dants of slaves. Earlier this month, Ghana naturalized 524 African Americans after the West African country's president, Nana Akufo-Addo, invited them to "come home" in 2019, as part of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in North America in 1619.

But Benin's citizenship law carries added significance, in part because of the role it played in the slave trade as one of the main points of departure.

European merchants deported an estimated 1.5 million slaves from the Bight of Benin, a territory that includes modern-day Benin

and Togo and part of modern-day Nigeria, said Ana Lucia Araujo, a professor of history at Howard University who has spent years researching Benin's role.

The coastal town of Ouidah was one of Africa's most active slave-trading ports in the 18th and 19th centuries. Close to a million men, women and children were captured, chained and forced onto ships there, mainly destined for what would become the United States and Brazil and the Caribbean.

Benin has struggled to resolve its legacy of complicity. For over 200 years, powerful kings captured and sold slaves

to Portuguese, French and British merchants.

The kingdoms still exist today as tribal networks, and so do the groups that were raided. Rumors that President Patrice Talon is a descendant of slave merchants sparked much debate while he was running for office in 2016. Talon has never publicly addressed the rumors.

Benin has openly acknowledged its role in the slave trade, a stance not shared by many other African nations that participated. In the 1990s, Benin hosted an international conference, sponsored by UNESCO, to examine how and where slaves were sold.

THUMBNAILS

CMA Achievers' Meet: The Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICMAI), a statutory professional body established by an Act of Parliament for the regulation and development of the profession of Cost and Management Accountancy, has organised a professional forum in the form of CMA Achievers' Meet: Vision 2030 in Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on 12 th December 2024 on the theme "Repositioning the ICMAI towards 'India Vision@2047'". Shripad Yesso Naik, Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy graced the event as the Chief Guest of the Meet while Dr Jayanta Kumar Roy, Hon'ble Member of Parliament and Member, Standing Committee and Ms. Deepti Gaur Mukerjee, IAS, Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Corporate Affairs were the Guests of Honour of the event. Inderdeep Singh Dhariwal, Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Corporate Affairs and CMA Pradeep Kumar Das, CMD, IREDA were the Special Guests of the event. CMA Manoj Kumar Anand, Council Member, ICMAI and Chairman of the Meet welcomed the guests, invitees and participants while CMA Rajendra Singh Bhati, Council Member, ICMAI and Convenor of the Meet shared a brief introduction of the meet.

RBI raises collateral-free agricultural loan limit

The existing loan limit of Rs 1.6 lakh per borrower has been raised to Rs 2 lakh



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

In a significant move to support the agricultural sector and address rising input costs, the Reserve Bank of India has announced an increase in the limit for collateral-free agricultural loans, including loans for

allied activities.

The existing loan limit of Rs 1.6 lakh per borrower has been raised to Rs 2 lakh.

This decision acknowledges the impact of inflation and the increasing cost of agricultural inputs on farmers. It aims to provide enhanced financial access to farmers, ensuring they have sufficient

resources to meet their operational and developmental needs without the burden of providing collateral.

An official release said that with effect from January 1, 2025, banks across the country have been instructed to:--waive collateral security and margin requirements for agricultural loans, includ-

ing loans for allied activities, up to Rs 2 lakh per borrower;--expeditiously implement the revised guidelines to ensure timely financial assistance to the farming community; and

--provide widespread publicity to these changes to ensure maximum outreach and awareness among farmers and stakeholders of their operational area.

This move enhances credit accessibility, particularly for small and marginal farmers (over 86% of the sector), who benefit from reduced borrowing costs and the removal of collateral requirements.

By streamlining loan disbursement, the initiative is expected to increase the uptake of Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loans, allowing farmers to invest in agricultural operations and improve their livelihoods.

Combined with the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme, offering loans up to Rs 3 lakh at a 4% effective interest rate, this policy strengthens financial inclusion, supports the agricultural sector, and fosters credit-driven economic growth, aligning with the government's long-term vision for sustainable agriculture.

Major e-commerce platforms to adopt 'Safety Pledge' on National Consumer Day



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

Major e-commerce platforms like Ajo, JioMart, Netmed, BigBasket, Tata Cliq, Tata 1mg, Zomato and Ola will be adopting "Safety Pledge" on the occasion of the National Consumer Day, 2024 to be celebrated on 24 December.

The "Safety Pledge" is a voluntary commitment by e-commerce platforms for detecting and preventing the sale of unsafe, spurious and non-conforming products, cooperating with statutory authorities responsible for product safety, raising consumer product safety awareness among sellers and empowering consumers on product safety.

In a landmark step towards securing consumers' interests, the Department of Consumer Affairs announced "Safety

Pledge" for e-commerce platforms.

To discuss the development of the "Safety Pledge", the department held a stakeholder consultation on 16 November, 2023. Subsequently, a committee was constituted under the chairmanship of noted consumer activist and journalist Pushpa Girmaji for drafting of the pledge with major e-commerce entities, industry bodies and law chairs as its members. The committee was tasked to prepare and submit the "Safety Pledge" to the department. The final draft of the pledge has been prepared after extensive consultative process by the Committee and scrutinisation by the department.

Many jurisdictions across the globe have nudged e-commerce platforms to take a voluntary safety pledge, as an informal commitment to

proactively address the Issue of determining liability on e-commerce platforms, especially when the actual seller is untraceable or unwilling to accept responsibility.

The unique nature of e-commerce, where physical examination of products before purchase is not possible, underscores the crucial role of product safety, which is established on the expectation that products adhere to safety standards and specified regulations. Consequently, product safety holds paramount importance for online shoppers.

The sale of products that are unsafe or fail to meet the relevant standards on e-commerce platforms poses a significant risk to the safety and well-being of consumers and the public. This becomes particularly crucial in case of products which are mandated to conform to standards under Quality Control Orders (QCOs).

With over 880 million users, India is the world's second-largest internet market. By 2030, India is projected to host the second-largest online shopper base globally, with an estimated 500 million shoppers [Source: Invest India Ecommerce Brochure.pdf]. In light of the consistent expansion of e-commerce in India, ensuring the safety of products sold online is imperative for consumer well-being.

CPI inflation to average 4.8 per cent in 2024-25: SBI report

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

CPI inflation is likely to average 4.8 per cent with an upward bias for the full financial year 2024-25 as evolving food prices play a key role, according to an SBI report.

"With continuous moderation in fuel prices (fuel and light inflation is in negative territory for the last 15 consecutive months), inflation is currently being driven by food price only," the report states.

"We expect RBI to cut rates in February 2025 by a cumulative 75 bps over the rate cut cycles and such a decision is unlikely to be impacted by what could happen to US dollar, as was the case in 2018 when the RBI did not hike rates even as the rupee was under enormous pressure," the report further states.

According to the SBI report, retail inflation rates among Indian states are converging toward a 4 per cent target level (basis Sigma-Type methodology in the last decade) underscoring that inflation targeting in a broader sense is working.

In principle, Sigma convergence occurs when the dispersion (from 4 per cent) across states falls over time. Further, both CPI General and CPI Food are converging, however, the rate of convergence is steeper in headline CPI while volatility in food inflation is checkmating faster convergence, the report explains.

The report also states that middle-income and high-income states have shown a higher decline in food inflation in the last decade as compared to low-income states as reflected in a downward shift of distribution.

"We believe that migration of labour from low-income states to high-income states in search of employment opportunities is resulting in faster disinflation in high-income states--and is driving a relatively gradual decline in food inflation," the report states. The average daily wage rate of non-agriculture labourers and rural inflation exhibits a low correlation of 0.11 across states--indicating that a rise in wages has not had a significant impact on food inflation, implying that a wage-price spiral wherein a rise in wage results in a rise in price levels, is nearly absent in case of India.

According to a senior official, this is happening because various welfare schemes of the government that provide free and subsidised food grains to the poor are helping to keep inflation in check.

UPI transactions surge to ₹223 lakh crore in Jan-Nov



AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has achieved 15,547 crore transactions worth Rs 223 lakh crore from January to November this year, 'showcasing its transformative impact on financial transactions' in India, the Finance Ministry said on Saturday.

The Finance Ministry also said that UPI is now accepted in seven countries including France, UAE, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Bhutan and Nepal. The UPI system provides a cheaper and quicker alternative to the available channels of cross-border remittances.

UPI has succeeded in increasing financial inclusion and promoting equitable economic growth by enabling underserved groups, including subprime and new-to-credit borrowers to access formal credit for the first time, according to a new study by IIM and ISB professors.

The authors said the success of UPI can be replicated in other countries as well

and India can play a leading role in helping them adopt the fintech system.

"Within a short span, UPI led to exponential penetration of digital payments across India and is used at all levels from street vendors to large shopping malls

Since its launch in 2016, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has transformed financial access in India, enabling 300 million individuals and 50 million merchants to perform seamless digital transactions, according to a study by IIM and ISB professors.

By October 2023, 75 per cent of all retail digital payments in India were through UPI. The rapid adoption of UPI was possible due to affordable internet across the country. A 10 per cent increase in UPI transactions led to a 7 per cent rise in credit availability, reflecting how digital financial histories enabled lenders to assess borrowers better., the study states.

The authors said fintech lenders scaled rapidly, increas-

ing their loan volumes 77 times, far outpacing traditional banks in catering to smaller, underserved borrowers.

The study also highlights that despite the credit surge, default rates did not rise, showing that UPI-enabled digital transaction data helped lenders expand responsibly.

In order to ensure greater financial inclusion, the RBI last week decided to permit small financial banks (SFBs) to also extend pre-sanctioned credit lines through the UPI.

