



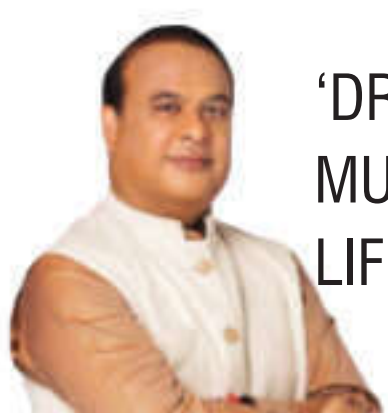
TRUMP SIDES WITH MUSK IN DEBATE OVER H1-B VISAS

P9



RAJNATH CALLS ON ARMED FORCES TO REMAIN ALERT

P5



'DR SINGH DESERVED MUCH BETTER IN BOTH LIFE AND DEATH'

P8

BGT 2024-25: BUMRAH OVERTAKES KAPIL DEV

P12



WEATHER

Generally clear. Hazy in the evening. Maximum and minimum temperatures likely to be around 28°C and 18°C respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Max. 73% Min. 59%

TEMPERATURE

Max: 28.1°C Min: 18.5°C

SUN RISES 06:15 hrs SUN SETS 17:02 hrs

MOON RISES 05:42 hrs MOON SETS 16:21 hrs

New Moon on 31 December

THUMBNAILED



A man carrying a child on his shoulder walks through a mustard flower field on the outskirts of Guwahati, on Sunday. ■ ANI

Tigress Zeenat captured: Fugitive tigress Zeenat was finally tranquillised and captured in Bankura district on Sunday, 21 days after she escaped from the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha. The animal, which had travelled over 300 km across Odisha, Jharkhand and Bengal, was sedated with a tranquilliser gun in the forested area near Gosaindih village on Sunday afternoon, forest officials said. Zeenat was later transported to Allpore Zoo in Kolkata, where vets will check her health and other parameters before she is sent back to Simlipal Tiger Reserve. (Page 2)

179 killed in plane crash at South Korean airport

Jeju Air flight skids off runway, hits wall, bursts into flame; 2 rescued

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SEOUL, 29 DECEMBER

A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in one of the country's worst aviation disasters.

The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 kilometres south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 a.m.

A total of 179 people – 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable – died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said.

Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.



Firefighters and rescue team members work near the wreckage of a passenger plane at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea on Sunday. ■ AP

Among the 177 bodies so far identified, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals.

Ju Woong, director of the Ewha Womans University Seoul Hospital, where one of the survivors was hospitalised, said the man was being treated in an intensive care unit for fractures to his ribs, shoulder blade and upper spine. Ju said the man, whose name wasn't released, told doctors he "woke up to find (himself) rescued."

Footage of the crash aired by South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility, triggering an explosion.

Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames. Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane

was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognisable among the wreckage.

Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities about what caused the crash, including whether the aircraft was struck by birds, Lee said.

Transport Ministry officials later said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. (See also Page 9)

India's Koneru Humpy clinches second world rapid chess crown

AGENCIES

NEW YORK, 29 DECEMBER

Koneru Humpy, India's top-rated female chess player, secured her second World Rapid Championship title, finishing the tournament with 8.5/11 here on Sunday (IST).

She won her first gold in the 2019 edition, in Moscow.

In a seven-way tie at the top at the start of the final, 11th round, Koneru stood out as the only player to score a victory. Playing with the black pieces, she outmanoeuvred Indonesia's International Master Irine Kharisma Sukandar in a challenging endgame, claiming the title in style.

"It's not easy to become a world champion when you are 37. It's quite difficult when you get older to keep that motivation and stay sharp when required. I'm glad that I made it," Koneru said after the triumph, as quoted by FIDE.

"I feel very happy for winning for the second time. In fact, I didn't expect it at all because I lost my first-round game, and I never imagined that I could finish the tournament as a world champion. This victory is very special. When I am on my lower side, I think this gave me the boost to fight and to again work on chess," she added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised Koneru Humpy for her grit and brilliance after



she secured the World Rapid Chess Championship title. "Congratulations to @humpy_koneru on winning the 2024 FIDE Women's World Rapid Championship! Her grit and brilliance continues to inspire millions. This victory is even more historic because it is her second world rapid championship title, thereby making her the only Indian to achieve this incredible feat," PM Modi wrote on X.

Koneru's victory adds another feather to the spectacular success of Indian chess in 2024, after the country won gold in the Chess Olympiad this summer in both the Open and the Women's Competition, and Gukesh D won the title of World Champion in classical chess.

"It's high time for India - we have Gukesh as the World Champion and now I got the second world title in the Rapid

event," Koneru said.

Koneru's path to the top began quietly, with just 2.5 points out of four on day one. By the conclusion of day two, however, she surged into shared first place alongside compatriot Harika Dronavalli and reigning Classical World Champion Ju Wenjun of China.

Entering the last round, the leaderboard featured an unprecedented seven-way tie. Alongside Koneru - Ju Wenjun, Harika Dronavalli, Kateryna Lagno, Tan Zhongyi, Irine Kharisma Sukandar, and Uzbekistan's Afruzha Khamdamova all held a chance at the title, FIDE reports.

Lagno, one of the pre-tournament favourites, had earlier dealt a critical blow to former World Champion Alexandra Kosteniuk in round nine, while Khamdamova stunned Grandmaster Elisabeth Paetz to join the leaders.

Manmohan Singh's ashes immersed in the Yamuna

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 29 DECEMBER

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's ashes were immersed in the Yamuna in the national capital on Sunday.

The ashes of Singh, the key architect of India's economic liberalisation, were immersed by his family members in accordance with Sikh rituals this morning at the Yamuna Ghat near the Gurdwara at Majnu Ka Tila.

Earlier, the ashes of the former Prime Minister were brought to the Gurdwara. Singh's wife, Gursharan Kaura was also present.

The Congress in a post



on X wrote: "Today, the ashes of former Prime Minister of the country, Dr Manmohan Singh ji were immersed at the Yamuna Ghat near the Gurdwara at Majnu Ka Tila with full rituals."

Recalling the contribution of Singh, who had served as Prime Minister from 2004 to

2014, the party said, "We will always remember Manmohan Singh ji's service to the nation, his dedication and simplicity."

The former Prime Minister was cremated with full state honours at the Nigambodh Ghat here on Saturday. Singh, already a renowned

economist before he reluctantly joined politics, passed away at 9.51 pm at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the national capital on Thursday at the age of 92.

As Finance Minister in the early 1990s, Singh was the architect of India's economic liberalisation. He initiated a series of reforms that not only saved the nation from a balance-of-payments crisis but also opened the doors to global markets. Through his policies of deregulation, privatisation, and the encouragement of foreign investment, he laid the foundation for India's rapid economic growth.

'Congress campaign demanding Shah's resignation to start after 3 January'

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, 29 DECEMBER

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh on Sunday said that his party will start 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhaan' campaign to demand the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his alleged disparaging remarks against Babasaheb Ambedkar.

The campaign was announced after the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting on 26 December. But the campaign is extended due to Congress' 7-day



mourning for former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

"The campaign that was announced in Belagavi has been put on hold till 3rd January to observe a 7-day

mourning for Dr Manmohan Singh... After the 3rd, we will hold rallies for the 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhaan' campaign," Ramesh told ANI.

"On 26 January, there will be a big rally at the birthplace of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar... From 25 January 2025, to 25 January 2026, we will take out the 'Samvidhaan Bachao Rashtriya Padyatra' across the country... Our only demand is that the Home Minister apologise and resign," he added.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said in the

Rajya Sabha, "If they (the Opposition) had taken the name of God as many times as they take Ambedkar's name, they would have secured heaven for seven lives." Following Shah's remarks, the Opposition accused him of having insulted Ambedkar and demanded his resignation. Hitting back, the BJP accused the Opposition of misleading the country for political expediency. Jairam Ramesh also attacked the BJP, saying that "those who are in power today should see Dr Manmohan Singh's personality."

ISRO to sign off 2024 with SpaDeX mission

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, 29 DECEMBER

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to launch its year-end mission, "Space Docking Experiment" (SpaDeX), on Monday at 9:58 p.m. from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR in Sriharikota. The mission will use the PSLV-C60 launcher.

The mission aims to dock two satellites in space, a challenge only mastered by the US, Russia, and China, so far.

According to ISRO, the primary objective of the SpaDeX mission is to develop and demonstrate the technology needed for rendezvous, docking, and undocking of two small spacecraft (SDX01, which is the Chaser, and SDX02, the Target, nominally) in a low-Earth circular orbit.

The success of this mission is vital for India's future space ambitions. Docking technology will help upcoming missions like Chandrayaan-4 and the planned Indian space station, expected to be ready by 2035. It is also crucial for the eventual manned Gaganyaan mission, expected to launch in 2026.



With SpaDeX, ISRO will attempt to dock two satellites orbiting at speeds of 28,800 km/h. And both satellites must be carefully manoeuvred to reduce their relative velocities to just 0.036 km/h.

Each satellite weighs around 220 kilograms and will orbit 470 km above Earth. The mission aims to include performing precision rendezvous and docking manoeuvres, validating power transfer between docked spacecraft, and operating payloads post-undocking, with a two-year lifespan.

SpaDEX will also use PSLV's fourth stage, POEM-4, for experiments. The stage will carry 24 payloads from academic institutions and startups. These experiments will utilise the micro-gravity environment in orbit.


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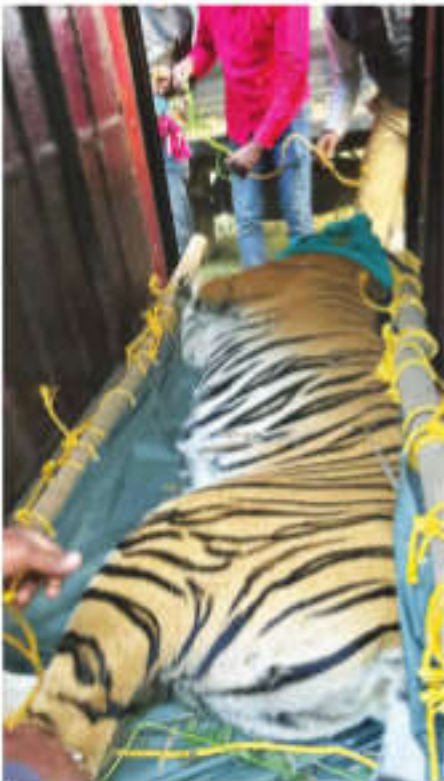
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epaper.thestatesman.com

After 21-day, three-state escapade, runaway Zeenat captured



KANCHAN SIDDIQUI
RANIBANDH, 29 DECEMBER

Fugitive tigress Zeenat was finally tranquilised and captured here today, 21 days after she escaped from the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha.

The captured tiger, secured in a specially designed cage, was dispatched to the Alipore Zoo in Kolkata within an hour. It will be kept under observation by veterinary experts for a couple of days before being returned to the Simlipal Tiger Reserve, senior forest officials said.

"The tigress was tranquilised with a single dart

today at 3.56 p.m.," said S Kulandaivel, Chief Conservator of Forests (Central). "The tranquilisation by experts from the Sundarban Tiger Reserve, assisted by our own officials from both the Bankura and Purulia divisions, was a fantastic operation and a coordinated effort, along with experts from Odisha. It was a fantastic team effort."

Yesterday at 2:26 p.m., forest officials fired a tranquiliser dart aiming to sedate Zeenat, but missed the target. Drones had captured her thermal images in the Gosaindih small jungle patch, and signals from the tigress's radio collar con-

firmed her location. As the first dart failed to penetrate, another dart was fired at 3:45 pm and then at 8:30 pm, both of which also missed the target. Early this morning, foresters held a brief meeting attended by police and civil administration officials. The radius of the nylon fencing was gradually reduced to confine the tigress and shorten the target zone. Live bait, made up of a pair of goats were placed closer.

"However, Zeenat didn't show any interest in approaching them," said a senior forest official, adding: "She appears to be in good health, although

she seemed angry and agitated by the presence of so many people and machinery around her."

"After her transfer, she may be offered food tomorrow at the Alipore Zoo under the supervision and prescription of the veterinary experts," Mr Kulandaivel said.

The three-year-old tigress continued to elude capture, and repeated tranquilisation attempts proved unsuccessful since yesterday afternoon after she was cornered by foresters at Gosaindih, close to the Mukutmoni pur tourism circuit surrounding the Kansavati reservoir here.

The tigress had escaped from the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha on the night of 8 December, and STR officials began tracking Zeenat after she was spotted in the Rajabasa jungle in Jharkhand on 10 December.