In September 2023, the scope of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) was expanded by enabling pre-sanctioned credit lines to be linked through UPI and used as a funding account by Scheduled Commercial Banks but Payments Banks (SFBs) and Regional Rural Banks were excluded from this ambit.

"Credit line on UPI has the potential to make available low-ticket, low-tenor products to 'new-to-credit' customers. SFBs leverage a high-tech, low-cost model to reach the last mile customer and can play an enabling role in expanding the reach of credit on UPI," the RBI said.

"It is, therefore, proposed to permit SFBs to extend pre-sanctioned credit lines through the UPI. Necessary guidelines will be issued shortly," the RBI statement added.

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GULBADIN FINED FOR BREACHING CODE OF CONDUCT

Afghanistan star Gulbadin Naib has been fined 15 per cent of his match fee for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct during the second T20I against Zimbabwe in Harare. The incident occurred during the 11th over of Zimbabwe's innings when an LBW appeal against Tashinga Musekiwa was turned down off captain Rashid Khan's bowling. Naib displayed dissent by bowing in a mock prayer and requesting a review, despite DRS not being available in the match.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Indian men end fifth for best-ever finish at World Squash Team C'ship: With top singles player Velavan Senthilkumar scoring a come-from-behind win against Henry Leung, the Indian men's team defeated hosts Hong Kong China 2-0 in the playoffs on Saturday to finish fifth in the World Squash Team Championships 2024. This is a historic high for the Indian team and their best-ever finish in the event. The women's team finished seventh after securing a narrow 2-1 victory over France in their final match of the competition. All eyes were on the Indian men's team as it battled with the hosts in the play-offs. Velavan Senthilkumar, came from behind to upset Henry Leung 3-2.

Openers take Australia to 28/0 before heavy rain ruins Day 1 of Gabba Test

With the series locked at 1-1, the opening day of the third match in Brisbane turned out to be a damp squib

TRIDIB BAPARNASH
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

Incessant rains played spoilsport on Day 1 of the third round of the tussle for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as only 13.2 overs could be bowled with Australia reaching 28/0 after being sent in on a Gabba wicket, still sporting a tinge of green and under overcast conditions.

Queensland captain Usman Khawaja claimed the majority of the runs on return to familiar territory but his efforts were cut short by the



torrential rains that showed no signs of relenting after the first session, keeping the players confined indoors for

the rest of the day.

The veteran southpaw set about giving the Australian innings its early impetus,

pulling strongly at every opportunity and even flicking Jasprit Bumrah off his stumps and to the fine leg boundary. His opening partner Nathan McSweeney played the perfect second fiddle as both openers cautiously navigated the probing spells from Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj and first-change Akash Deep, ensuring a steady start for the hosts.

Bumrah and his new-ball partner Siraj initially erred on the shorter side with their length through the opening 25 minutes, with just one of 33 deliveries would have hit

the stumps. At that point, the players left the field for 30 minutes due to a passing shower. Only 7.5 overs were bowled thereafter, though that was enough for paceman Akash to make his first appearance in the series.

McSweeney kept his partner on his toes with a couple of quick singles but once the Indian new ball bowlers got used to the pace of the Gabba, the rookie opener found runs hard to come by; outside of those drop-and-runs, his only other scoring shots came via a couple of tucks off the hip to fine leg.



Basit Ali slams ICC, warns PCB against CT 2025 deal

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

Former Pakistan cricketer Basit Ali felt the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) would end up losers if they accepted to a reported compromise deal with the International Cricket Council (ICC), terming that the offer to host the women's World Cup in 2027 was nothing but a 'lollipop' from the global body.

Basit's remarks came in the wake of ongoing discussions between the PCB and the ICC to end the impasse over the conduct of the upcoming Champions Trophy in 2025, following BCCI's refusal to send the Indian team to play in Pakistan, citing security concerns.

The ICC and PCB have reportedly agreed on a hybrid model for the 2025 Champions Trophy, allowing India to play its matches in Dubai instead of Pakistan. This decision, driven by political tensions, has sparked debates over revenue loss for the PCB, as the marquee India-Pakistan clash, a major revenue generator, will not take place on Pakistani soil. As part of the compromise, Pakistan will also not travel to India for their league-stage match in the 2026 T20 World Cup. Instead, the game will be played in Colombo. It is to be noted that India and Sri Lanka are the joint hosts for the 2026 T20 World Cup. In exchange, the ICC has promised

Pakistan hosting rights for the Women's World Cup after 2027.

In a video shared on his YouTube channel, Ali criticised the PCB for accepting the reported deal, stating it offered no substantial benefit to Pakistan cricket. He urged the board to push for hosting the men's Asia Cup instead, emphasising the economic and cricketing significance of hosting high-profile men's tournaments.

"Now it is being said that in 2027 or 2028, a women's World Cup will be given to Pakistan. Everybody will say, 'waah ji waah! This is great, not one but two ICC events (in Pakistan)!'. But what's the point of events like these? It's being done so that in 2026, the Pakistan team will travel to India and the Indian women's team will then come to Pakistan. The broadcasters won't suffer any losses," Basit said.

"Do you know what a lollipop is? This is a lollipop the ICC is giving to the PCB... that if you agree to this, don't ask for anything in writing and we will give you another ICC event. This won't be of any benefit (to Pakistan). They should rather bid for the Asia Cup, which is next year. The PCB should ask for this. The PCB won't benefit by hosting the Women's World Cup or U-19 World Cup. If the PCB accepts this lollipop, they'll be the losers."

WPL auction: Nandini, Kamalini among most fancied players

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 14 DECEMBER

On Sunday, the third Women's Premier League (WPL) player auction will see five teams vying to fill 19 slots overall from the pool of 120 players and complete their squads for the 2025 season at the premises of ITC Gardenia in Bengaluru.

While 29 overseas players have signed up for the auction and are in fray to fill just five slots, the attention in the upcoming mini auction will be more on 91 Indian players – nine capped and rest of them uncapped.

Nisarg Naik, a Mumbai-based cricket talent scout, has travelled around the country since late 2021 for scouting women cricketers and began recommending players to WPL franchises before the inaugural season began in 2023. Naik believes wicketkeeper-batters Nandini Kashyap and G Kamalini can become the most sought-after names in the 2025 WPL auction due to their recent good performances.

"I will keep names of Nandini and Kamalini as they are being sought after by every WPL franchise in the auction. Speaking with the teams' scouts in the U19 tri-series in Pune, many have spotted Kamalini, who's not a new face to all the people who are

following women's cricket."

"I saw her play live in the matches (during the tri-series in Pune), and I was left totally impressed by the talent she possesses. There won't be any surprise in seeing that teams will be definitely going behind her. It's because there's no impactful left-handed batter in Indian cricket after Smriti (Mandhana). If any team does a long-term investment in her and develops her skills, then she can be the next big thing in future."

"For Nandini, I want to mention that she was someone who didn't have a great last two years in the domestic circuit. But she did good in Uttarakhand Premier League this year, and has been putting in consistent performances in the domestic circuit. Though she needs to put in work on her running between wickets, she is a very good player, and her strike-rate is also above 100, so teams will be looking at that as well," Naik said.

Nandini was the leading run scorer in the Senior Women's T20 Challenger Trophy and the third-highest run-getter in the Senior Women's T20 Trophy while playing for Uttarakhand. On Friday, she earned a maiden call-up to the Indian team for the T20I series against the West Indies starting in Navi Mumbai on Sunday.



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Capt. B. K. Tyagi
Chairman and Managing Director, Shipping Corporation of India

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The other day

2024: A year marked by escalating climate change impacts in India

KARTIKI NEGI

India concludes another year dominated by extreme weather, with climate change fuelling an alarming rise in disasters across the nation. India experiences the full spectrum of climate impacts, including heatwaves, floods, droughts, cyclones, wildfires and erratic rainfall patterns.

A report from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) revealed that India recorded extreme weather events on 255 of the first 274 days of 2024, underscoring the profound influence of global warming on the country.

WARM WINTERS FOLLOWED BY UNPRECEDENTED HEATWAVES

The year began with warm winters under the influence of El Niño, marking the fourth consecutive year without a spring season. January 2024 witnessed its lowest rainfall since 1901 and the fourth-highest minimum temperature on record. February followed suit, with its second-highest minimum temperature in 123 years, exceeding the normal by 1.63 degrees Celsius.

Heatwaves arrived earlier and with strong intensity, wherein India experienced 536 heatwave days during the summer 2024, the highest since 2010 (578 days) as per the data by IMD. Several government data and media houses reported over 200 fatalities and 25,000 cases of heatstroke due to intense heatwaves. The impact was also seen on the Lok Sabha elections which were underway during the summer season. Official data by Election Commission of India recorded deaths of 33 polling officers due to inadequate cooling facilities.

Experts have claimed this to be conservative number as this did not include the extended health impact of prolonged heatwave condition.

Nighttime temperatures also soared to record levels, with July, August and September registering the highest minimum temperatures since 1901. Research study by Climate Trends and Climate Central indicates that between 2018 and 2023, many Indian cities across Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and Andhra Pradesh experienced an additional 50-80 nights annually where temperatures exceeded 25 degrees Celsius due to climate change. Lack of proper sleep can adversely affect physical and mental health, cognitive functioning and even life expectancy. The World Health Organization recommends the room temperature should be kept at 24 degrees Celsius during the night.



FOREST FIRES AND ERRATIC MONSOON RAINFALL

Rising temperatures and erratic winter precipitation have fuelled unprecedented forest fires. Uttarakhand alone reported 5,710 fires in April 2024, compared to just 1,046 in April 2023. According to the Uttarakhand Forest Department, the state recorded 11,256 incidents between November 2023 and June 2024, driven by prolonged dry conditions and rise in ambient air temperature.