Zeenat was relocated to Odisha from the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra on 14 November to enhance the gene pool. Prior to that,

Yamuna, another tigress, was airlifted to Odisha on 27 October. Yamuna also escaped from the STR and was tracked in Kuldiha forests in Balasore last week. Prakash Chand

Gogineni, Field Director, STR, said: "We are also keeping track of her."

Zeenat entered Bengal by crossing the Subarnarekha river through the Chahala point of the Belpahari range in Jhargram district early on 20 December. The young feline traversed the dense forest corridor and was found in Raika hillock in Purulia's Bandwan on the morning of 22 December. On Friday night, she evaded a tranquilisation attempt and escaped the nylon fencing at Dangardihi point in Manbazar, crossed the Kumari river, walked along the Kansavati irrigation canal

bank beside the Khoridua and Basantapur villages, and her pugmarks were spotted at Gosaindih yesterday morning, triggering panic among residents.

The panicked residents of Gosaindih and Gopalpur heard Zeenat growling repeatedly as the tigress became restless in the late evening.

The foresters who had erected double nylon nets around the area where Zeenat had been cornered, had also placed floodlights on the tops of trees, and the tranquilisation experts were targeting her from the top of an earth-moving machine.

'Ruling, Oppn parties must act together to curb infiltration'

Mahakumbh chief convener concerned over the arrest of a number of Bangladeshi terrorists in Bengal

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 29 DECEMBER

All Opposition parties of West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura should cooperate with the central government, along with the state governments, to prevent infiltration and terrorist activities from Bangladesh without politicising the issue, stated Swami Vishokananda Bharati Maharaj, the chief convener of the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Sunday.

He expressed strong concern over the arrests of a series of terrorists from Bangladesh's dreaded terrorist groups in West Bengal and Assam, as well as the arrest of numerous Bangladeshi infiltrators.

Swami Vishokananda will inaugurate the royal bath of the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj



when it starts. Ahead of that, he is visiting Kolkata to invite the heads of various monastic organisations in West Bengal to the Mahakumbh.

He was the keynote speaker on the concluding day of a three-day conference of religious leaders organised by Acharya Sri Ramanuj Vitthal Maharaj, the president of the Akhil Bharat Jayguru Sam-

praday, addressing the persecution and killings of minorities in Bangladesh.

Swami Vishokananda said that under the interim government of Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh, at least 700 militants were released from prison through various means.

"In this situation, the security of Hindus in Bangladesh

has suddenly come under serious threat. At the same time, various terrorist organisations have reactivated 'sleeper cells' in India. These groups have begun the process of sending people across the border to different parts of India with the aim of carrying out major acts of sabotage. In coordination with militants active in India, a new base is being established in Dhaka. Given this situation, I urge all political parties in the three states to work together in the interest of the nation as these states have porous India-Bangladesh borders. We are facing a deep crisis," said Swami Vishokananda.

He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should take a firm stance on the Bangladesh issue, similar to that of erstwhile Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Priyanath Chattopadhyay, president of the Omkarnath

Mission and senior member of Akhil Bharat Jay Guru Sampraday, said lakhs of signatures would be collected from monks and devotees at the Mahakumbh Mela over a few days and sent to the United Nations and the new US President Donald Trump to sensitise them regarding various atrocities committed by subversive outfits in Bangladesh, especially on women and children.

"We provide newspaper documents as well as video clippings to highlight how barbaric attacks were perpetrated on Hindu women and children," said Priyanath Chatterjee.

Swami Vishokananda, meanwhile, praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for making exceptional arrangements and significant infrastructural improvements for the Maha Kumbh.

Siliguri holds its sixth Pride Walk



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SILIGURI, 29 DECEMBER

Siliguri witnessed its sixth Pride Walk today, organised by members of the LGBT community, who marched through the city demanding their fundamental rights, including those for adoption, marriage, and the recognition of love.

The LGBT group first united in Siliguri in 2018 and has since been organising such pride rallies to raise awareness about their issues. Despite a turnout of fewer than 100 participants this year, organisers noted that many others were unable to join due to social

stigma and pressures.

One participant highlighted their challenges, saying, "We are often victims of molestation, torture, rape, and assault. Sadly, when we seek justice, the police often dismiss our complaints. The recent incident at R.G. Kar Medical College has shocked us deeply, as it reflects the continued marginalisation of our community."

Diksha Kundu, one of the organisers, explained: "This is the sixth Pride Rally in Siliguri since we started in 2018. Similar rallies are held across the country, all demanding basic human rights for the LGBT community. Our primary focus is on securing

legal recognition for adoption and marriage, as these are fundamental to our lives and love."

Another member expressed hope for change, adding: "We appeal to the Supreme Court to grant us marriage rights. While there is a 1% reservation for transgender individuals, local authorities have yet to implement this appropriately."

The rally, which included slogans demanding justice for the R.G. Kar incident, served as a poignant reminder of the ongoing struggles faced by the LGBT community and their determination to achieve equality.

Four more Bengal workers apprehended in Manipur for flouting Inner Line Permit rule

AGENCIES
IMPHAL, 29 DECEMBER

Four more workers from West Bengal have been apprehended for flouting the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system in Manipur, taking the total number of violations from other states to 33 this month.

A police official in Imphal said that four workers from West Bengal's Uttar Dinajpur (also known as North Dinajpur) were apprehended from Yairipok Bishnunaha water reservoir construction site in Thoubal district on Saturday and they would soon be deported from Manipur to their home state after completing the formalities.

Legal action has been initiated against the four detainees identified as Afsar Ali (22), Md. Sanfaraj (20), Md. Rahamtullah (23) and Sahabaj Alam (20) as per the provisions of the ILP system.

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh in a post on social media platform X said: "I



appeal to all employers, contractors, and residents to cooperate with the authorities in implementing the ILP system effectively."

Earlier this month, police detected 29 persons in Imphal West district for flouting ILP guidelines and they have been deported and sent to their home states – West Bengal and Assam.

The 29 individuals were working in a bakery in the Mayang Imphal Bengeon area under the Labour Category ILPs. "Their Labour Category ILPs were cancelled and the apprehended 29 individuals have been deported and sent to their respective home states," the official said.

Manipur Home Department earlier issued instructions to the District Administration concerned and the Deputy Labour Commissioner to conduct a detailed inquiry into such lapses and initiate stern action against the involved government officials.

The Chief Minister had earlier said that the state government has constituted a committee at the state level to review the overall implementation of ILP in the state with the Commissioner (Home) as Chairman and representatives of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), Chief Electoral Officer, Land Resource Department, DCs and Senior Superintendent of Police of districts as members.

In view of the unrest in Bangladesh, all the northeastern states, including Manipur, have further strengthened their vigil and drive against the infiltrators.

The ILP under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation,

1873 is an official travel document that allows an Indian citizen to visit the ILP-enforced state and areas for a limited period and with a specific purpose.

The ILP, which aims to protect the identity and existence of the Indigenous people, has been in force in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

Obtaining the ILP is mandatory for anyone who is not an indigenous inhabitant of these northeastern states and after obtaining the permit, the individual can enter these states for a specified period and specific purpose.

Agitations are being held on and off to promulgate the ILP in Meghalaya.

Following the political crisis in neighbouring Bangladesh, various tribal bodies, and civil society organisations in some northeastern states are demanding enforcement of the ILP very strictly to prevent the influx of illegal immigrants into the northeastern states.

BSF arrests smuggler with 8.5 kg silver ornaments along Indo-Bangladesh border

AGENCIES
KOLKATA, 29 DECEMBER

The Border Security Force (BSF) claims to have arrested a cross-border smuggler in the North 24-Parganas district of West Bengal on Saturday with silver ornaments weighing 8.5 kg. He was planning to smuggle the ornaments, valued at nearly Rs 6,17,004, to Bangladesh.

"Troops of the 143 Battalion BSF, posted at Tarali-1 Border Outpost, were carrying out checks at the Hakimpur checkpoint when they came across a motorcyclist moving towards the Indo-Bangladesh Border (IBB). The jawans stopped



the man and carried out a thorough search. The ornaments were found inside the air filter and tail light cavities of the motorcycle," said N K Pandey, DIG and spokesperson, BSF, South Bengal Frontier.

The man, along with the motorcycle, was taken to the Tarali-1 BOP, where he was interrogated. He claimed to be a resident of the Swarupdaha

village in the Swarup Nagar police station area of North 24-Parganas.

"He also claimed that an unknown person from Bithari Bazaar had given him the motorcycle and informed him of the silver ornaments inside. He was supposed to cross the BSF domination line through the Hakimpur checkpoint and hand over the vehicle, along with the silver, to another person close to the IBB. For this, he was to receive Rs 1,300. We have handed him over, along with the seized silver and motorcycle, to the customs department in Tentulia," Pandey added.

The DIG praised the efforts

of the BSF jawans. "Due to their alertness, criminals are being apprehended along the IBB on a regular basis and seizures are being made. The BSF will not allow smuggling or any other crimes along the border. Those involved in such activities will get into trouble unless they mend their ways," he said.

Another senior BSF official said that while gold is smuggled from Bangladesh to India, silver – particularly ornaments – is illegally sent from India to the neighbouring country. There is high demand for Indian-made silver ornaments in Bangladesh, and smugglers take advantage, he said.

Great loss to country, Congress party: Abhijit Mukherjee on demise of Manmohan Singh

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 29 DECEMBER

Abhijit Mukherjee, the son of former President Pranab Mukherjee, on Sunday expressed deep sorrow over the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and said that the passing away of the late leader is a great loss to the country and the Congress party.

"I couldn't attend his funeral but tomorrow or the day after I will go and pay tribute if they allow us. It is a great loss to the country and Congress. The last rites are the rights of families, so as per the Sikh ritual, it has been done," said Abhijit Mukherjee while speaking to ANI.

Sharing his mind over the controversy surrounding Manmohan Singh's cremation, Mukherjee said, "I don't think there should be a controversy. We want a memorial



(for him). I appeal to the government and fully endorse Congress President Mallikarjun's appeal to the govt, they should think about it."

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders, during a party meeting on Sunday, observed a moment of silence to express grief over the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and prayed for peace

of the departed soul during the organisational meeting of the party.

Manmohan Singh passed away on Thursday night at the age of 92 at AIIMS Delhi.

Earlier today, the ashes of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh have been immersed at the Yamuna Ghat near the Gurdwara Majnu Ka Tila Sahib in Delhi,

a day after he was cremated with full state honours at Nigambodh Ghat.

His ashes were brought to the Gurdwara Majnu Ka Tila Sahib earlier today.

The family of the late former PM Manmohan Singh performed rituals at the Gurdwara including Shabad Kirtan (musical recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib), Paath (recitation of Gurbani) and Ardas. On Saturday, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was cremated with full state honours at Nigambodh Ghat in Delhi's Kashmir Gate in the presence of his family, friends, colleagues and government dignitaries.

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh paid their last respects to the former PM by placing a wreath near his mortal remains earlier today.

TENDER

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
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The Executive Engineer Salt Lake Reclamation Division invites two no. online percentage rate basis e-tenders vide Tender ID No. 2024 UDD 789600.1 & 2 WBUD & MA/EE/SLRD/NIT-371e/2024-25 of EE/SLRD dated 23/12/2024. Values of work are Rs. 8.85,157.00 and 10,28,967.00. Start and Last date of submission of bid online are 30/12/2024 and 06/01/2025 & 13/01/2025 upto 13:00 Hrs. respectively. All documents can be seen/obtained from the website: <https://wbidders.gov.in> Detailed information can also be seen in the website: www.wburbanservices.gov.in and Office Notice Board. Sd/- Executive Engineer, Salt Lake Reclamation Division. ICA: 7240470204

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
KMDA TENDER NOTICE
e-NIT No. 02/EE/SCD-R&B/KMDA/2024-25
Online Bids are invited by the Executive Engineer, SCD-I, R&B Sector, KMDA, Block-D, 3rd floor, Unnayan Bhavan, Salt Lake, Kolkata-700091, from bonafide, reliable, experienced & resourceful firms / individuals contractors, joint ventures / consortium, for the work, Sl. No. Name of Work, Value of the work, Earnest Money, Time of Completion, (1) Painting work for Kalkapur Bridge of both flanks on E.M. Bypass. Tender ID: 2024_KMDA_789286_1, Rs.3,35,202/-, Rs.6,704/- [Online through e-Procurement System of Govt. of W.B.], 10 days, (2) Painting work for Metropolitan Bridge of both flanks on E.M. Bypass. Tender ID: 2024_KMDA_789286_2, Rs.6,02,672/-, Rs.12,053/- [Online through e-Procurement System of Govt. of W.B.], 10 days, (3) Painting work for Naskarhat Bridge, DD1 Bridge, Mandirpur Bridge, Makinipur Bridge and Garia Dhola Bridge of both flanks on E.M. Bypass. Tender ID: 2024_KMDA_789286_3, Rs.5,15,060/-, Rs.10,301/- [Online through e-Procurement System of Govt. of W.B.], 10 days, (4) Painting work of Chingrighata Bridge, Chingrighata 6 cell box Bridge, Captain Bannery Bridge & Metropolitan Bridge on EM Bypass. Tender ID: 2024_KMDA_789286_4, Rs.2,26,657/-, Rs.4,533/- [Online through e-Procurement System of Govt. of W.B.], 10 days Last date & time of Online Bid submission: 13.01.2025 upto 14.00 hrs., for details consult the above office or visit both websites. www.kmda.wb.gov.in www.wbtenders.gov.in ICA: 72406020204

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Bid reference no.-: WBMSCL/NIT-766/2024; Dated - 26/12/2024
SITC of 06 nos. split AC with electrical works and light fan for the rest room at different location of Raiganj GMCH (SSH Building) 2nd Call(Rattier Saathi). Last date of submission of bid (online) - 07/01/2025 at 03.00 P.M. The tender document can be downloaded from www.wbmsc.gov.in or www.wbtenders.gov.in on or after 28/12/2024 at 05.00 P.M. Clarification requests, if any may be sent to cpes@wbmsc.gov.in Sd/- General Manager, WBMSCL & Joint Secretary to the Govt. of West Bengal. ICA: 72406020204

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
West Bengal Medical Services Corporation Ltd. is inviting online bids for the works mentioned below - Name of the work: NIT Ref. No. Last date of submission of bid (online) Repairing & Restoration of Existing Fire Protection & Detection System of Kaldip Super Speciality Hospital, District- South 24 Parganas. WBMSCL/NIT-768/2024 Dated-26/12/2024, 14.01.2025 upto 3.00 P.M. Tender can be downloaded from www.wbtenders.gov.in or www.wbmsc.gov.in on or after 31/12/2024 at 11:00 A.M. Clarification requests, if any may be sent to info@wbmsc.gov.in or call 033 40340410. Sd/- General Manager, WBMSCL & Joint Secretary to the Govt. of West Bengal. ICA: 72406020204

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Bid reference no. WBMSCL/NIT-767/2024, Dated - 26/12/2024
West Bengal Medical Services Corporation Ltd. is inviting online bids for "Construction of sitting room of on duty doctors at the OT section(5th floor), M5 sheet grill gates and repairing of collapsible gates at Mortuary ward and urgent supply, installation and AMC of water purifier at different floors of Baripuri SSH, South 24 Parganas on basis of Rattier Sathi (2nd Call)." Last date of submission of bid (online) - 13.01.2025 upto 12.00 P.M. The tender document can be downloaded from www.wbmsc.gov.in and www.wbtenders.gov.in on or after 31/12/2024 at 11:00 A.M. Clarification requests, if any may be sent to krishnaill76banerjee@gmail.com Sd/- Managing Director, WBMSCL & Special Commissioner, H&FW, Govt. of West Bengal. ICA: 72406020204

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
West Bengal Renewable Energy Development Agency [WBREDA]
(An Organisation under Department of Non-Conventional & Renewable Energy Sources, Government of West Bengal)
Bikalpa Shakti Bhawan, Plot - J1/L10, Block - EP & GP Sector - V, Salt Lake Electronics Complex, Kolkata - 700 091
Notice Inviting e-Tender
NIT No: WBREDA/NIT-28/2024-25 dt. 23.12.2024
WBREDA invites e-tender for Design, Engineering, Manufacturing / Procurement, Testing, Supply, Installation and Commissioning of 1200 LPD Solar Water Heating System per site with Cumulative capacity 8400 LPD with 5 years Comprehensive Maintenance on turnkey basis at different Ekalavya Model Schools/Hostels/kitchens in various Districts of West Bengal. The NIT can be accessed from WBREDA website (www.wbreda.org) and can be downloaded from <https://wbidders.gov.in> portal from 30.12.2024, 4.00 P.M. onwards. The last date of submission of bid is 14.01.2025 upto to 3.00 P.M. Sd/- Divisional Engineer-II, WBREDA. ICA: 72406020204

epaper.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Sisters crushed to death at Memari Railway Station: Two sisters from Bankura, on their way to attend the last rite of their sister's dead husband, were crushed to death by an express train in Memari in East Burdwan today. The sisters - Pakhi Bhuiyan (40) and Jharna Bhuiyan (35) of Gorabari locality in Rani-bandh PS limits were heading for Khanyan in Hooghly to attend the last rites of their brother-in-law. They were crossing the Railway tracks carelessly at the Memari Railway Station when the UP Howrah-Malda Intercity Express passed through the platform No: 1. Both were crushed to death on the spot. **SNS**

Railways set to deploy Kavach 4.0 on key routes

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SILIGURI, 29 DECEMBER

In a significant push to enhance train safety and operational efficiency, Indian Railways is set to deploy the advanced Kavach 4.0 automatic train protection system across key routes. This upgraded technology aims to prevent accidents and ensure smooth train operations, offering an additional layer of safety and control.

Speaking on the initiative, Chief Public Relations Officer of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), K K Sharma, stated that approximately 1,966 Route Kilometres (RKM) from Malda Town to Dibrugarh have been earmarked for the implementation of Kavach 4.0. Locomotives equipped with earlier versions of Kavach will be upgraded to the latest version under this programme.

Kavach 4.0 integrates several advanced features, including Station Kavach: This system communicates with Loco Kavach and signalling systems to guide locomotives effectively. Secondly, RFID Tags: Installed along tracks, these tags monitor train location and direction, ensuring precise operations.

These innovations aim to minimise human error, streamline train connectivity, and prevent accidents.

As a part of a 'Broader Safety Mission', Indian Railways has consistently prioritised safety by adopting cutting-edge technology. The rollout of Kavach 4.0 marks a major step in modernising infrastructure and improving safety standards. "This initiative reflects Indian Railways' commitment to providing safer rail travel and strengthening the country's railway network," Mr Sharma added.

By leveraging Kavach 4.0, Indian Railways seeks to bolster passenger confidence, reduce mishaps, and pave the way for a safer and more efficient transportation system.

'Bengal Police have tightened security to counter terrorism and infiltration threats'

Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar said police are highly active in countering terrorism and are working silently to ensure the safety of residents

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 29 DECEMBER

No one can exploit the unrest in Bangladesh to create disturbances on this side of the border, as the state police are vigilant in this matter. This was stated by the Director General (DG) of Police, Rajeev Kumar, during a press conference on Sunday.

He emphasised that both the West Bengal and Kolkata police are highly active in countering terrorism and are working silently to ensure the safety of the state's residents.

Recently, in a joint operation conducted by the police forces of West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir, a ter-

rorist was arrested from Canning. According to police sources, the arrested individual is a member of the banned terrorist organisation Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen based in Kashmir.

Rajeev Kumar said, "The information provided by the STF (Special Task Force) of the West Bengal Police led to the arrest of the Kashmiri resident. We have maintained a good record in counter-terrorism efforts in the past and will continue to uphold it in the future."

Rajeev Kumar claimed that it was the Bengal police who tracked and apprehended the Kashmiri terrorist. He stated: "We tracked his movements for two days, closely monitoring his activities, and then informed the



Kashmir police. We are silently doing our work. Especially in cases related to terrorism, we cannot disclose too many

details publicly. But this does not mean we are inactive."

Mr Kumar indirectly crit-

icised the Border Security Force (BSF) regarding incidents of infiltration across the Bangladesh-India border.

He remarked: "West Bengal is the only state that shares borders with three countries. Border security is the responsibility of the BSF, but there are several lapses in this regard. Over the past few days, many people have crossed the border into Bengal, and such incidents continue. However, we remain vigilant. We are arresting infiltrators and ensuring they are sent to the appropriate authorities."

Mr Kumar, however, refrained from making harsh criticisms against any investigating or security agencies. Instead, he emphasised the

need for collaboration, acknowledging that all agencies, including the police, have room for improvement.

He further credited public cooperation for the success of West Bengal Police in tackling terrorism. "We are successful because we receive support from the public. Just as we work for the people, the people also stand with us. Although we cannot reveal all the details, many individuals actively assist us. We are committed to ensuring the safety of the state's residents," said the DG.

Following the arrest of the Kashmiri terrorist from Canning, some have speculated that terrorist organisations are using Bengal as a 'corridor' to infiltrate India

from Bangladesh and carry out activities. The Tripura border has also been reportedly used for similar purposes.

Addressing these concerns, the DG stated: "Given West Bengal's geographical location, anyone entering India from Bangladesh and heading towards Kashmir or the western parts of India would have to pass through this state. There is no alternative route. Trust us. We are silently doing our work." Mr Kumar assured that the police will become even more vigilant about infiltration using forged passports. He said that in the coming days, district police superintendents will personally supervise the passport verification process.

VOICE OF PROTEST



On the 3rd day of the extended dharna of the Abhaya Mancha on the RG Kar issue on Sunday. ■ SNS

Arrested Bangladeshi national frequently changed locations in Bengal

AGENCIES
KOLKATA, 29 DECEMBER

Abiyur Rahman, the illegal Bangladeshi infiltrator who was arrested on December 27 by Kolkata Police from a hotel in Marquis Street in central Kolkata along with fake Indian identity documents, including passport, had been frequently changing his accommodations since he started residing in India permanently since 2023.

Kolkata Police insiders said that although he started residing in different places of West Bengal in 2023, he started the process of getting the fake Indian documents in 2017.

In this case, too, sources said, he followed the same pattern of first getting the ration card, followed by EPIC, PAN and Aadhaar cards and finally the fake Indian passport in 2023, after which he started residing permanently in West Ben-



gal.

Incidentally, at the time when he was arrested, he suppressed the fact of holding a fake Indian passport, which the investigating officials later recovered.

He first started residing at Madhyamgram in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal and subsequently shifted to the minority-dominated Khidirpur area in south Kolkata. The last two places where he had been staying were in the New Market area and finally at the hotel in the Marquis Street area where he was arrested.

A city police insider said

that such frequent changes in the locations of his accommodation have made the investigating officers apprehensive that Rahman was for something quite major which the cops are trying to extract through interrogation.

Incidentally, the hotel from where Rahman, an original resident of Nariel in Bangladesh, was arrested was located at Marquis Street under Park Street Police Station in central Kolkata, the same locality from where former Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) associate Selim Matabbar was arrested. He was also staying at a hotel there posing as an Indian citizen with a fake passport.

Incidentally, there are several hotels in the Marquis Street area providing accommodation to Bangladeshi citizens coming to India on either tourist or medical visas.

Seventh arrest in Bengal fake passport racket case, helped illegal Bangladeshi nationals

AGENCIES
KOLKATA, 29 DECEMBER

The Kolkata Police, on Sunday, arrested a man in connection with a racket operating out of West Bengal which was engaged in arranging fake Indian identity documents, including passports, for illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators entering India through the porous borders of the state.

This is the seventh arrest from the state made in the case. The arrested agent has been identified as Manoj Gupta. He had been arrested from his rented accommodation in the Chandpara area under the Gaighata Police station in North 24 Parganas district.



He will be presented at a court in Kolkata on Sunday and the public prosecutor will seek his police custody.

City police insiders said that Gupta had connections with a fake travel agency operating from Behala in the southern outskirts of Kolkata which was actually engaged in a racket for arranging fake Indian identity for illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators.

The main role of Gupta, city police insiders said, was to act as the middleman between the fake travel agency operators and those illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators willing to pay hefty amounts to get fake Indian identity documents for them.

Sources said that from the hard disc of the personal computer at Gupta's residence several incriminating documents regarding the creation of the fake Indian documents have been seized by the investigating officials.

Incidentally, Dipankar Das, who was arrested earlier by the city police in this connection, also had connections with the same travel agency operating from Behala.

Since December 15, the West Bengal Police have arrested seven persons in connection with a fake passport racket.

The investigating officials have identified a pattern in the operations of such rackets engaged in arranging fake Indian passports for the illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators. Any infiltrator illegally crossing over to the Indian territory, contacting the local agents and showing willingness to pay out hefty amounts for getting fake Indian identity documents are first provided with safe shelters at the different villages adjacent to the borders with Bangladesh in the state, both land and coastal.

Abhishek Banerjee slams the silence of film stars and sports personalities on Manmohan Singh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 29 DECEMBER

Abhishek Banerjee, national general secretary of the Trinamul Congress, strongly criticised film and sports personalities, often considered role models, for their silence on the death of former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh.

In an X post, Mr Banerjee urged people not to glorify those who prioritise their careers and comfort over courage and accountability. He said such indifference from these individuals is not new. They remained silent during the farmers' agitation, the CAA-NRC movement, and the ongoing crisis in Manipur. Their silence demonstrates a troubling detachment from the struggles of ordinary citizens.