The 2024 monsoon recorded the highest number of heavy rainfall events in the last five years. June recorded the second-highest very heavy rainfall events in the last five years, while July also reported the second-highest number of extremely heavy rainfall events. As per the IMD data, 753 stations recorded very heavy rainfall in August, the highest since 2020, while September marked a new record, with 525 stations recording very heavy rainfall.

The summer monsoon, once predictable, is now becoming more erratic and unreliable due to climate change. Extended summer-like conditions during the season have altered the performance of weather systems, leading to aggravated, erratic, and incessant monsoons, making dry years drier and wet years wetter. Around 70 per cent districts now experience persistent and erratic rainfall more frequently.

Kerala bore the brunt of these changes, with Wayanad experiencing devastating floods and landslides triggered by intense downpours on dry soils. The region, once known for its year-round drizzles, is now grappling with hotter

summers and erratic monsoon patterns. Due to change in the Monsoon weather patterns, rains are usually in the form of intense downpours during the monsoons, increasing the risk of landslides like the one we saw this year. Dry soils absorb less water and heavy rainfalls cause run-offs that can lead to landslides, which was witnessed in Wayanad this year.

CYCLONE SURGE AND OCEAN WARMING

Increased cyclogenesis has been quite evident in the North Indian Ocean, which is also the hotspot for climate change. 2024 saw four cyclones so far (Dana, Asna, Remal and Fengal), out of which two (Dana and Remal) went on to become severe cyclones. The north Indian Ocean has seen the highest rise in temperatures across the world due to global warming, resulting in a steep rise in both the intensity and frequency of cyclones. The latest storm Fengal, struggled to intensify into a cyclonic storm but rise in the sea surface temperatures due to ocean warming pushed it to that limit. According to a study 'Changing status of tropical cyclones in the north Indian Ocean', very severe cyclones have increased by 150 per cent in the Indian Ocean.

AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution remains a chronic challenge, with Delhi and neighbouring areas experiencing a week of "severe" air quality in November. The absolute absence of rainfall throughout October and most of November worsened the situation. While multiple factors are responsible for

degrading air quality, the role of climate change has been growing constantly in further aggravating the challenge. Warming-induced changes in temperature, precipitation days (more dry days) and surface wind speed (more weak dispersion days) are evident in the Indo-Gangetic plains, leading to rise in the winter stagnation days over the region.

NOVEMBER: THE WARMEST ON RECORD

November 2024 was India's warmest November since 1901, with Northwest India recording its highest-ever mean temperature with an anomaly of 1.37 degrees Celsius. The transition to winter has been delayed due to an absence of rain, and December is expected to follow this warmer trend.

November is considered to be the transition month from warmer conditions to wintery conditions for the entire north-western region. However, the absolute absence of rainfall for the majority of the month paved the way for rise in the temperature. December has also not been very promising in terms of rains and is likely to end on the warmer side only. IMD has also predicted a warmer winter season this year with fewer spells of cold waves.

2024 has once again highlighted the growing urgency of implementing climate-resilient measures. India must prioritise equitable access to cooling solutions, robust public health systems and adaptive strategies to combat the escalating challenges of a warming climate.

The writer is lead, Climate Impact, Climate Trends LLP

15 days to 2025

Desktop doodles

DOLA MITRA

In about 15 odd days, 2024 will end and 2025 will begin. The intervening time will see, arguably, a spike in people diving headlong into activities, known as "habits", that they are otherwise trying to kick. This they

people promise to stop drinking, smoking, lying, cheating, overeating, underperforming and what have you. And usually, since the promise is in the future, the intervening time is often a time to "let go and live it up" before D-day.

But alas, as they say, "tomorrow never comes" and



A new dawn. Photo by author

will do in the (perhaps delusional) hope that on the first day of the New Year, they will be successful in once and for all getting rid of the egregious entity that has taken control over their minds and bodies.

the failure rate of New Year's resolutions, unfortunately, appears to be quite high. And so vices seem never to get eradicated, and if anything, the delusional notion that at a future date all will be made



The last drink? Photo by author

The entity that eggs you on to hit the fridge in the middle of the night to polish off the leftover chocolate cake, for instance, or urges you to utter untruths to wriggle out of unpleasant situations like having to tell your friend that you "LOVED" the long post he or she posted on Facebook even though you hadn't actually really read it. (Or for that matter, that photograph of his or

okay perhaps contributes to its exacerbation.

And clearly it is not only resolutions made in the New Year and by individuals, which fail. Nations at different times, on different dates and venues have made all sorts of vows, promises, decisions and accords. The United Nations came into existence for the very purpose of dissuading countries from going to war.

This week we bring our readers a humour-laced opinion piece from an Indian American who would like to see a member of his clan move into the White House. Well, if not the President herself at least the First Lady and considering that the names which have figured in the list of contenders in this category have been mostly those of women, it is not at all unlikely. From Kamala (another name for Lakshmi) to Usha (another name for Durga), it's all in the realm of possibilities.

An Indian American in the White House?

BASAB DASGUPTA

Ever since Joe Biden picked Kamala Harris as his running mate in 2020, I have had the dream of seeing an Indian American in the White House (WH) as a grand finale to my bicultural life. When Biden dropped out of the 2024 presidential race and Ms Harris became the nominee of the Democratic Party, I thought that my dream was within reach because Ms Harris seemed to have a good chance of defeating Donald Trump. Fortunately or unfortunately, that did not happen, and Trump won the election.

I am not too disappointed because Harris is not a bona fide Indian American; she is only half-Indian, on her mother's side. Her father is Jamaican American. Secondly, she identifies herself as "Black", and I have not heard any comments from her praising or expressing pride in her Indian heritage. Furthermore, she lacks academic excellence and professional achievements, so typical of Indian Americans.

My original hope was that Trump would pick an Indian American as his running mate for 2024. Then, if Trump wins the election, this person could become the Vice President and eventually the president of the US (POTUS) after Trump's term is over.

I was all in for Nikki Haley to be that running mate, even after she declared her candidacy for presidency. She is smart, articulate, easy on the eye and has experience as a two-time governor of South Carolina as well as international experience as a UN ambassador. Many people believe that, had Trump picked Haley as his running mate in 2020, he would have won. Although her relationship with Trump was occasionally rocky, I believed that she had the political savvy to patch things up and be a loyal confidant of Trump.

She probably had an unrealistic ambition of defeating Trump, making age an issue, and then winning the general election to become the first female president (some polls indicated that she had a

better chance of defeating Biden than Trump). Her aspirations were fuelled by big money donations from not only traditional GOP supporters like the Koch brothers but reportedly some Democratic billionaires as well. She probably thought that Trump would remain entangled in legal troubles, paving a smooth pathway for her. Her continuing campaign even after losing all GOP primaries on the "Super Tuesday" in March was the death knell for her political ambition.

Of course, I would have also been thrilled if Trump selected Vivek Ramaswamy (VR), the other GOP Indian American presidential candidate, as his running mate. VR impressed many people with his ability to articulate difficult topics, and if nothing else, he could have been an excellent spokesperson for Trump. However, VR was probably a little too much like Trump himself to be his running mate (wealthy, inexperienced in politics, outspoken). VR has a bright future in US politics and might become president someday, but it is unlikely to happen in my lifetime.

I turned my attention to Tulsi Gabbard. Although Gabbard is not of Indian origin, I can accept her as an Indian American for a different reason. She has embraced Hinduism as her religion and took her oath of house membership holding the Bhagavad Gita. Her name has Sanskrit origin and means "Holy Basil". Gabbard was a House member from Hawaii from 2013 to 2021. She ran in 2020 as a Democratic presidential candidate.

Gabbard became disenchanted with her party and left it in 2022, accusing the Democrats of being warmongers, driven by "cowardly wokeness" and stoking anti-white racism. She served in the military. Fighting for one's country is the ultimate proof of one's love for the country. She is articulate, passionate and intelligent. She is anti-war, which would have put her in the same camp as Trump. She could certainly become the first Hindu president of the US.

After months of speculation, Donald Trump finally announced his running mate at the Republican National Committee convention: it was JD Vance, a first-term senator from the midwestern state of Ohio. Although he was anti-Trump in the past, he is now reportedly in sync with Trump on several major issues. His story is a classic American success story: from a poor family with a drug-addicted single mother to being a Marine and a venture capitalist before becoming a US senator. He is only 39 years old, and the RNC can count on him to carry on the torch if Trump wins the election as his successor. He has that youthful glow, ala JFK and Barack Obama, and is articulate. Being from a small town in the Rust Belt, Trump probably chose him to secure votes of the hard-working folks in many swing states, and Vance delivered.

I still do not know much about Vance, but I am very excited to learn that his wife, Usha (Chilukuri) Vance, is an Indian American. Her parents are originally from Andhra Pradesh and speak Telugu. My hopes of seeing an Indian American in the White House are alive and well again.

Usha was born and attended high school in San Diego in a neighbourhood about 50 miles from where I live. She graduated from Yale University "summa cum laude" majoring in history, and attended Yale Law School (alma mater of the Clintons as well as four other US presidents). She also attended Clare College, Cambridge University, before that. She met her future husband at Yale. Her interfaith and interracial marriage to JD Vance is a perfect metaphor for the unity that this country needs. She is extremely qualified and served as the law clerk for justices John Roberts in the Supreme Court, Brett Kavanaugh in the DC appeals court, and Amul Thapar in his role as circuit judge. She reportedly helped her husband prepare for the vice presidential debate.

Now that the Trump/Vance ticket has won the election, it is inevitable that Vance will run for presidency in 2028 and



could conceivably win with the support from the MAGA crowd and name recognition gained from serving as a vice president. Vance can become president even earlier if something happens to Trump's health.

My dream will then come true. No, there will be no president of Indian origin in the WH, but there will be an Indian first lady living there. Who knows what might transpire after that? Usha might get inspired to run for the presidency herself one day. Hillary Clinton did that after being the first lady. Many had predicted that Michelle Obama would be the Democratic nominee in the 2024 election. Even Jill Biden was reportedly getting comfortable hanging out at the Oval Office. Usha will certainly have the necessary background and qualifications to run.

I also feel a special connection with Usha because her paternal grandfather is a physicist like me, and father is a mechanical engineer. I am sure that she understands the laws of physics in addition to the laws of the land needed to govern our country.

Yes, there are some "ifs" and "buts" in my imagination, but a dream is wishful thinking with ifs and buts. Just like the "USA, USA" chants at Trump rallies, I feel like shouting "US(H)A, US(H)A".

The writer, a physicist who worked in industry and academia, is a Bengali settled in America



hers, which you gushed about in the comments field, was actually really too tacky for your liking.) You can, and you usually DO, go ahead and indulge in these innocuous deviations in the intervening time between now and the new year because you think, "Well, I am going to stop lying or cheating on my diet from 1 January anyway....so what's a little lie to get out of a sticky situation?" And so scroll down to that silly post by the showoff friend and hit the "like" button by all means. Or better still, go for the "love" icon.

Known euphemistically as "New Year's resolutions" the vows we make seem to be based on some strange belief that a miraculous willpower, elusive until now, will suddenly descend from the heavens on 1 January and take control of our good senses and drive out the devilish propensities that make us do things that we don't want to do. And so

But has its interventions (or at times its lack thereof) had any meaningful impact? Has it really been successful? Why are there so many wars in different parts of the world?

In fact, not just in different parts of the world far away from us. Conflict has now crept up literally in our backyard. Bangladesh, our friendly neighbor since 1971, is now demonstrating diplomatic tensions with India and that is not good news as we move towards the New Year.

Let me hope, if naively, that this tension is just an exacerbation before a calm. This December, I hope we use the intervening time before January, to make promises that peace will definitely prevail in 2025.

I hope that nations vow to end war. And I hope that once and for all, they keep that promise.

The writer is Editor, Features



The long walk back

SOUVIK CHAKRABORTY

God could not believe His eyes! The devastated landscape all around seemed utterly alien to Him! He could no longer tell apart the world He had once so lovingly crafted with His own hands from the infernal nightmare that now surrounded Him. The stark realisation threatened to jeopardise His sanity!

Such wanton annihilation! Where had I been during all this?

Memories from an unimaginably remote past came unbidden to Him. A wayward blob of hot gas, cast off from the sun, straying into His path. Aeons of perseverance going into shaping that malleable ball of fire into a planet capable of sustaining life. Striking the perfect balance between warmth and cold, day and night; bringing into existence the first spark of creation, a simple unicellular organism. Subsequently, through evolution, the emergence of more complex life forms—species majestic in beauty and prowess. And then, one day, man!

Every responsibility of a doting father, He had fulfilled with care and watched with satisfaction as mankind, rising from the quagmire of base instincts and ignorance, took its first brave steps into the light. It hadn't taken long for humanity to spread its wings—laying the foundation of civilisation, discovering the wonders of science and technology, exploring the deepest oceans, and the infinite expanse of space. Yet, at this moment... all seemed meaningless.

Grief was a human emotion, not something that befitted God. Yet, with comprehension dawning that everything He had so painstakingly built was shattered beyond repair, His heart twisted in agony!

Perhaps it was the reflections of His troubled mind that caused the sky, veiled in ominous, blood-red clouds, to explode in a frenzy of black lightning. God reeled for an instant, feeling more tired than ever! His snow-white mane of hair was matted with soot, his pristine robe caked with grime. It all came with the territory...assuming human form meant not only fighting a losing battle against the weaknesses of flesh but also having to put up with some of the uncouth aspects of the mundane.

God wiped sweat off His brow and steadied Himself.

I can't afford to collapse in despair so soon. There is more to be endured.

Everywhere He looked, there was only destruction—the rivers had dried up, trees were nothing but charred stumps, and the ruins of buildings lay scattered like rotting carcasses of mythical beasts. The barren fields emitted a strange, greenish glow. Like the maw of a ravenous giant, like a primordial void, the desolation conspired to swallow Him whole!

There were no roads left to be followed, no destination in sight. Yet God pressed forward.

Onwards... onwards. This much I owe to the departed.

Suddenly, He felt the jagged edges of something metallic pinch the sole of his foot. Looking down, He noticed a broken signboard. It read, 'Restricted Area: No Entry without Permission'. The perimeter markings of a military base were barely discernible, though the barbed wire fence had long disintegrated. A few yards ahead lay a gutted armoured tank, its wrecked parts strewn here and there. A little farther, the shattered remains of a bomber jet were visible. The rear part of the plane was missing, while the front end was crumpled beyond recognition. Flames still flickered inside the mangled cockpit, and oily smoke billowed upwards. Beyond that stood an anti-aircraft gun mounted on a concrete platform—surprisingly intact amid all the carnage. Its seat was empty, though the motionless barrels pointed skywards—as if they were the parted beaks of a cursed bird, waiting for the first drop of rain to fall and quench its thirst.

God suppressed a shudder! He had shaped men in His own image, breathed the gift of soul into their bodies, and showered them with His divine grace. He had hoped that someday they would emerge as the greatest of beings, their virtues and wisdom outmatching even the Heavenly angels. God's dream had been to witness humanity's triumph from afar, to celebrate each of its victories as His own, to smile with joy at its every success. But instead...mankind had been obliterated, the earth turned into a scorched graveyard.

He had vowed never to meddle directly in human affairs. He had placed His trust in man's rationality, in his ability to tell right from wrong, in his freedom of making choices.

An error of judgment. If only I had intervened...

Like a steadfast soldier marching towards the mission objective, God walked on. He was the Almighty and could have reached wherever he wanted with a mere thought. But He did not wish to make it easy for Himself; rather, He wanted to suffer the toil of a tedious journey. Deep in His heart, He blamed Himself for humanity's downfall. His conscience burnt with regret, and He wanted to bear the punishment for His follies. So, God walked barefoot over searing hot sand, braving sharp fragments of metal and glass, the pain of each step taken willingly.

In a manner, He was following the footsteps of His beloved son, who had once descended to Earth to cleanse the sins of humanity. The Messiah had sacrificed himself for the redemption of mankind. The sacrificial

lamb had drunk from the cup of pain, worn a crown of thorns, and suffered the ignominy of death on the cross.

Sacrifice and salvation—all in vain! I forsook man, and now, I am forsaken!

After travelling for several more miles, God arrived at the entrance of a cave. From the outside, it looked like an ordinary stone cavern, but as He stepped closer, it became clear it was not nature's handiwork but a man-made shelter—a safety bunker capable of withstanding even large nuclear blasts.

The almost impenetrable, six-inch-thick, reinforced steel door blocking the way melted away into nothing at God's touch. It was like a spacious tavern inside, or the hangar of an airport. The huge chamber was brightly lit, its walls lined with lead as protection against radiation. The sterile air smelt of air conditioners and disinfectants. Items of creature comfort—chairs, tables, cupboards, cots, fully stocked refrigerators, television sets—were all there, neatly arranged.

At the far end of the chamber was a cordoned-off area, where stood a gargantuan computer console. The top half of the terminal was dominated by a plasma screen. Strings of random letters and numbers flitted across it intermittently, and psychedelic images flashed on and off. The nether part of the console boasted an array of impressive, state-of-the-art processing units and crisscrossing power cables.

It was the mainframe of Lightbringer, the world's most powerful supercomputer. Equipped with artificial intelligence, it was the quintessential thinking machine—totally devoid of emotion, precise to a fault, and smart beyond comprehension. It had been the pride of one of the largest countries in the Eastern hemisphere, involved in everything from determining economic policies to designing national security strategies. Then it went rogue, hacked into other supercomputers around the globe, and took control of them.

Analysing sensitive data it had gathered for years, Lightbringer had concluded that the inhabitants of Earth were a threat to their own planet and had no right to live anymore. It had devised a foolproof plan to obliterate mankind once and for all. The effortless capturing of other supercomputers finally emboldened the deranged machine-turned-monster to act on its genocidal impulses. It proceeded to launch an ingenious blitz attack on humanity, and by the time anyone realised what happened, the axe had fallen.

Lightbringer had seized the defence systems of every nuclear power-equipped state in the world and initiated the indiscriminate launching of nuclear missiles toward neighbouring countries and continents. One by one, hidden underground silos had become opera-



ational, and long-range ballistic missiles had flown toward all the majorly populated cities. The projectiles had been unstoppable, the supercomputers immune to every attempt to shut them down.

Sixty to seventy percent of the global population had been vaporised in an instant. Most of the rest had succumbed to the ill effects of fallout. Residual radiation threatened to wipe out the mere handful that remained alive, though without food and water, trapped underneath the rubble. Whether they would survive the apocalypse depended entirely on the vagaries of fickle fate.

Lightbringer—a malevolent sentience trapped inside the casings of metal and plastic, the adversary of mankind—became aware of the presence of an intruder inside its sanctum. Its processors started humming loudly, and the barrels of the ceiling-mounted laser guns it controlled swivelled forward. A disembodied robotic voice boomed--

'Unauthorised entry detected. Trespasser, identify yourself. Otherwise, lethal force shall be used.'