"They have built their wealth and fame by leveraging public admiration, yet they shy away

from taking even the smallest moral stand when the nation needs them most. The power of 1.4 billion Indians is immense. It's time we demand integrity and accountability from those we elevate as icons. Let this New Year 2025 mark a shift in our collective consciousness towards valuing those who stand tall for justice, democracy, and the nation's well-being," he wrote.

Mr Banerjee further tweeted: "India has lost one of its greatest statesmen, Dr Manmohan Singh, whose immense knowledge and visionary leadership reshaped the nation's economy. As the architect of the 1991 economic reforms, his contributions remain unparalleled, steering India onto a path of growth and global recognition. Tributes poured in from across the political spectrum, reflecting the immense respect he commanded."

"However, it is both shocking and disheartening to see the

complete silence from prominent figures in the Sports and Film industries - individuals who are often celebrated as role models. Their reluctance to even acknowledge Dr Singh's passing raises uncomfortable questions about their priorities, responsibility, and integrity. It appears this silence is driven by the fear of government backlash, as staying silent on national issues has become the norm for many of these so-called icons." This pattern of indifference is not new. These same individuals remained silent during the farmers' protest, the CAA-NRC movement, and the ongoing crisis in Manipur. Their silence in the face of such critical issues highlights a troubling detachment from the struggles of ordinary citizens. They have built their wealth and fame by leveraging public admiration, yet they shy away from taking even the smallest moral stand when the nation

needs them most."

"As we enter a new year, it's time to reconsider who we look up to as role models. Let's stop glorifying those who prioritise their careers and comfort over courage and accountability. Instead, let us honour and support those who truly contribute to our nation and society - our freedom fighters, soldiers, and individuals who sacrificed their lives for the greater good. Let's channel our energy and resources into meaningful actions: supporting a child's education, feeding a needy family, or uplifting someone struggling. The power of 1.4 billion Indians is immense. It's time we demand integrity and accountability from those we elevate as icons. Let this New Year 2025 mark a shift in our collective consciousness towards valuing those who stand tall for justice, democracy, and the nation's well-being," he wrote.

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YSRCP alleges police excesses against social media activists

The Opposition party has claimed that 336 cases have been filed against its social media activists

ANINDITA CHOWDHURY
HYDERABAD, 29 DECEMBER

The crackdown by the Andhra Pradesh government on social media activists belonging to the YSRCP has led the Opposition party to complain about police excess and misuse of section 111 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita meant for fighting organized crime like drugs and human trafficking to suppress dissent.

The Opposition party has claimed that 336 cases have been filed against its social media activists since the crackdown began including 36 cases filed under Section 111 of BNS resulting in 27 arrests.

The NDA-backed state government launched the crackdown against YSRCP supporters alleging misuse of social media to defame women and indulge in character assassination.

The objectionable con-

tent was posted to target chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu and deputy chief minister Pawan Kalyan and their families, state home minister Vangalapudi Anitha, and even APCC chief YS Sharmila who is the sister of YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Even the High Court directed the CBI to conduct a probe against defamatory content in social media against the judiciary in 2020 when the YSRCP was in power.

However, the YSRCP has accused the TDP-led state government of targeting its leaders and social media activists, and influencers through this crackdown in order to silence criticism, intimidate them, and stifle dissent in the state.

The Opposition party has stated that the state police was indulging in excess and applying section 111 of the BNS which is meant to tackle organised crime against polit-



ical activists. Multiple FIRs are being filed in several districts against an individual for the same posts on social media.

According to YSRCP, Varra Raveendra Reddy, a party supporter faces 20 cases in 10 districts including one by CID. Moreover, the party alleged that he was detained on 8 November but his arrest was only shown on 10 November and he was kept illegally

in custody for more than 48 hours.

Another supporter Puli Sagar, who is a Dalit, was allegedly "verbally abused, stripped, and locked in a cell" for questioning the flood relief undertaken by the TDP government. He has now complained to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Human Rights Commission against his incarceration.

Outgoing Governor Arif Mohammad Khan bids a heartfelt farewell to Kerala

ACHUTHANANDAN KUNIYIL
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
29 DECEMBER

Outgoing Governor Arif Mohammed Khan left Kerala bidding a heartfelt farewell to the state with heartfelt remarks that Kerala would hold a special place in his heart and his association with it is lifelong.

Arif Mohammed Khan, who left the Raj Bhavan at 11 am on Sunday, said he was extremely grateful for the love, affection, and support the people of the state had shown to him.

Beginning his brief address in Malayalam, Khan said, "My term as governor has ended. But the relationship will continue. It will be a lifelong relationship with Kerala. I am extremely grateful for the love, affection, and support the people of the state had shown to

me. I am leaving with the most beautiful memories of my Kerala life. I will always remember you all. May all the best come to everyone in Kerala."

"There was no issue with the government, except for the matter concerning the universities," he said, adding, "I wish the government all the best. I hope they will work for the welfare of people."

Khan, who served as the Kerala governor since 2019, completed his five-year term in the role on September 5, 2024. His tenure has been marked by controversies and conflicts. The LDF government has been at loggerheads with Khan over various issues.

Notably, Khan's departure was without an official farewell ceremony from the Kerala government. Neither Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan nor any of

his Cabinet colleagues turned up to see him off. However, the chief secretary and the state police chief had come to greet Governor Khan. State Chief Secretary Sarada Muraliedharan presented the state government's memento to Khan on Saturday.

Though an official farewell to him could not be organised owing to the state mourning of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's death, the absence of dignitaries from the Cabinet even for an informal farewell to Khan was noticeable in the backdrop of the intense governor-government rift in Kerala over the last few years. The send-off programme at the Raj Bhavan was also cancelled due to the declaration of a seven-day national mourning following the death of Manmohan Singh.

Investigations on in Sandhya Theatre stampede case: Telangana DGP

AGENCIES
HYDERABAD, 29 DECEMBER

Investigations are on in the 4 December stampede at Sandhya Theatre which claimed the life of a woman during the premiere show of "Pushpa 2: The Rule" and law would take its own course, Telangana Director General of Police Dr Jitender said on Sunday.

The police chief's statement came in response to a query about the case against actor Allu Arjun.

"Let us not talk about this. A lot of things have gone. The case is already under investigation. The court is also looking into various aspects of the case. It's a sub-judice also," he said.

"Moreover, the law will take its own course. This is what I have to say. Nothing more," the DGP added.

A 38-year-old woman was

killed and her eight-year-old son was critically injured during the premiere of the movie at Sandhya Theatre which was attended by actor Allu Arjun.

Day after the stampede, the police booked the theatre management, Allu Arjun, and his team for culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Allu Arjun, who is named accused number 11 in the case, was arrested on 13 December. He was produced before a city court, which remanded him to 14-day judicial custody.

The High Court granted him interim bail the same day. He was released from Chanchalguda Jail the next day.

As the 14-day judicial remand period ended on 27 December, the actor appeared before the Nampally Court virtually.

Telangana initiates process to bring back accused in phone tapping case from US

AGENCIES
HYDERABAD, 29 DECEMBER

Telangana Police have initiated the process to bring back two accused, including the former chief of Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) T. Prabhakar Rao, to India from the United States in the phone-tapping case.

Director General of Police Jitender that their request for Red Corner Notices (RCNs) is with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

"We have initiated the process. It is already with the CBI. Let us hope because the international process takes some time. I have worked in CBI. I know about it. In many cases, it takes years," the police chief said while replying to a query during a year-end press conference.

"The international process is not that simple because there are so many guidelines, so many practices," he said.

The DGP said that Interpol, which issues Red Corner notices, has several standard operating procedures.



It was in August that the state police approached the CBI for a request to issue an RCN against Prabhakar Rao and managing director of a private news channel Sravan Kumar.

The phone-tapping allegations under the previous government of BRS came to light in March this year with the arrest of Deputy Superintendent of Police Praneeth Rao following a complaint from his superior, D. Ramesh, Additional SP with the SIB.

Then chief of SIB, Prabhakar Rao had allegedly constituted a team within the bureau with his trusted aides including Praneeth Rao for surveillance of rival political leaders, their families

and dissidents within the ruling party, businessmen, journalists and even judges.

The police have so far named six accused in the case. Praneeth Rao, Additional SPs Thirupathanna and Bhujanga Rao and former DCP P. Radha Kishan Rao were arrested in the case.

The police had last month questioned former MLAs Jaipal Yadav and Chirumarthi Lingaiah in the phone tapping case.

Last week, Telangana High Court reserved the orders on a bail petition filed by Bhujanga Rao. It also extended his interim bail till December 30. The public prosecutor had prayed to the court to dismiss the petition on the ground that his ailments were not as serious as claimed by him and on this ground, he has been out of prison for the last four and half months.

The High Court also granted interim bail to retired police officer Radhakishan Rao for four days to attend his father-in-law's death anniversary rituals.

(Representational image)

Year-ENDER: LWE saw significant decline in 2024 as India set sights on eradication by 2026

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 29 DECEMBER

The year 2024 saw a significant decline in Maoist activities, with the Central government setting a deadline to finish off Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) by March 2026. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is learnt to have asked the officials and agencies responsible to tackle this menace to expedite the process. The Prime Minister wants LWE to be wiped out within the next 15 months.

In the month of October this year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah reaffirmed the government's commitment to eradicating LEW by 2026. As the year draws to a close now, the combination of intensified



security operations, increased infrastructure development, and proactive social programmes signals that LWE is nearing its end in India.

Despite the ongoing challenges in regions like Bastar (Chhattisgarh) and the continued presence of key leaders, security forces with the government's support are on the job to eliminate the menace of LWE. Intelligence estimates suggest that approximately 3,000 Maoists are still active,

predominantly in Chhattisgarh. However, LWE's grip on the country is steadily weakening. This year, security forces made major breakthroughs in dismantling Maoists' strongholds in the state of Chhattisgarh. Regions like Abujmahar, once a LWE-dominated pocket, now see many families returning to their homes. These families had left their homes due to threats by Maoists.

There are several camps of security forces now in these regions, instilling a sense of confidence among the locals. In one of the largest operations, the Border Security Force (BSF) eliminated 29 Maoists, including top Maoist leader Shankar Rao, in April. In October, another major operation in Chhattisgarh

resulted in the killing of 31 Maoists, with no casualties on the security forces' side.

The government's efforts to curb Maoist violence have shown impressive results.

The number of LWE-affected districts dropped significantly from 126 in 2018 to just 38 in 2024.

The violence related to LWE has decreased by 73 per cent compared to 2010, with a remarkable 86 per cent drop in deaths. The reduction in LWE-related incidents continued in 2024, with a 25 per cent decline from the previous year.

The government also allocated Rs 4,350 crore from 2019 to 2024 to enhance security and infrastructure in LWE-affected areas.

NHAI invites tenders for Telangana's Regional Ring Road

AGENCIES
HYDERABAD, 29 DECEMBER

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has invited tenders for the construction of the northern part of the Regional Ring Road (RRR) in Telangana with a total estimated cost of Rs 5,554.02 crore.

The northern part of the RRR from Sangareddy to Choutuppal will be executed in five packages.

The RRR's northern part will be 161.518 km long. The deadline for this four-lane, access-controlled greenfield regional expressway is two years.

The NHAI had decided to undertake this project in Engineering, Procurement, and

Construction (EPC) mode. The maintenance period of the project will be five years. The project will be executed in five packages. Package-1 is from Girmapur village at Sangareddy to Reddipalle (34.5 km) and this is estimated to cost Rs 1,529.19 crore.

Package 2 from Reddipalle to Islampur (26 km) will be executed for Rs 1,114.8 crore. Package-3 from Islampur to Pragnapur (23 km) Rs 1,184.81 crore, Package-4 from Pragnapur to Rayagiri (43 km) Rs 1,728.22 crore and Package-5 from Rayagiri village to Tangadpalle village (35 km) Rs 1,547 crore. The Centre has sanctioned Rs 7,104.06 crore for RRR, which is expected to be a "super game-changer" for Telangana.

People are fed up with both Cong and BJP: K Kavitha

AGENCIES
NIZAMABAD, 29 DECEMBER

Bharat Rashtara Samithi MLC K Kavitha received a welcome as she returned to her constituency, Nizamabad, after a gap of 10 months. Speaking to the agencies, she launched a scathing attack on the Congress and BJP for neglecting the region's development.

"There is absolutely no talk of development and fulfilment of promises by the Congress government in Nizamabad," Kavitha remarked, adding that both major national parties had failed the people of Telangana.

She pointed out the lack of action from the BJP MP from Nizamabad, saying: "The BJP MP here has never asked about Telangana in Parliament, nor has he done any new development in Telangana or Nizamabad."