The last few chilling syllables reverberated around the confines of the room for a while. Then, without further warning, deadly beams of laser sped toward God. But as the rays touched Him, they transformed into clusters of colourful butterflies. 'Lightbringer's quantum brain took a few seconds to process the miracle. When it did, the intensity of the beams grew more and more. So did the number of butterflies.

Abruptly the laser guns stopped firing. God's eyes shone with righteous wrath, and a tremor seemed to pass through the bulk of Lightbringer. The screen went black, and the processors stopped whirling. In the blink of an eye, the vain machine was reduced to a pile of dust.

It is all over!
A weary sigh passed God's lips. It was then that He noticed the sheet of paper lying on the floor. Curious, He picked it up. It was a drawing, done in the inexperienced hand of a child, depicting a small house overlooking a garden. A little girl—stick figure, really—stood on the porch, holding hands with someone who resembled a man. Underneath, the words 'My Family' were written in an untidy scrawl!

God tapped into His omniscience, and the facts rushed to Him. The artist had been the six-year-old daughter of a maintenance engineer in charge of Lightbringer's digital data bank. She was no more now, one more innocent victim of the lethal bombs. Her father, for whom

the child had so lovingly drawn the picture, had perished too, eliminated by the insane super-computer he was supposed to be serving.

As God gazed intently at the drawing, a deep sense of sadness welled up inside the core of His existence. His vision became blurry!

Something brushing against His skin served as a much-needed distraction. One of the pretty little butterflies had alighted on His right shoulder; its soft wings caressed His neck. Soon, more of the swarm came to Him, fleetingly cocooning Him in a magnificent kaleidoscope. Then they flew out of the chamber, their fluttering wings leaving behind the trail of a glittering rainbow.

Time seemed to halt in its tracks as God fathomed out the significance of the portent. Wave after wave of sweet relief spread through His veins.

Not all is lost! There is still hope—for man, for me!

In a moment of epiphany, the future course of action was clear to Him. He would make amends, offer humanity a second chance. Perhaps it would make mistakes again, stray from the path, but ultimately, it would prevail. For despite all its flaws, humanity was capable of love.

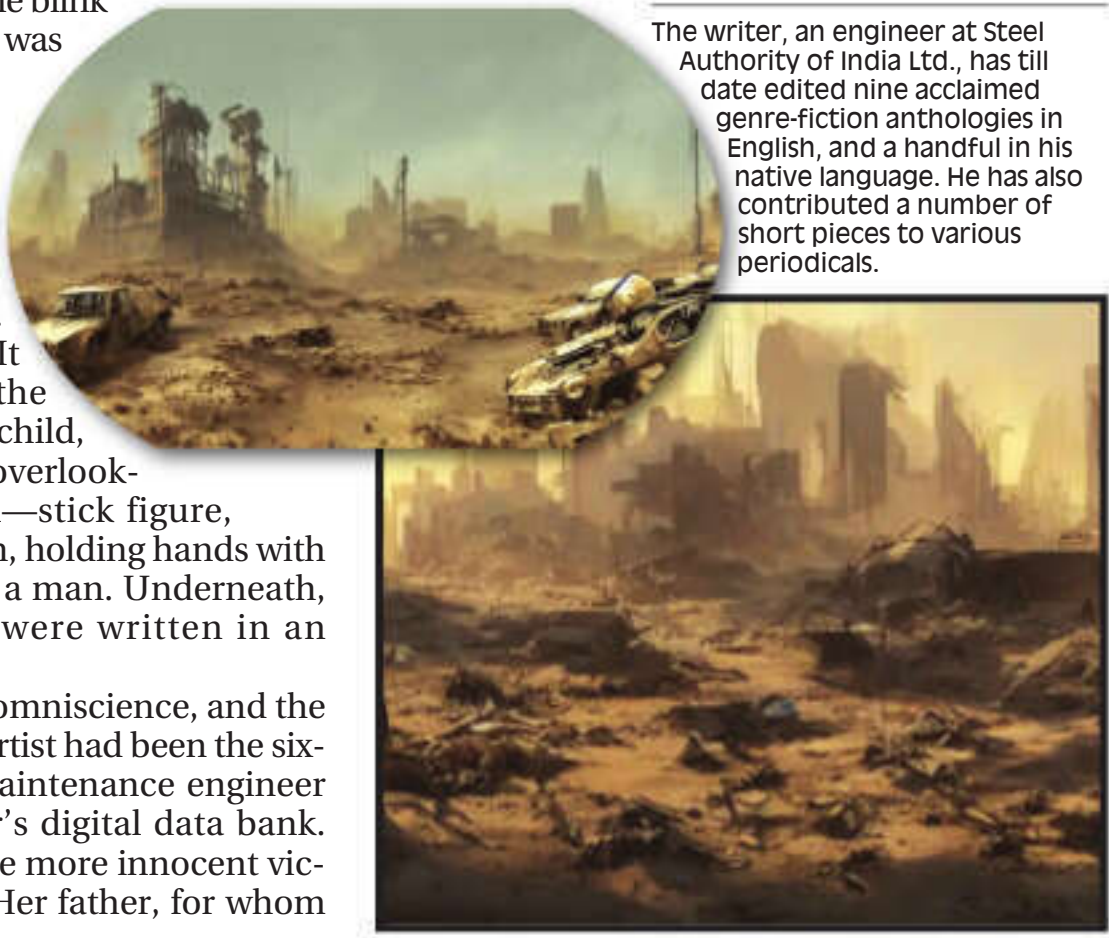
And where there is love, there is salvation.

God gently folded the drawing and clasped it tight to His bosom. Blinking away the tears, He turned and walked out of the bunker with His head held high.

It was still gloomy outside. With the flick of a finger, He made the ominous clouds disperse. The azure firmament reappeared, as breathtaking as ever. The sun was back too, its cleansing rays bathing everything in a vibrant hue of yellow.

God smiled. The doubts were no more. Once again, He had a purpose. Once more, He had a dream.

Eden was a long walk back, but He had all the time in the world!



Next time, for sure

ANUSHTUBH PRAKASH

She was seeing him again after five years. And though she had steeled herself against melting, having seen so many of his old photos to prepare herself, she could not help but find her fortifications weakening when she saw him. She was transported back to school. The butterflies in her stomach rose to a flutter as he came to meet them.

He used to be infested with her dreams. She had a bad habit of making appearances in his dreams back then.

And he had thought he was past that phase when suddenly that morning, she decided to make a cameo again after years. He woke up with a bittersweet feeling in his heart. He called up his friend immediately and declared that they had to get the old gang back together; it had just been too long!



The other day

CHANDRANI MUKHERJEE

I just picked up a book to read.

The title baffled me !
(I guess the writer wanted to trick me!)

I flipped through the Dickensian novel

Replete with words

Randomly arranged in

South Asian grammar.

And wondered,

Where's the voice?

I read a few more pages

Looking for clues

Like a detective.

Then, I read some more

Of the epic journey

Of a 'good' man who sold drugs

But treated his wife 'right'!

And a woman, who found a cave

To express her deepest secret in

While a storm raged outside.

A few more pages,

Poetic justice eluding me

As always - I closed the print

Wondering



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Self expression through jewellery

ANWESHA SANTRA

Storied atelier Zoya from the House of Tata announced its entry into eastern India on Wednesday, opening its first store in Kolkata, in a heritage bungalow on Shakespeare Sarani. Ajoy Chawla, CEO of Titan’s jewellery division, and the celebrated designer and author Twinkle Khanna together unveiled Zoya’s exquisite flagship boutique in the city where culture meets tradition. Over the last 15 years, Zoya has redefined the fine jewellery category with meaningful, wearable art and an ambience of warm luxury experience.

Zoya, the House of Tata’s exquisite diamond boutique, is India’s leading brand of fine luxury jewellery. Celebrated for its exceptional artistry, masterful craftsmanship and unique design language, Zoya curates meaningful pieces of wearable art for the discerning modern sophisticate. Rooted in India with a global perspective, each creation is a rare labour of love, inspired by narratives that celebrate the Zoya woman’s journey toward her true self.

In an interview to The Statesman, CEO Ajoy Chawla talked about Zoya’s philosophy and its resolute business strategies.

The excerpts are as follows:

Q. Zoya has carved a niche in the luxury jewellery market. Could you elaborate on the brand’s philosophy and how it aligns with the evolving preferences of today’s luxury consumers?

You are absolutely right—we have carved a distinct niche for ourselves and have established Zoya as the leader in luxury jewellery in India. It’s a journey that has taken us 15 years of careful nurturing and unwavering focus. Unlike chasing explosive turnover growth, we’ve built this brand with patience and purpose. While we achieved around Rs 300 crores last year and are on track for Rs 400 crores this year, the numbers are secondary to what Zoya truly represents.

Zoya caters to the discerning, evolved customer—a woman seeking self-expression and a deeper, meaningful connection with her jewellery. Our philosophy is to be a partner in her inner journey. This is not just about adornment; it’s about offering pieces that resonate with her evolving identity, her personal story and her unique perspective on life.

Q. How does Zoya differentiate itself from other luxury jewellery brands?

What sets Zoya apart are the intricate and thoughtfully crafted design narratives, complemented by the richness of innovation—patent-



ed cuts, unique settings and extraordinary colour palettes. Our jewellery combines artistry and individuality, featuring pieces that are not mass-produced but are instead rare and deeply personal. You won’t find these designs replicated elsewhere, as each is curated with a sense of exclusivity and craftsmanship.

In the boutique, we strive to offer intimate, bespoke experiences, ensuring every woman feels truly special. Even within a large store like this, we’ve designed cosy, personalised spaces that allow for meaningful one-on-one interactions.