She also slammed the Congress government in the state, accusing it of turning a blind eye to the region's

needs. "People are fed up with both Congress and BJP," Kavitha said. The BRS leader's return was met with fervent enthusiasm from her supporters, with party workers thronging the streets to greet her. Kavitha, who is the daughter of Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababu Naidu, has been an active voice for her party in the region.

Earlier this week, BRS MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha accused the Congress government in Telangana of functioning under the BJP's influence, alleging collusion between the two parties to target regional forces and suppress opposition voices.

Addressing the media at Telangana Bhavan, on Monday, Kavitha highlighted a pattern of political conspiracy. She claimed that recent cases against BRS Working President K.T. Rama Rao (KTR) were politically motivated and part of a vendetta campaign orchestrated after Chief Minister Revanth Reddy met with BJP leaders in Delhi.

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Any person who has a claim in respect of the said Shares should lodge the same with the Company at its Registered Office within 21 days from this date else the Company will proceed to issue Duplicate Certificates to the aforesaid applicants without any further.

Folio No.	Name of Shareholder	No. of shares	Dist Nos. Fm. To.	Cert. No. Fm. To.
D001507	Himadri Speciality Chemical Ltd.	2270	002494601-00249470	0006115
			005162992-005163091	0042200
			005163092-005163118	0042201

Jagabandhu Daw
9230622763

CHANGE OF NAME

UTTAR Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Pundibari, Cooch Behar – Abridged NleT No. 13 of 2024-25 – Ref. No. 1046 / UBKV / Est. / Tend (WD), Date: 26-12-2024 – Sealed e-Tender in two-bid system is hereby invited for Civil and Electrical works of UBKV, Pundibari, Cooch Behar from bona fide and experienced agencies. Last date of submission of tender is 13-01-2025 (up to 2-00 p.m.). For details log on to website: www.ubkv.ac.in & www.wbtenders.gov.in Registrar (Actg.)

TENDER

The Statesman

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KOLKATA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION e - TENDER

ABRIDGED NIT

The Director General (Civil), KMC invites e-Tender online percentage rate two bid system for the following work:
NIT No. : KMC/D.G.(C)/IX/079/038/2024-2025
Name of work : Restoration of footpath by paverblock disturbed by RVNL from Mominpore junction to Mominpore post office in Ward No. 079. Estimate Amount (including GST & CESS): ₹ 6,66,124.00. Earnest Money: ₹ 13,400.00. Period of Completion: 60 days. Last Date and Time of submission of Bid : 11.01.2025 - 12 Noon. Tender will be opened on: 13.01.2025 - 12 Noon. The bid forms and other details are available on and from 02.01.2025 (5 p.m.) from the website: <https://etender.wb.nic.in>
The Director General (Bustee), KMC invites e-Tender online percentage rate two bid system for the following work:
NIT No. : KMC/EEBS/HQ/60/24-25/186 (1st Call)
Name of work : Repairing of bustee passage at different places of 21 Jannagar Road, Linton Street and its surrounding area in Ward No. 60. Estimate Amount (including GST & LWC): ₹ 8,38,005.35. Earnest Money: ₹ 18,000.00. Period of Completion: 90 days. Last Date and Time of submission of Bid : 13.01.2025 upto 11 a.m. Bid opening date and time for technical proposals : 15.01.2025 at 11 a.m. The bid forms and other details are available on and from 31.12.2024 (5 p.m.) from the website: <http://wbtenders.gov.in> & <https://www.kmcgov.in> (1125/24-25)

CHITTARANJAN LOCOMOTIVE WORKS

E-TENDER NOTICE

e-tenders are invited for and on behalf of the President of India for the following works: SL No: Tender Nos.: Name of the work: Advertised Value: Earnest Money Deposit: Period of Completion: Date of Closing are as follows: (01): Enge-52-2024-25: Automation of water supply system in Area-3 (Officers colony) & Area-7 (Singuri colony); 86,91,982.76; 1,73,800.00; 18 months; 14/01/2025. (02): Enge-53-2024-25: Covering of 70 m open shed and extension of existing Shed by 40m in 25 m bay at Loco Assembly shop at ELAAU, Dankuni; 8,42,29,451.82; 5,71,200.00; 10 months; 16/01/2025. (03): Enge-54-2024-25: Provision of Aluminium sheet in Bogie shop at ELAAU/Dankuni; 1,63,66,869.70; 2,31,800.00; 6 months; 16/01/2025. (04): Enge-55-2024-25: Provision of 4 Nos wheeling pit, 2 Nos Test pit, 2 Nos. Rain Test plant at 25 m bay and 3 Nos. wheeling pits & 20mX6m panel room in 30 m bay along with P-way work in Assembly shop at ELAAU/Dankuni; 2,51,51,280.15; 2,75,800.00; 6 months; 16/01/2025. NOTE:- (01) Complete details can be seen in the Railways website www.rps.gov.in & www.chs.indianrailways.gov.in (02) Contact Number 91 63340201. (03) 254. Deputy Chief Engineer, CMC/Chittaranjan. Like us on: www.facebook.com/clwrailways

Government of West Bengal

Office of the District Magistrate, Murshidabad

Muzaral Section

Notice Inviting e-Tender

No. 423/2024-25/NT

Communicated vide memo no. 3870/1(18)/NT dt. 28-12-2024

e-Tender is hereby invited from the eligible, reliable, resourceful and experience firms / companies / agency for "Renovation at 108 Barrack, Berhampore, Murshidabad."

The date of downloading and submit of e-Tender is on 28.12.2024 at 17:00 hrs and closing date of submission 07.01.2025 at 17:00 hrs.

(Tender ID: 2024_OJMU_79219_1)

Interested parties may visit www.etenders.gov.in For any query contact: Muzaral Section, Murshidabad, Collectorate (Room No.109, Contact No. 7719377375) in any working day.

Sd/-
For District Magistrate Murshidabad

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Rajnath calls on Armed Forces to remain alert to deal with any kind of threats

The defence minister described BR Ambedkar as an epitome of selfless service, who dedicated his life for social equality and empowerment

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 29 DECEMBER

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Sunday, called upon the Armed Forces to continue keeping a vigilant eye on the current geopolitical scenario, and always remain alert and ready to deal with any kind of threats.

Singh's alert to the Armed Forces came during his visit to the three premier training institutes of the Indian Army-Army War College (AWC), Infantry School and Military College of Telecommunication & Engineering (MCTE) Madhya Pradesh's Mhow. He was accompanied by Chief of the Army Staff General



Upendra Dwivedi and other senior officers of the Indian Army.

Speaking on the occasion, the defence minister commended the courage and vigilance of the Army personnel in safeguarding the borders and ensuring national

security. "Your dedication and devotion to duty are an inspiration to all of us. It is due to your hard work and commitment that our country and its borders are becoming increasingly secure and strong," he said.

He said that the Narendra

Modi government's aim is to make India a developed and self-reliant nation by 2047, and the Armed Forces will play a crucial role in achieving this goal. "You are the protectors of our borders, and the forerunners in nation building. I am sure you will

The Narendra Modi government's aim is to make India a developed and self-reliant nation by 2047, and the Armed Forces will play a crucial role in achieving this goal, said Rajnath Singh

continue securing our borders with courage and dedication, and contribute in realising the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047," he added.

During his visit, Singh was briefed by the Officiating Commandant on the establishment of Advanced Incubation and Research Centre and the various MoUs towards enabling absorption and transformation of technologies.

He visited the Army Marksmanship Unit to witness their contribution towards national sports. He also visited

the Infantry Museum, where he was briefed on the history of infantry as well as the induction of modernised equipment into the Infantry.

Earlier, Singh also visited the Bhim Janm Bhoomi, a memorial dedicated to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in Mhow, and paid homage to the Bharat Ratna and the architect of the Indian constitution at his birthplace.

He described Dr Ambedkar as an epitome of selfless service, who dedicated his life for social equality and empowerment.

Maha CM asks CID to seize properties of accused involved in Beed Sarpanch murder case



AGENCIES
MUMBAI, 29 DECEMBER

After an all-party protest against the brutal murder of Massajog Sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has cracked the whip directing the CID to seize properties of the accused involved in the ghastly incident.

The Crime Investigation Department (CID) has already taken over the investigation into the killing of Deshmukh, and the directives to seize the properties of the accused were given late Saturday night.

CM Fadnavis has ordered to immediately start the process of confiscating the properties of the accused and also to cancel the licenses of those whose photos with the revolvers have gone viral on social media.

He has given these directions to CID's Additional Director General Prashant Burde. The CM has also asked the CID to review the revolver licenses that have been issued so far and cancel them.

CM Fadnavis' directives come at a time when three accused involved in a broad-daylight murder of Santosh Deshmukh are still absconding. Political parties, especially, the ruling BJP and

various organisations have been strongly demanding the immediate arrest of these three absconding accused and the mastermind in the killing of Santosh Deshmukh.

So far 19 days have passed since the murder of Santosh Deshmukh but all accused have not been arrested yet. Due to this, the atmosphere has heated up. In Beed, an Akrosh Morcha was taken out by all party leaders on Saturday demanding the arrest of the accused. Cutting across party lines, leaders demanded the arrest of Valmiki Karad who is reportedly a close confidant of Food and Civil Supplies Minister Dhananjay Munde. The leaders cited that the police have to arrest Karad who is one of the accused in the extortion case and also allegedly linked to the murder of Deshmukh.

NCP legislator and former Minister Prakash Solanke demanded that Dhananjay Munde be relieved from his ministerial post till the ongoing investigations are completed by the special investigation team and judicial commission into the killing of Santosh Deshmukh and also into the deteriorating law and order and rising extortion cases in Beed district.

BJP has been criticising Manmohan Singh: Congress

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 29 DECEMBER

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Sunday slammed the BJP after it accused the party of politicising the death of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, saying those in the ruling dispensation singing praises of Dr Singh, have criticised him.

Attacking the ruling BJP, Congress general secretary in-charge of Communications Jairam Ramesh said: "The BJP criticised Dr Manmohan Singh till date. Those who are in power today, and have been singing praises for him for the last two days, they should see what was his personality and how he had worked."

Recalling the contribution of Singh, the key architect of India's economic liberalization, the Congress MP



said he made an immense contribution to the nation when he was the Finance Minister.

He also credited him for the country's strong position at the international level.

Ramesh said Dr Singh was the epitome of humility, peace, ability and gentleness,

who gave us all new hope.

Earlier, in the day BJP leader Shehzad Poonawalla accused the Congress of indulging in "low-level petty politics" over the death of the former Prime Minister.

He said those who are raising the issue of "insult" to Singh over his last rites, forgot about the treatment given to him when he was alive.

Notably, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Saturday accused the BJP government of not allocating a place for cremation and memorial of Singh, and called it an insult to Singh.

Dr Singh, one of the most renowned economists, passed away at 9.51 pm at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the national Capital on Thursday at the age of 92.

Police inspector suspended in MP over custodial death of Dalit man

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHOPAL, 29 DECEMBER

The inspector of a police station has been suspended with immediate effect after the suspicious death of a Dalit man inside the police station and consequent protest against the police by the family members and villagers of the deceased in the Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh.

The irate family members alleged that the police were demanding a bribe to reduce the severity of sections against the man, who was brought to the police station for questioning after a woman lodged a complaint against him.

The family of the deceased levelled serious allegations on police personnel accusing them of murder. The police,

however, said the man tried to commit suicide with his *gamcha* (scarf) and the police rushed him to a hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

The incident occurred inside the Satwas police station in Dewas district on Saturday evening.

According to information, the police brought the man, Mukesh Longre (35), to the police station for questioning in connection with a complaint against him by a woman. However, after a while, the police informed his family members about his death. The enraged family accused the police personnel of demanding a bribe.

They also accused the police personnel of murdering Mukesh inside the police sta-

tion. A large number of people gathered outside the police station and raised slogans. The protest continued on Sunday too.

On getting the information about the incident, Dewas SP Puneet Gehlot suspended Satwas police station in-charge Ashish Rajput and ordered a judicial probe against him.

The Congress launched an attack on the ruling BJP and Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav, who is also the home minister. MP Congress chief Jitu Patwari reached Satwas. He alleged that there was 'jungle raj' in MP.

He said a Dalit man has been 'murdered' inside a police station and the home minister of MP must take responsibility for it.

54th

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Getting ready

India's defence sector is undergoing a pivotal transformation with the Ministry of Defence launching a detailed review of tri-service procurement priorities. This initiative, driven by an urgent need to address capability gaps across the Army, Navy, and Air Force, reflects a strategic shift from piecemeal solutions to a more holistic, problem-solving approach. The Indian Air Force, operating with just 31 squadrons against a sanctioned strength of 42, epitomises the urgency. Its fighter fleet faces acute shortages, exacerbated by delays in delivering indigenous platforms like the Tejas MK1A and the stalled Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) programme. These delays hinder operational readiness and compromise India's ability to counter emerging threats. Similarly, the Navy's critical needs ~ submarines, helicopters, and an additional aircraft carrier ~ remain unmet, while the Army grapples with the need to modernise tanks, drones, and munitions. Despite the presence of established mechanisms like the Defence Acquisition Council and Defence Acquisition Procedure, procurement processes often stall due to procedural complexities and lack of alignment among stakeholders. Recognising this, the Ministry has initiated a consultative exercise involving service chiefs, the Defence Research and Development Organisation, and other key officials. This step underscores the need for a solutions-driven mind-set that prioritises outcomes over bureaucracy. The dual challenge of addressing immediate operational requirements while promoting indigenous manufacturing adds another layer of complexity. The push for self-reliance under initiatives like "Make in India" is laudable, yet delays in delivery timelines and quality control remain persistent challenges. A balanced approach ~ leveraging global partnerships for critical capabilities while strengthening domestic defence production ~ is essential. India's defence modernisation also suffers from the shadow of past controversies. Political disputes over procurement decisions have deterred officials from taking bold steps, often leading to indecision. Breaking this cycle requires insulating procurement processes from political interference and fostering a culture of accountability. Looking forward, a few key steps can ensure the success of this initiative. First, prioritisation must be clear and aligned with strategic goals, focusing on critical capabilities like fighter jets, submarines, and drones. Secondly, enforcing accountability through technology-driven tracking systems can reduce delays. Thirdly, enhancing transparency in decision-making, while protecting sensitive details, can rebuild trust in the procurement process. India's security environment demands a military that is agile, well-equipped, and future-ready. The current review process is an opportunity to address systemic inefficiencies and set a roadmap for sustainable modernisation. With focused leadership and collaborative efforts, this exercise could redefine India's defence procurement strategy, ensuring that the armed forces are not only prepared for present challenges but also for the evolving threats of the future. The time to act decisively is now. By addressing capability gaps, expediting procurement, and fostering self-reliance, India can build a robust ecosystem that safeguards its sovereignty and advances its strategic aspirations. In an increasingly hostile neighbourhood, this is an imperative.

Touching the Sun

The Sun, the fiery heart of our solar system, has fascinated humanity for centuries. Despite the progress of modern science, many of its secrets remain locked away, particularly the mysteries of its outer atmosphere, the corona. NASA's Parker Solar Probe's record-breaking journey to within 3.8 million miles of the Sun marks a monumental step toward unravelling these enigmas, demonstrating both technological prowess and the enduring human drive to explore the unknown. One of the mission's most intriguing aspects is its focus on the corona, a region hotter than the Sun's surface itself. While the Sun's surface temperature is about 6,000°C, the corona can reach millions of degrees. This counterintuitive phenomenon, where a region farther from the Sun's core is exponentially hotter, has perplexed scientists for decades. The Parker Solar Probe's unprecedented proximity to the Sun offers the possibility of gathering data that may finally provide answers. The mission also seeks to decode the mechanics of the solar wind, the continuous stream of charged particles emitted from the corona. These particles shape the space weather that directly impacts Earth. From dazzling auroras to disruptions in power grids and satellite communications, the solar wind's influence is immense. Understanding its origin and behaviour is not just a matter of scientific curiosity but of practical necessity for a world increasingly reliant on technology. The success of the probe is a testament to human ingenuity. Enduring temperatures nearing 1,800°F (980°C) and radiation levels that would incapacitate most electronics, the spacecraft relied on an advanced heat shield and innovative design to survive. Moreover, its record-breaking speed of 430,000 mph underscores the immense gravitational forces it navigated. This achievement highlights the precision and resilience of modern engineering. Beyond the technical feats, the mission serves as a reminder of the importance of basic scientific inquiry. As we focus on addressing immediate challenges on Earth, such as climate change and resource scarcity, missions like the Parker Solar Probe underscore the value of long-term exploration. Understanding the Sun's dynamics is vital for forecasting and mitigating space weather effects, which have the potential to impact our interconnected world significantly. The Parker Solar Probe represents more than just a leap in solar science; it embodies humanity's unyielding curiosity and capacity for innovation. By venturing into the Sun's outer atmosphere, it is not only bringing us closer to understanding our star but also paving the way for future explorations of extreme environments. In an era where science often battles for recognition amid other global priorities, the probe's success is a shining example of why investing in exploration matters. It is a bold reminder that our quest to understand the cosmos is as much about answering fundamental questions as it is about preparing for a sustainable future on Earth.

Glory of Womanhood

Sarada was not known beyond a small circle of her close associates during her husband's lifetime. No male follower of her husband saw her face. She was self-effacing and shy. Moreover, the stringent social norms for a married Brahmin woman did not permit her to mix with others outside her caste. She did not have the minimum access to formal education because of the restrictions in force against women's education then, particularly in rural areas. In this way, she virtually lived an incarcerated life

Sri Ramakrishna commissioned his spouse Sri Sarada Devi to carry his spiritual legacy forward. He was the prophet of the new age. He first realized and then offered a religion suited to the modern world. Sarada witnessed intimately what that religion was and how he gave it by examples at every movement of his life.

Likewise, Ramakrishna, too, thoroughly scanned her to find out how pure and powerful she was under the guise of an unassuming ordinary woman and how surely capable of bearing the brunt he wished to lay on her. They knew each other like the palms of their hands. Therefore, there was a clear understanding between them regarding their joint responsibility to show The Light towards Peace.

Hence, they peculiarly de-emoted themselves equal. It was notably more peculiar to Sarada's conduct to have accepted this as correct, being a woman of such a period when a married woman would have imagined it a blasphemy to consider herself of the same status as her husband. To be able to comprehend the true significance and import of the nuances of her husband's spiritual practices and accomplishments spoke of another of Sarada's astonishing peculiarities that established her absolute right to become his spiritual consort to do his work without any hesitation or dithering.

Sarada's amazing rise from a disciple and wife of Ramakrishna to his spiritual height didn't happen by any slip-shod means. It happened in consequence of her silent, serene, sustained prayers and austerities in the seclusion of the Purdah. Her heart and mind flowed incessantly in quiet contemplation steadily to trances, away from public gaze, which endowed her with a celestial Peace. "Instead of luxuriating in the enjoyment of inner peace, (she) worked till the last moment of her life to transmit that peace to others." She also gave the secret of having peace to us. She said: "If you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own." She palpably demonstrated this secret at every moment in her life.

Sarada was not known beyond a small circle of her close associates during her husband's lifetime. No male follower of her husband saw her face. She was self-effacing and shy.

Moreover, the stringent social norms for a married Brahmin woman did not permit her to mix with others outside her caste. She did not have the minimum access to formal education because of the restrictions in force against women's education then, particularly in rural areas. In this way, she virtually lived an incarcerated life.

But then, she was too sharp and receptive, because of which she easily learnt by hearing and watching her husband who taught her every detail of household work and how to still remain detached from it, attaching the mind to God relentlessly. She found her husband by no



means dogmatic or exclusive. With her elevated common sense she internalized everything for which Ramakrishna lived. "Therefore, today, she is a model for householders and world renouncing monks."

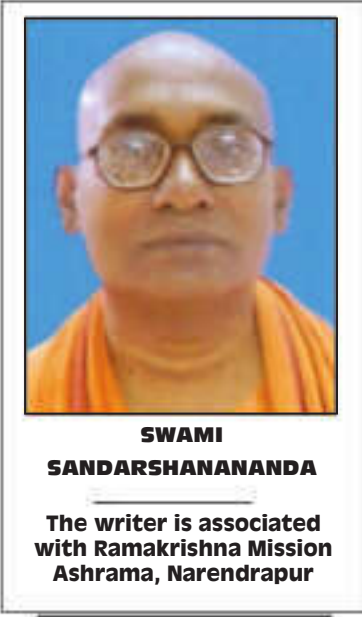
Sarada covertly grew to be modern in thought and perception in spite of her traditional demeanour of extreme simplicity. She wore no slippers or stitched clothes and slept on a mat on the floor. She woke up much before sunrise and sat in meditation, after finishing her bath. The whole day she did back-breaking labour by serving her husband and cooking for his guests, who came without notice until late at night. None other than two or three widows who guarded her from trespassers knew how she managed them quietly. She was never unhappy about that hard life. She said her heart was always full of joy like a pitcher full of water.

Her husband worshipped her and let her realize that she was Divine Mother, as a result of which she consciously acted as the mother of the universe. Her husband saw Kali in her, and she also saw Kali in him. Both were in that way confirmed of their Divine non-difference. Sarada affirmed this by worshipping herself, placing her photo beside Ramakrishna's on an altar. To a few of her spiritually mature disciples she revealed her divine aspect. These novelties evidently made her modern amidst the traditional saints. So, their lives and works were recognized as Divine Plays, which were seen as directly proportional to and complimentary with one another.

It was only when her husband passed away that she stepped out in public. Earlier, no one had even seen her photograph. Now she freely visited places and took it upon herself to discharge the duty her husband had allotted her. She initiated both men and women from all castes as well as from other races with no reservations. She 'deepened' the faith of her disciples in Ramakrishna's teaching of the validity of all religions for realizing God, as the one

suites to the present age. She said she was 'mother of all', whether saint or sinner. She gracefully gave mantras to sanyasins, and sanyasa to brahma-charins. Her motherhood knew no distinctions. It was her forte where she did not brook the slightest encroachment, not even her husband's.

Above all, Sarada took the reins of the Ramakrishna Order in her hand. She didn't even allow Swamiji to do things which she thought were incorrect.



Everyone in the Order was at her beck and call. Each was under her protective care. Benign scolding sometimes issued from her for correction, but not a single word of condemnation ever. Hers was a voice of reason and righteousness, difficult to ignore.

On the other hand, her dealings with people and society were unprecedented for any woman during that period of Indian history. She was overtly denying communal differences, dearly treating men and women of other communities as her own children.

She was feeding them and sometimes eating with them as well in her house without the fear of being ostracized. She went to the extent of letting foreign ladies stay with her, for which she was even ready to part with the company of upper-caste close devotees who disliked it. She strongly advocated girl's education despite the opposition of bigoted conservative Hindus. She opened a primary school in her village where no provision of education for poor children was available.

She dug a tube-well there for clean drinking water, after observing people drinking contaminated pond water. For irrigation purposes, she sought Government help to dig a canal from the nearest rivulet.

For 34 years she, thus, continuously worked for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind with a pragmatic, progressive and modern outlook, fulfilling her husband's expectation from her.

She set a perfect example of how to translate his teachings in

practice effectively, which was a clear illustration of practical Vedanta. Her followers are now forming organizations to work in her fashion, emulating the Vedantic religion and philosophy she reflected in her day-to-day behaviour and activity in the simplest terms.

For instance, there is an organization in Coventry, England called 'Sarada Vedanta Society' where people are being educated giving primacy to her life and teachings. As its name indicates, so also its shrine, where her photograph is placed in the middle, instead of Ramakrishna's, shifting from tradition.

The appeal of Sarada Devi increased by and by. She was at last out of her husband's shadow. People of all walks of life thronged for her blessings and guidance. She became legendary for her divine character, love and affection. Even after almost 125 years of her departure, the intensity of her attraction remains sky high. It was observed that a conspicuous awakening was occurring among women everywhere with her advent.

Marking this, Swami Vivekananda's brother disciple and the second president of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Shivananda said: "Holy Mother (Sarada Devi) assumed a human body to awaken the womanhood of the entire world. Don't you see, since her advent, what an amazing awakening has set in among the women of the world? They are now resolved to build up their lives gracefully and advance in all directions. A very surprising renaissance is swaying women in the fields of spirituality, politics, science, literature, etc. And more will come. This is the play of the Divine Power. Ordinary mortals cannot understand this mystery."

Swamiji believed Sarada Devi was born to revive the glory of womanhood. He said "making her nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world". He planned to start an organization for this purpose, in which she would be 'the central figure'. Keenly studying her personality, Sister Nivedita wrote: "In her, one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate, in giving utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her."

Anyone can see the far reaching and magnifying impact of her life (22 December 1853-20 June1920) of 67 years in modern times. Today, she is dear to everyone who knows about her. Her sublime matriarchal influence is transforming countless minds, cutting across castes, communities, countries and the fallen. She said: "I am the mother of the wicked, as I am the mother of the virtuous. Never fear. Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, 'I have a mother.'"

Warnings on South Korea's plunging potential growth

South Korea's political landscape has plunged into one of its worst crises in years following the sitting president's sudden declaration of martial law and attempt to incapacitate the National Assembly. His efforts have all failed, resulting in his impeachment by the parliament and likely removal from power before the natural end of his term.