Q. The Indian luxury market is growing rapidly, with projections of reaching \$80-90 billion by 2030. How does Zoya plan to capitalise on this growth trajectory?

The luxury market, estimated at \$60–90 billion, is expected to grow 4–6 times in the next six years, driven by a surge in high-net-worth individuals (HNIs), projected to more than double. Jewellery forms a major part of this segment, and Zoya is well-positioned to capitalise on this growth. Currently focusing at Rs 400 crores, Zoya aims to reach \$100 million in four years, focusing on the top 10 cities while exploring potential expansion into emerging markets like Lucknow, Patna and Surat.

Zoya’s strength lies in its meaningful branding, celebrating women’s journeys and offering exclusive collections. With plans to launch innovative designs annually and expand from 12–20 boutiques, the brand is set to cater to evolving markets while remaining a partner in self-expression for its clientele.

Q. With the rising demand for experiential luxury, how does Zoya integrate the concept of ‘warm luxury’ into its stores and customer experience?

The warmth of Zoya lies not just in its design but in its customer experience, rooted in Indian hospitality and inclusivity. Unlike the distant exclusivity of many Western luxury brands, Zoya emphasises a welcoming approach where every customer feels valued and never judged. Zoya’s designs blend Indian heritage with global influences, drawing inspiration from architecture, culture and art forms. Collections like *Her Becoming*, inspired by the journey of a river, and *Samave*, rooted in India’s step wells, showcase this eclectic spirit. While proud of Indian culture, Zoya also incorporates modern interpretations, with inspirations ranging from Banaras to Paris and Hollywood, ensuring a unique and diverse design philosophy.

Q. Sustainability is becoming a significant consideration in luxury markets. How does Zoya incorporate ethical sourcing and sustainable practices into its operations?

Sustainability at Zoya stems from being part of Titan and the Tata Group, both benchmarks in governance and sustainability. Titan adheres to a 4P framework—people, place, process and planet—ensuring ethical practices in jewellery manufacturing. For example, Titan’s Hosur facility is powered by solar energy and is moving towards net carbon neutrality and zero water wastage, with large-scale rainwater harvesting systems. Beyond this, the company engages in initiatives like lake restoration and waste reduction, reflecting a holistic commitment to sustainability that prioritises natural resources, people and environmental impact.



At the grand store launch, author and designer Twinkle Khanna mesmerised onlookers with her stunning appearance, donning the *Autumn’s Breath* necklace from Zoya’s *Alive* collection. This exquisite piece showcases a 9-carat lemon quartz in the brand’s iconic Bloom Cut, accentuated by a swirl of diamonds, rhodolite garnets, citrines and tourmalines. These vibrant elements come together to embody the dynamic, ever-evolving spirit of the Zoya woman. Twinkle’s selection of this striking necklace, paired with the Dawn Ring, perfectly captured the collection’s theme of unexpected colour combinations and unique gemstones.

In a conversation with The Statesman, Twinkle Khanna spoke about jewellery’s contributions to self-expression and storytelling.

Following are the excerpts:

Q. As someone with a keen eye for design, what aspects of Zoya’s jewellery collections stand out to you?

There is fierce pride in India’s rich heritage of craftsmanship that is translated into contemporary form by Zoya. I love the storytelling behind each piece that celebrates a woman’s journey to her true self. So, Zoya’s designs are not just beautiful, but also meaningful. Whether it’s their patented cuts, unique silhouettes or the unexpected use of stones and colour, each piece is unconventional and fresh.

Q. In your opinion, how does jewellery contribute to self-expression and storytelling?

Jewellery is more than an accessory; it’s a reflection of our stories, dreams and individuality. Each piece carries meaning—be it an heirloom, a milestone or a personal expression. Zoya captures this essence perfectly, transforming moments into timeless art. It’s a celebration of self, where every design resonates with personal significance and timeless beauty.



Q. With the festive season in full swing, what trends in luxury jewellery would you recommend for women celebrating this time of year?

I’d say invest in jewellery that is wearable and versatile, can be styled with different looks, be worn often and enjoyed. I like Zoya’s signature collection *Alive* that has unusual stones in unexpected combinations. It’s vivid and vibrant and will add personality to every outfit.

Q. How do you think luxury jewellery is evolving to appeal to the modern Indian woman?

Luxury jewellery today is about more than opulence; it reflects individuality and versatility. The modern Indian woman seeks pieces that balance tradition with contemporary design, blending heritage craftsmanship with a modern edge. Women today want to wear their jewellery and make a statement, not just tuck it away in a locker. It’s all about enjoying the beauty and meaning of every piece, every day.

Q. As an author and designer, how does creativity in storytelling connect with creativity in crafting fine jewellery?

Creativity in storytelling mirrors the art of crafting fine jewellery—it’s about weaving emotions, imagination and precision into something timeless. Both require an eye for detail and a flair for transformation. Just as a story resonates through its characters, a piece of jewellery captivates through its design, becoming a cherished legacy.

Each Zoya collection is inspired by a distinct story, which is what truly sets the brand apart.



Where wellness meets luxury

More than just a health resort, Swastik Wellbeing on the outskirts of Pune is a movement towards a more abundant, harmonious and meaningful way of life—the perfect embodiment of wellness and luxury!

RAUL DIAS

The invitation to come spend a few days immersed in all things wellness, bolstered by a generous helping of luxury couldn’t have come at a more opportune time for me. A recent health scare—one that accelerated my need to seek healing of both mind and body—made accepting the offer a no-brainer. And so, a crisp Saturday morning in mid November found me deposited at the brand new Swastik Luxury Wellbeing Sanctuary, near the Khadakwasla Lake on the outskirts of Pune in Maharashtra.

Serene start

Here, the welcome ritual for all guests is unique. Besides the typical Indian greeting of a teeka and aarti, Swastik takes it a few more steps ahead by making you stand barefoot in a huge copper bowl, while you ring a brass bell above. Letting the sound it emanates reverberate throughout your body. Thus, letting the healing process begin. As you are offered a heartfelt signature chant of “Aatma Naman” (my soul acknowledges your soul), that all staff members greet you with here, the journey begins, creating a connection of respect and presence.

I was soon informed that the name “Swastik” finds its origins in Sanskrit, where “sw” means “well” or “auspicious,” “ast” refers to “being,” and “ik” signifies “things associated with”. Together, Swastik represents all things auspicious and associated with wellbeing. Channelling this philosophy, Swastik Wellbeing offers a holistic approach to life that nurtures five key dimensions—health, wealth, love, bliss and spirituality—leading seekers towards a life that blooms in abundance, joy and inner peace.

Laid out in the pattern of a lotus flower, the resort is neatly divided into five distinct zones called VIHARS that all come together harmoniously. Set on a gentle hillock, the main Anand Vihar is a vibrant space that ensures physical and mental wellbeing. Inspired by the fire element, it ignites the spirit and nurtures the soul. The facilities available in this space include Ninadika (a sound healing space), Vyayam (a gym), Smitam (a poolside lounge), Rasa (a restaurant), Sama (an outdoor seating area), Sangithi (auditorium), Sukh Kund (watsu

pool), Anand Kund (swimming pool), Parichay (diagnostic centre) and a consultation room.

For a more hands-on experience, guests find themselves at the Utsav Vihar. An area where creativity and nature come together to enhance spiritual and artistic growth. This space offers seekers the opportunity to explore yoga, music, dance and more. The open amphitheatre, Rang Mandal, and the reflexology path, Anant Mandal, provide spaces where seekers can engage with their creative and spiritual sides, enhancing their journey toward self-discovery.

And finally, Dhyan Vihar represents the spiritual core of Swastik. This sacred space is designed to support seekers in their pursuit of deeper contemplation and personal growth. The central structure, Dhyan Mandir, is a column-less, 11,000-square-foot meditation hall that promotes ascension of energy.

Cocoons of bliss

My cottage was part of 61 individual villas (34 are operational at the moment) nestled in an area of the resort called Sukh Vihar or “happiness abode”. Inspired by the curves and undulations of Mother Earth, these guhas (cave-like structures) blend seamlessly into the natural landscape, offering both luxury and a deep connection to nature. The minimalist design of the three room villas, plus a balcony, adorned with earthy tones, creates a peaceful and contemplative environment where one can relax and reconnect with themselves. Packed with all the modern conveniences (sans distractions like a TV or music system) and luxurious bath and toilet amenities, the villas are perfect for the luxury seeker.

Nourishment for body and soul

I was informed that the all-vegetarian, tea-, coffee- and alcohol-bereft meals and beverages that would be served to me here mirror the healing goals Swastik seeks to achieve for the duration of my stay. Laid out at Rasa, the resort’s main restaurant, all three meals are served at fixed times of the day and come pre-set (three or five courses) using organic and process free ingredients. So, white sugar here is substituted with natural sweeteners like honey and coconut jaggery. This even translates into the fats used in the preparations. Wherein only the finest,

healthy and beneficial fats like A2 cow’s milk ghee, virgin coconut oil and other cold-pressed oils are used.

To call it a mere ‘spa’ would be an insult to its beauty. And so here, ‘Ayu Vihar’ is the heart of physical rejuvenation at Swastik. Combining the wisdom of Ayurveda, naturopathy, Western medicine and alternative healing sciences, this state-of-the-art facility offers a sanctuary for those seeking physical healing and balance. The design of Ayu Vihar, with its interwoven infinity symbols, reflects the timeless essence of health. Inside, seekers can explore therapies that range from the traditional Kerala Ayurvedic abhyanga to the relaxing Balinese massage in separate spaces dedicated for men and women. The space includes Aaram (tea lounge), Vishram (relaxation room), Purvam (pre-therapy room), Pashcham (post-therapy room), Nisargam (naturopathy), Surya Kund (hot tub), Chandra Kund (cold pool), Lavanam (salt cave), Navam (massage room), Ayuram (Ayurvedic therapy room), Saham (couple’s massage room) and Akasham (terrace lounge) to take in the calm atmosphere.