The severe political deadlock has pushed the country's economy, already under pressure from various domestic and external challenges, deeper into a tailspin. Economic players ranging from the government and corporations to households and investors find themselves with little choice but to stand still.

This politics-induced economic crisis is set to persist for several months, regardless of whether the Constitutional Court upholds or rejects parliament's impeachment motion against the president within 180 days. This crisis comes at a particularly bad time, as the external conditions facing South Korea's trade-reliant economy are becoming increasingly unfavorable.

Meanwhile, China South Korea's closest trade and business partner is facing increasingly restrictive trade policies from the incoming US administration, even as it continues to struggle with its long-standing, homegrown economic challenges, such as falling

The Korea Herald

productivity and increased debt. Reflecting these worsening conditions, the governor of the Bank of Korea warned last week that this year's economic growth would likely fall short of its revised projection of 2.2 percent, which was adjusted down from an earlier forecast of 2.4 percent just weeks ago. Gov. Rhee Chang-yong also cautioned during his parliamentary testimony that downside risks threaten the latest growth projection for 2025, set at 1.9 percent. He urged the government and parliament to consider drafting a supplementary budget bill for next year to support the economy and pledged to adjust the timing of the next interest rate cut accordingly.

It is encouraging that South Korean economic policymakers are calling for and committing to all-out efforts to minimize the adverse effects of the political deadlock and deteriorating external conditions before Asia's fourth-largest economy risks slipping into an unrecoverable abyss.

However, a report by the Bank of Korea, also released last week, sounded an even graver alarm by highlighting that it is no longer time to focus solely on short-term growth. Titled "Our Economy's Potential Growth Rate and Future Projection," the report warned that South Korea's potential growth rate is falling rapidly and is projected to drop below 1 percent within the next two decades.

The potential growth rate of an economy refers to the speed at which a country's economy can grow over time while using its resources such as workers, technology and capital efficiently and sustainably. It shows how much the economy could expand in a sustainable manner without causing problems like high inflation.

South Korea's potential growth rate was estimated as high as around 5 percent in the early 2000s, but has since dropped to just above 3 percent a decade later. It is now projected to fall further to around 2 percent by the middle of the current decade.

It is widely understood that an economy's growth rate tends to decline as it matures. Moreover, South Korea's economically active population those aged 15 to 64 has been shrinking since the late 2010s, which means economic output will inevitably expand more slowly than before.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Air strikes

SIR, This refers to today's report "Pakistani airstrikes killed 46 people in eastern Afghanistan, says Taliban," in The Statesman. Pakistan, notorious for sponsoring cross-border terrorism, is itself feeling the terror heat and making desperate moves. Pakistan's



airstrikes have killed around 50 people, mostly women and children, in eastern Afghanistan, a couple of days after its security forces gunned down 11 suspected terrorists in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The airstrikes have exposed Pakistan's duplicity. They were carried out hours after its special representative for Afghanistan visited Kabul to discuss ways to improve ties. It is apparent that Islamabad is paying lip service to resolving the dispute through diplomatic means.

This strategy can have dangerous consequences for the region, with the Afghan government warning that it would not leave this "cowardly act unanswered". The Balakot-style airstrikes might be a ploy of the

establishment to rebuild the Shehbaz Sharif government's public image. Another trigger could be the growing closeness between the Taliban and the Indian gov-

ernment that has clearly annoyed Pakistan. In any case, Islamabad needs to brace itself for a fierce retaliation not only from the Taliban but also from the TTP. India,

a victim of terrorism for decades, must keep a close eye on the developments.

Yours, etc., N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru, 26 December.

BALANCE NEEDED

SIR, The Central Government's decision to scrap the no-detention policy in the schools it governs marks a significant shift in the approach to elementary education. Under the new framework, students of Central schools in classes V and VIII who fail their exams will now face re-examinations and, if necessary, be held back. The shift is geared towards promoting accountability and elevate learning results. Around 20 states and UTs have already scrapped the no-detention policy.

Apparently, the implementation of the no-detention rule under the right to primary education has, over the academic sessions, faced criticism for diluting academic rigour and fostering complacency among students and educators alike. Year after year, various surveys and reports have highlighted alarming gaps in the basic literacy and numeracy outcomes of students. The fall in the academic standards expected of them does necessitate reform. But education reform must strike a balance between academic excellence and inclusivity. It is not enough to abandon old policies; we must also invest in a framework that enables every child to thrive. It should not come at the expense of a child's self-esteem or access to education.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 25 December.



Product eco-labelling must be streamlined

GOVIND SINGH
AND VAMIKA MITTAL

The Delhi Government has decided to use energy-efficient cooling devices in all its offices and buildings. The move comes as a step to save energy and curb the rising demand of electricity. Once approved, all departments of the Delhi Government will use only 5-star rated air conditioners and other cooling devices. The star-rating of electrical devices is an eco-label that makes green initiatives like these possible.

The star-rating of electrical devices was introduced under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001, through the setting up of a Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE). The BEE assesses electrical products and rates them on a scale of 1 to 5 stars, with higher ratings indicating greater energy efficiency and lower running costs. The Delhi Government expects to save up to 3,042 units of electricity and Rs. 29,000 per AC each year by using 5-star rated cooling devices.

Eco-labelling of products helps consumers know how environmentally friendly one product is compared to others in the same category. The overall environmental impact of products is assessed by a third party; this allows eco-conscious consumers to make unbiased purchase decisions. Moreover, eco-labelling encourages manufactures to transition towards environment-friendly production since the entire life cycle of a product - from its manufacturing to its disposal - is assessed during eco-labelling. The concept of eco-labelling has been around for more than two decades. The World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002, held in Rio de Janeiro, identified the need for such "effective, transparent, verifiable, non-misleading and non-discriminatory consumer information tools."

Growing consumer awareness



about environmental impacts of manufacturing and production has created demand for eco-friendly products, and for eco-labels. The BEE star-rating is one such eco-label and is specific to the electrical appliances segment. Many eco-labels exist today but there is a need for streamlining and optimizing them across all segments. More and more people are now recognizing the benefits of buying green products for both the environment and their own well-being. Green consumerism is rising, with customers actively seeking eco-friendly options beginning with biodegradable packaging, reusable bags and recyclable plastic. Green consumers are interested in buying products that are ethically produced, do not waste water

and energy during manufacturing, do not cause pollution and are focused on sustainability and the circular economy.

Consumer awareness about green products is increasing. There is thus an increasing need for comprehensive, reliable and unambiguous eco-labelling of all available consumer products. In India, the overarching, government-regulated eco-label is called Ecomark. The Ecomark Scheme was first introduced in 1991 as a voluntary eco-certification programme. Ecomark is different from BEE's star-rating in that it has wider scope and covers a wide range of product categories including food, textiles, household goods and personal care products. Another key difference is that

Ecomark assesses the entire lifecycle (holistic environmental impact) of the products while BEE's star-rating focuses on energy use and consumption.

A quick analysis of the Ecomark Scheme shows it to be highly unpopular. Its logo, the earthen pot, is rare to find on any product in the marketplace. In its absence, green consumers are relying on other eco-labels with narrow scope such as BEE's star-rating, chasing arrows, organic certification and informal notation on packaging such as "Recyclable". The latter are often not reliable which discourages motivated green consumers.

Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has notified Ecomark Rules

2024, replacing the Ecomark Scheme of 1991. The fresh impetus is due to the ongoing Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) of the MoEFCC which uses green nudging as a tool for promoting green choices. Reviving the Ecomark eco-label is thus a much needed pre-requisite for the success of Mission LiFE.

Implementation of Ecomark Rules 2024 must begin by analyzing the factors behind the unpopularity of the earlier Ecomark Scheme. The Ecomark Rules 2024 continue to make it a voluntary initiative; it is up to manufacturers to decide if they want to take part in eco-labelling. Making participation mandatory, at least in some product categories, will certainly strengthen Ecomark eco-labelling and will also have long-term environmental benefits.

It also needs to be assessed if the Ecomark eco-label should continue to be implemented in a Yes/No mode allowing only eco-friendly products to display the eco-label, or should it adopt a BEE like rating system. After all, a rating system not only guides consumer choices but also increases competition among manufacturers to improve performance and obtain higher ratings.

In addition, Ecomark should be made flexible to accommodate existing green ratings as well as upcoming green ratings like the Right to Repair rating of products. The growing interest of consumers in green products underscores the need for a reliable eco-label that simplifies their choices. With streamlined implementation, Ecomark has the potential to become a unified, transparent label for enabling consumers to make impactful, informed decisions for a sustainable planet.

(The writers are, respectively, an associate professor and a student at the Jindal School of Environment & Sustainability, O.P. Jindal Global University, Haryana, India.)

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

The strange use of jawbones

In the wealthiest museum of the world, Getty, there is a remarkable work by the Dutch painter, Salomon de Bray, of Samson the strongman, holding the jawbone of an ass with which he supposedly killed a thousand Philistines. This is the story of how the Philistines are killing us now, without many of us even noticing it.

'Jawboning' has now become a verb, meaning talking or persuading in order to gain an advantage. Strangely, it has evolved to mean something sinister. It means wrongly using official power to influence private action. Most clearly, when an authority forces the press to follow the official line. Or to keep a discreet silence when it should speak out.

We all cry hoarse about democracy but how we practice it varies wildly. Every country has elections to anoint the leaders; every country has a parliament (in the US, it has the erotic name of Congress) to make laws; and every country has courts to make sure the laws are obeyed by everyone.

How then Navalny, a law-abiding patriot, can be jailed the moment he enters Russia and kept jailed and eventually killed without a fair trial? How come Erdogan, a supposedly progressive leader of Turkey and a NATO stalwart, can purge the military and civil service of all but yes-men? Why do hundreds rot in prisons in Hungary, Belarus and India for the flimsiest charge of 'anti-state' activity?



Illustration by: Debabrata Chakrabarty

Should the interned consider themselves lucky that their houses have not been bulldozed, as in India, making their families homeless, or they are not summarily shot, as 6000 were in Duterte's Philippines?

The first step in any campaign to debauch democracy is the destruction of the Fourth Estate. The press must be gagged, because people must not know that they are being systematically stripped of their rights. More important, they must be hoodwinked into believing that their life is getting

better, their society is being enriched. This is the essence of jawboning: misleading people into thinking that their interests are being served by surreptitious bullying by government officials. How is this done?

Let us say your government decides to pass a new law that each person has to prove his citizenship with documents, the idea being to take away the citizenship of some unwanted members of a minority group, like the Uighurs in China or Rohingya in Myanmar. You don't think it is right and want to organize a protest meeting. You want to book

a hall and invite people you know. After all, it is your right to have such a meeting and it is your duty to raise other people's awareness. To your surprise, you find that most halls are not available to you. Most owners say their halls are already booked. One owner you know well confides that he has been 'advised' not to encourage you.

Somehow you and your friends find a small hall in another part of the city and pay an advance to reserve it. When you arrive for the meeting with your friends, however, you find a posse of cops guarding the entrance and telling you to go home. When you and some of your eager friends refuse to leave, suddenly appear some goons with sticks who start attacking your group. The next day the papers report on some 'trouble-makers' who created an unwelcome 'disturbance.' They refer to you, not the goons.

Outraged, you visit the office of a major newspaper to ask about the misreporting. The chief reporter tells you that the report is fully authenticated by many observers. A junior reporter, who was in school with your son, takes you aside and tells you that the local party boss had come the previous day and told the editor what the report should contain. Your son then tells you that some students in the university also wanted to protest, but the police was there to stop the gathering and arrest the student leaders.

The junior reporter came to advise you not to try for a meeting any

more; otherwise, you would encounter physical violence aided by cops. His paper, he said, dare not report the facts because it is heavily dependent on government advertisement for revenue.

In the evening news on television, the anchor talks of a disturbance and explains that the police had to take strong steps to prevent a 'treacherous' group from starting a riot. The camera did not seem to catch any of the stick-wielding goons. The anchor also interviews later a minister who speaks of the vital importance of the citizenship law and the urgency of weeding out 'seditious' aliens pretending to be citizens of the land.

Two of your friends who had joined you for the meeting came to tell you that both of their bosses called them and counseled them against participating in 'extremist' political gatherings. If reflected badly, they said, on the company's reputation.

You realized that your idea of raising awareness on a national issue was considered anti-national and anything else you try - such as explaining your point of view - would have serious consequences. There is the government and there are the government officials. But they are not on your side. Rather, you need to be on their side. You have been jawboned.