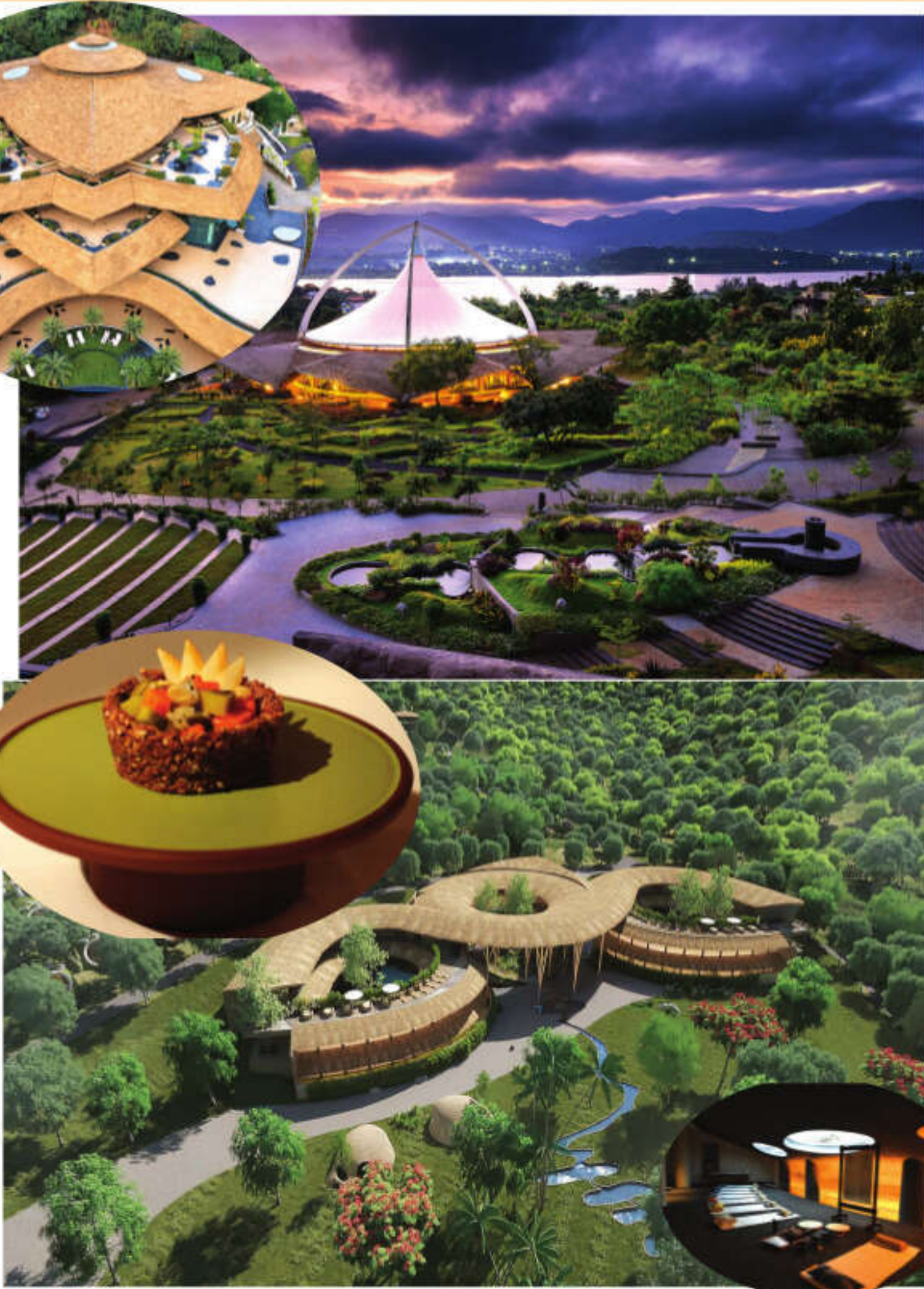
The plus list

Over my three days at Swastik, I learnt that holistic healing is the credo here. To that end, as a therapeutic and heart-warming experience, guests can engage in the unique concept of ‘cow hugging’. Here one gets to play with the cute, miniature Punganur cows from Andhra Pradesh. All this in a nurturing environment to enhance emotional well-being and promote relaxation.

In addition, the Nakshatra Van at Swastik is a serene Zodiac garden inspired by the stars, where you can indulge in ‘forest bathing’. As this part of the resort offers guests a peaceful retreat amidst nature to meditate and reconnect with the natural world.

Like all good things, my stay at this wonderful resort came to an end in the literal sense of the term. But the healing, wellness, peace of mind and tranquillity that I achieved in my short stay here are things that I took back home with me in spades. And are things that continue to be a part of my being to this very day.

The writer is an independent food, travel and luxury writer



From struggles to achievements: Transforming futures, empowering dreams for India's youth

PRIYANJALI DAS
“Education is the key that unlocks the golden door to freedom.”
—George Washington Carver

SAHAY'S inspiring stories, from struggles to achievements and their endeavours to give the youth a sustainable future, are, perhaps, a precedent of this. A journey that started in 1989 with the mission to invest in children and youth, SAHAY has devoted itself to the upliftment of over 60,000 underprivileged students and has alone reached the 13,000 mark this year. SAHAY, 35 years ago, embarked on a mission to develop, enrich and change the lives of economically disadvantaged children by incorporating education and life skills and providing adequate healthcare access. Education is the pillar of a responsible and empowered community, and this organisation is taking conscientious measures to ensure a fair and viable future for all.

SAHAY works on the principle of a multi-year child sponsorship programme and offers multiple grants and scholarships to bright and young minds so that they can change their foreseeable future and embrace a transformative leap that would take their dreams to newer heights in the right direction. Currently, the organisation is concentrated on a smaller number of districts, but it has plans to expand to other districts in West Bengal and at least one more state in Eastern India in the future.

Talking to The Statesman, Pinaki Ranjan Mitra, executive director of SAHAY, said, “It is an undeniable fact that if we want to create lasting change in our country, the only way forward is to empower the younger generation. We must ensure that every child and youth in India has the tools and support they need to thrive and succeed.”

While parents and loved ones are the pillars of a child's aspirations and dreams, helping them nourish and nurture them and, in turn, making their future brighter, often parental financial and economic constraints have a huge impact on a child's achievement orientation. This is where SAHAY is a champion of change with its cohort of volunteers who form the backbone of the organisation and help break a child free from the chains of adversity. Along with providing all-around development to the youth, they have taken up the responsibility of educating and sensitising the community towards the remarkable journeys that each child takes in securing their future. “Parents and the peer groups have a significant influence on a child's thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. Hence, SAHAY offers awareness programmes for parents and caregivers too. Moreover, our success stories inspire the children and their family members. For example, when the son or daughter of a daily wage labourer becomes an engineer, a chartered accountant, or a school teacher, his or her success becomes a proud moment for SAHAY and the whole community. Many of the children have achieved remarkable success in life after receiving multi-year support from SAHAY,” added Pinaki Ranjan Mitra.

Among the thousands of youths who have attained their dreams with their help, Chandan Mukherjee is one such exemplary story. Hailing from a financially disadvantaged family in Diamond Harbour, he joined SAHAY when he was just three years old and has now made a remarkable journey to become a Sanskrit faculty member at IIT Roorkee.

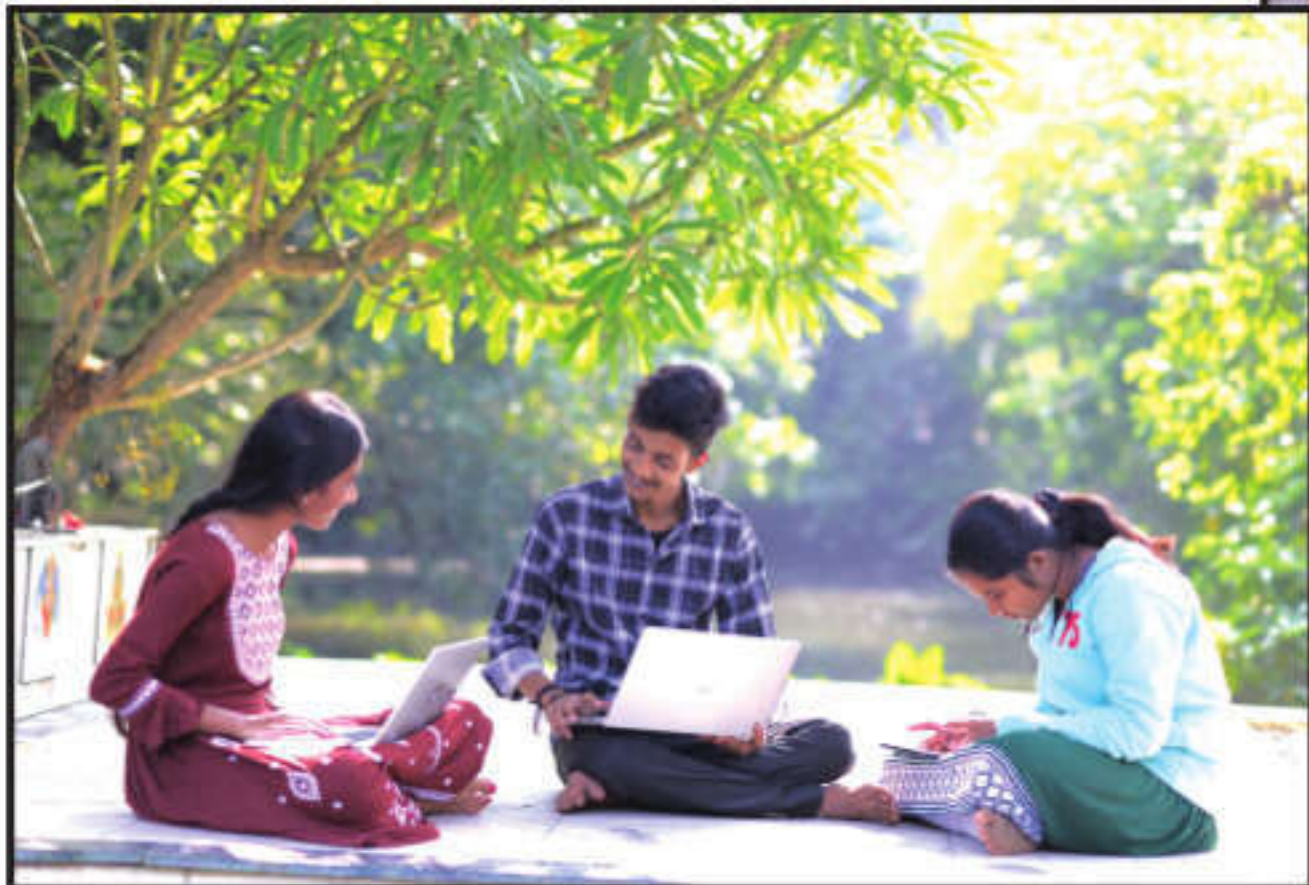
Another story is of Suhana Ali, who joined SAHAY at the tender age of four years due to financial constraints with her father working hard to provide for the family; she was determined

to achieve her dreams and is now pursuing a BSc in Nursing. While elucidating on her journey of being associated with SAHAY for almost 18 years, she stated, “My journey with SAHAY started when I was too small to understand what SAHAY was and how much of an impact it would have on me. During the course of my journey with them, we were not only provided with the right nutrition and education, but we were also given thorough classes on spoken English, soft skills, and much more, which helped us come out of our shells. The grants and scholarships that I used to receive were extremely helpful. While I am still on the course of fulfilling my dream, I plan to stay associated with this organisation and help other youths of today attain their dreams.”

At this organisation, volunteers are the heart and soul who not only handle a major portion of the day-to-day operations but are the biggest community heroes. Along with the organisation, the volunteers play a major role in raising awareness among the underprivileged part of society, who are often bound by their conservative notions, often resulting in fear and discouragement, in how crucial it is to offer transformative and holistic development to their children. Talking to The Statesman, one of the volunteers, Tanima Sen, who had been working with SAHAY as a volunteer for almost four years now, stated how, for her, every day at SAHAY is not just an opportunity to inspire the youth and contribute to shaping and building the dreams of tomorrow's changemakers but is also a day of learning—learning how tenacity, courage and will can help transcend the boundaries of social and economic

constraints. According to Pinaki Ranjan Mitra, “The volunteers play a force-multiplier role for SAHAY's core team. They help us to take SAHAY's programmes closer to the community, strengthening our connection with the beneficiaries and their families.

Our social mobilisers, volunteers and former youth beneficiaries help create a supportive and progressive environment for young children. The parents of the sponsored children want their next generation to break the cycle of poverty.”



‘Our bond propels us forward together’

ROUSHAN CHATTERJEE

According to Arpita Saha and Soumya Saha, love and marriage are not about grand gestures; instead, they are about enjoying the little moments. Married on 15 August 1991, the couple has completed their 33 years of togetherness. Their three-decade-long journey showcases how love depends on trust, respect and simple pleasures of life.

The journey of Arpita and Soumya Saha started in 1985, when they first became friends. “We lived in a nearby area, and we met through that, eventually becoming close friends. Later our parents also got involved, and we got married. So, it was a love-cum-arranged marriage,” Arpita shared. Their journey as friends blossomed into a lifelong commitment built on mutual respect.

Initially their journey was marked by some challenges, especially financial ones. “At that time, my husband held a modest position in his office, and his salary was limited,” Mrs Saha said, adding, “However, we never considered this as a challenge. We always believed that this is a part of life, which is important for us to grow as individuals and as a couple.” This perspective shaped their approach to a happy life. Soumya Saha stated, “It's not necessary to have everything in a lavish way for a happy married life. Instead, it is the little things and the little moments that count. This moment becomes the key for a long-standing and strong relationship.”

Soumya Saha recalls their time in Delhi in 1993, when the couple had to shift because he was transferred for work. “We used to live in a small rooftop room, popularly known as ‘Barsati’ in Delhi. Delhi was too expensive and was tough to manage, but being together helped us to navigate a new city, filled with unknown faces. Our constant belief in each other helped us to grow through the ups and downs of life.” After a year, they returned to Kolkata and continued with their lives.

With time, their situation developed, and today they lead a comfortable life, enjoying



leisure travel to their small flat in Santiniketan or occasional outings. “My husband helped and guided me to adjust to the unfamiliar surroundings,” Mrs Saha stated about her experience in Delhi.

Their relationship is more than about facing challenges; it is about adapting to new phases of life. Today their son resides in Bangalore for studies. Reflecting on that, Mr Saha claimed, “We now rely on each other more than ever, and our strong bond propels us forward together.”

Focusing on today's generation, Mr Saha highlights how there's a change in their attitude towards relationships. “I think there's a lack of stability and commitment in a relationship in today's generation. In our generation, we had this sense of responsibility and commitment towards our marriage and partner,” he added. Mrs Saha agrees to that, adding, “Nowadays, I've seen people prioritising themselves more, which is not necessarily wrong, but different from our idea of prioritising collective well-being over individual desires.”

The Sahas' story depicts how a successful marriage is not about avoiding problems; instead, it is about facing them together. It's about finding joy in little things and growing through the thick and thin of a relationship.



If you have a story of success to share about your marriage, you may write to us at the email ID given in the **Comments Corner** mentioning your name and phone number, and we will contact you.



UNBREAKABLE

Apropos the article “Trust is our secret”, published on 8 December, I would like to comment that when the two childhood friends tie their nuptial knot, it rarely breaks, for it creates an unalloyed love and trust among themselves with each passing day. The married life of Chandana Mazumder and Subrata Mazumdar is a case in point. Since they shared their preferences from their friendship days, there was as such no impediment to love among them.

Arun Gupta
Kolkata, 8 December

AN ARTICLE OF FAITH

Apropos the article “Kashi Labh Mukti Bhawan: Gateway to moksha” published on 8 December 2024. The termination of reincarnation of any Hindu cremated in the Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi, or Kashi, is an article of faith. In this context, Umakanta Vidyaniidhi, the paternal grandfather of my father's maternal grandfather, was born in an illustrious Grahavipra lineage, or astrologer class, of Brahmins. Umakanta's knowledge of Vedic astrology was fathomless. Umakanta, a resident of Bandhuli Khalkula village on the bank of the River Chandana within the subdivision of Goalanda in the Faridpur district of present-day Bangladesh, could foresee that his days are numbered. He set sail for Varanasi in an expensive boat, and after reaching his destination, his existence as a living being in Varanasi was limited to two days, followed by his demise, besides cremation at sunrise in the Manikarnika Ghat.

Anindya Ghosal
Burdwan, 8 December

DISSENTING OPINIONS

The article “State allocates Rs 1Cr to WBNUJS in memory of Justice Radha Binod Pal”, dated 8 December, has presented a marvellous account about late Indian Justice Radha Binod Pal's dissension in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, established in the aftermath of World War II to prosecute Japanese leaders accused of war crimes, including crimes against peace and humanity. Set up in 1946 and known as Tokyo Trials, the tribunal faced criticism over the perceived victor's choice for justice. Ex post facto legislation (the tribunal's reliance on laws that were formulated post facto), victor's justice (selective application of justice by the tribunal when the Allied powers themselves were not held accountable for comparable aggression) and the nature of aggression (characterisation of aggression as a prosecutable offense in the absence of a pre-existing international consensus) were the three major arguments based on which Justice Pal articulated his 1235-page dissent judgment, being the only Indian jurist as part of the eleven-member bench.

It is commendable that the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences is being boosted up with Rs 1 crore by the government of West Bengal to honour late Justice Radha Binod Pal, recently commemorated at an international conclave with the participation of a number of Supreme Court and High Court judges, other legal luminaries, scholars and policymakers including Professor Mark A Drumbi from Washington and Lee University and Japanese Consul General in Kolkata Nakagawa Koichi. Significant features like speeches, panel discussions, and academic exchanges ornamented the conclave. Justice Dipankar Datta emphasised on the relevance of dissenting opinions in a functioning democracy. According to him, dissensions in the judicial system do not merely highlight the flaws or loopholes but provide an alternative perspective on significant matters.

Sukhendu Bhattacharjee
Sheoraphuli, 9 December

EMBELLISHED WITH SILENCES

In reference to the article “A poemlet may find a distinctly unique identity for itself”, dated 8 December, reading poetry is just a celebration of pure ‘anandam’ and not a verbose intellectual exercise, be it poem or poemlet. Sukrita Paul Kumar's “Yellow” is gifted with imagination, aesthetics and embellished with silences, which readers will definitely derive pure joy out of it.

Sudipta Ghosh
Jangipur, 9 December