(The writer is a US-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com)



100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

DISAPPOINTMENT in Germany over the prospective postponement of the evacuation of Cologne is naturally strong, more especially in quarters where Lord Curzon's statement on the subject came as a complete surprise. Representations have already been made at Paris, and the facts on which the decision is based are hotly challenged. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the intimation should have been made to Germany in a roundabout fashion. The German Government is held up to the world as a defaulter, with apparently no previous private or

formal communication. Berlin has already retorted. The French Government has been informed that if the terms of the Treaty are not observed it will be difficult if not impossible to form a Cabinet to carry out the Dawes plan. This is likely to make little impression on the French Foreign Office, even under the present regime, for M. Herriot cannot disregard the strong French sentiment on the subject of security. But should the German utterance turn out to be more than a diplomatic move the position will be serious. The Dawes plan is the one device yet found for promoting peace and understanding in Western Europe, and if anger in Germany leads to its abandonment, relations with France will be bitterer than ever.

NEWS ITEMS

THE NEXT WAR

"ATROCIOUS BEYOND COMPREHENSION"

LIMITATION in the US of war-time aircraft is urged in the report of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, to be submitted to Congress through President Coolidge. This report predicts the use of gas, disease germs, and powerful explosives indiscriminately against defenceless cities, through scientific progress in the art of destruction. Any future war, says the report, will be mostly in the air, and the methods employed will be atrocious and terrible beyond comprehension.

The report points particularly to the possibility of spreading pestilence through cities and argues that a nation with its back to the wall cannot be expected to forgo desperate means.

MENACING EPIDEMIC

DEADLY NEW DISEASE IN THE EAST

A TOTALLY, new disease which kills in six cases out of ten, and in a very few days, has broken out as an epidemic in Japan and doctors fear that it is spreading throughout the East.

It was at first mistakenly diagnosed as acute meningitis and later as "sleepy sickness."

Many deaths have been reported to the Health Organisation of the League of Nations by the Tokyo Government.

The most remarkable facts about this new disease are its very high fatality rate, the suddenness of the attack and the rapidity with which it develops, death taking place within five to ten days. Most of the persons affected were over 50 years of age.

TIGER SHIKAR

LARGEST EVER SHOT IN KUMSI JUNGLES

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

COLONEL J. COATES, Agent of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway, and Mr. A. Khan, Agent of the Mysore Railways at Shimoga, have shot two tigers in the Kumsi jungles during the last few days, one of which has been identified as that which mauled the late Rev. E. O. Jervis. A missing claw had previously been found in the jungle, and this tiger also bore an old wound. It is said to be the largest ever shot there. The District Magistrate of Shimoga has raised the Government reward of Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 for the destruction of the man-eater still doing damage in the Kudergere taluk of that district.

The Hon. Mr. Barton and Mrs. Barton, with Mr. A. N. L. Cater, his secretary and Major Allen of the Brigade Staff and Mrs. Allen has gone to a shikar camp not far from this district, and a tiger shoot has been arranged for them.

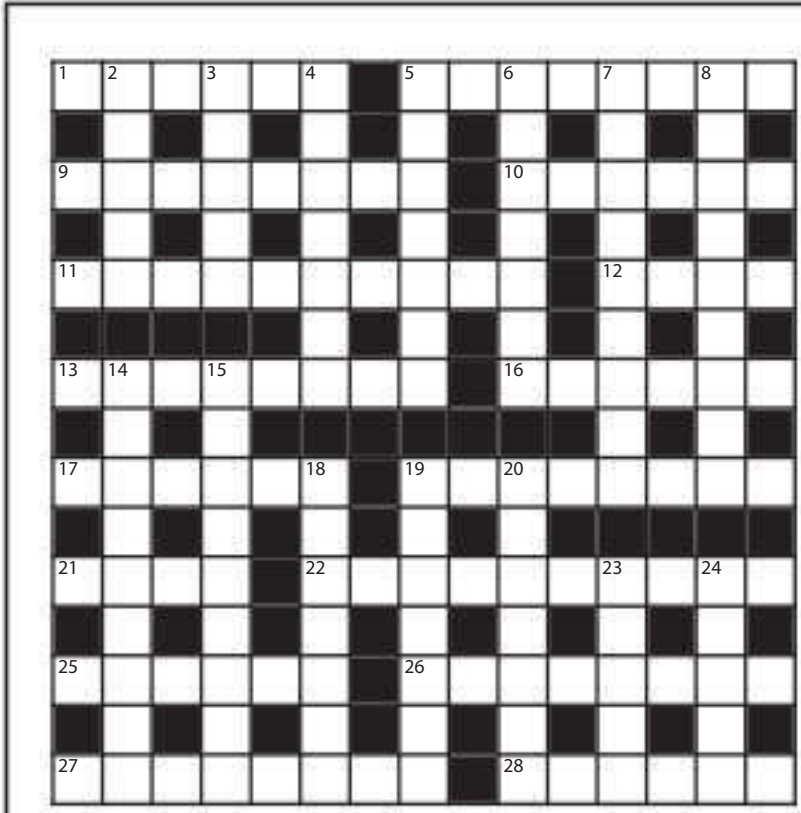
"GOODBYE" TO OFFICE

LORD DERBY DECLINES THE CABINET

LORD Derby, presiding at the Lancashire Division of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations at Manchester, said "Some of my friends tell me that, had it not been for my express wish, Mr. Baldwin would have asked me to join his Cabinet. (Cheers.) I want to tell you, therefore, why it was my wish that I should not go to the Cabinet, for the fear, it may be thought that I have any feeling of resentment, or that there is any lack of loyalty in me towards the Premier. I shall endeavour to the best of my ability to assist the Government with whole-hearted loyalty, saying 'goodbye' probably forever to office, with no feeling of resentment and no feeling of regret."

CROSSWORD

NO-292998



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

ACROSS

- Split, or stick together, being caught with time off (6)
- Radar perhaps surprisingly protected after power cut (8)
- Permit, or penalise, criminal actions? Not at first (8)
- Hide, or show, Native American between two poles (6)
- Rifle protecting a revolutionary, or an officer (10)

- Moving rapidly, or stuck when grabbed by foot (4)
- Sides with, or switches before saying "cheerio" (6,2)
- Wasn't mad about type of string sounds from banjo, maybe (6)
- After a short time, gained back unimpressive catch (6)
- Member wearing man's clothes (8)
- Look for someone at one's own level, or higher? (4)
- Skill of crew aboard

- the Hindenburg? (10)
- Husband follows peculiar scent or horrible smell (6)
- Bold, or at first lost in terrible perdition (8)
- It has the same shape as Moorish palace's first construction (8)
- Leave (or again join) regime restricting society (6)
- DOWN
- In Mali, a natural climber (5)
- Sent up a Roman Catholic to state

- capital (5)
- Teaches nonsense if ideas only partly recalled (7)
- Stupidly refuse to accept bottomless ego (7)
- Suggest, or reject, flip of coin elsewhere (4,3)
- One of the limits of canteen: very small plate for breakfast cereal (9)
- Supervision (or neglect) of deliveries, given stated location (9)
- Parisian can work before I briefly return

- (9)
- Against hollow man and Tory cavorting? That's self-contradictory (9)
- Become worn down, or endure topic of desultory conversation (7)
- Add or take away new gaudy covering (7)
- Nuclear device's designer about to be demoted (7)
- Removes or supplies kernels (5)
- Seeing all but not the top of the cake (5)

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

PM Modi calls for unity at Mahakumbh, end to hatred

‘The specialty of the Mahakumbh is not only in its vastness, it is also in its diversity’

NIKHIL VYAS
NEW DELHI, 29 DECEMBER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday termed the upcoming Mahakumbh as the "Mahakumbh of unity" and urged people to participate in the mega event with a resolve to remove the feeling of division and hatred in the society.

Talking about the Mahakumbh during the 117th episode of his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' broadcast over All India Radio, PM Modi said, "Let me tell all of you; when we participate in the Kumbh, let us bring along this resolve of unity with us. Let us also make a resolve to annihilate the feeling of division and hatred in the society."

"If I have to say it in a few words, then I will say... Mahakumbh Ka Sandesh, Ek Ho Poora Desh... The message of the Mahakumbh, let the whole country be

united and put it in another way, I will express... Ganga Ki Aviral Dhara, Na Bante Samaj Hamara... Like the uninterrupted flow of the Ganga, let our society be undivided," he said.

Modi said the Mahakumbh is also going to be held in Prayagraj from 13 January, 2025. He said at this time, mammoth preparations are going on at the Sangam banks there.

"I remember, just a few days ago when I went to Prayagraj, my heart was filled with joy after viewing the entire Kumbh area from a helicopter. It's so huge! So beautiful! Such grandeur!" the Prime Minister said.

"The specialty of the Mahakumbh is not only in its vastness. The specialty of the Kumbh is also in its diversity. Crores of people congregate for this event. Lakhs of saints, thousands of traditions, hundreds of sects, many Akharas, everyone



becomes a part of this event. There is no discrimination anywhere, no one is big, no one is small. Such a scene of unity in diversity will not be seen anywhere else in the world. Therefore, our Kumbh is also the Mahakumbh of unity," he said.

"This time's Mahakumbh will also bolster the mantra of Mahakumbh of unity," Modi said.

The Prime Minister informed that this time in

related to Kumbh will be available in 11 Indian languages through the AI chatbot, the Prime Minister said.

"Anyone can ask for any kind of help through this chatbot, either by typing text or by speaking in. The entire Fair area is being covered with AI-powered cameras. If someone gets separated from one's skith and kin during the Kumbh, these cameras will help in finding them," Modi said.

The Prime Minister said devotees will also get the facility of a digital lost and found centre adding that devotees will also be provided information about government-approved tour packages, accommodation and homestay on their mobile phones.

"If you too go to the Mahakumbh, then avail of these facilities... and yes, do upload your selfie with #EktaKaMahakumbh," Modi said.

‘Manmohan Singh deserved much better in both life and death’: Assam CM hits back at Congress



AGENCIES
GUWAHATI, 29 DECEMBER

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma hit back at Congress following the allegation by opposition leaders that the state government had shown disrespect towards former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during his final journey.

CM Sarma launched a scathing attack on the Congress party, saying, "Manmohan Singh deserved much better both in life and death."

Taking to X, the CM wrote: "Dr. Manmohan Singh, a statesman of unparalleled dignity and intellect, deserved much better, both in life and in death. It is deeply disheartening to witness the Congress Party attempting

to stir controversy around his final journey, diminishing the solemnity it truly deserved."

CM Sarma also alleged that Congress had shown disregard towards former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and former President Pranab Mukherjee.

"This is not the first time they have shown such disregard - be it towards the legacy of Narasimha Rao or Pranab Mukherjee, the Congress has, unfortunately, treated its own with indifference," he said.

The Chief Minister also mentioned in his X post: "The people of India have bid Dr. Singh a respectful and heartfelt farewell, recognising his invaluable contributions to the nation. Prime Minister @narendramodiji has already

announced a fitting memorial to honour his legacy, reflecting the nation's gratitude. Yet, the actions of some, who seek to turn this moment of mourning into an opportunity for political gain, are deeply painful."

According to CM Sarma, the public still remembers the indignities inflicted upon Manmohan Singh during his tenure, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's infamous gestures that undermined his stature.

"Such actions remain etched in the nation's memory. At the very least, in his passing, Dr. Singh's legacy should not be sullied by political opportunism. Let us honour his memory with the dignity and respect he so richly deserves, free from any discord or manipulation by the leadership of the Congress party," he said.

The CM's reaction came against the backdrop of Assam Congress leader Debabrata Saikia's claim that the state government has violated its decision to observe the seven-day state mourning due to the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Pune Rural Police prepare for Bhima-Koregaon anniversary celebrations

AGENCIES
PUNE, 29 DECEMBER

The Pune Rural Police on Sunday formally announced their comprehensive preparations for the upcoming 207th Bhima-Koregaon Anniversary celebrations, set to take place on January 1, 2024.

Speaking to ANI, Pune Rural SP Pankaj Deshmukh shared details about the police arrangements, highlighting the adequate parking facilities available for visitors. He welcomed all visitors, appealing to them to maintain peace during the celebrations.

"For the upcoming Bhima-Koregaon Anniversary celebrations, the Pune Rural Police is completely geared up. At the same time, the district

administration is ready. We have been provided with a large number of parking places where the visitors can come and park their vehicles... I welcome all the visitors for this celebration and would appeal to them to conduct these celebrations peacefully," he said.

Every year, Koregaon Bhima village becomes a significant pilgrimage site as thousands of visitors gather to commemorate the anniversary of the historic battle that occurred on January 1, 1818. This battle was a pivotal conflict between the British East India Company and the Peshwa faction of the Maratha Confederacy. The event marked a critical moment in Indian history, symbolizing resistance against colonial rule.

Akhilesh Yadav questions frenzied excavations, invite to Kumbh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, DECEMBER 29

Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav castigated the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh for the frantic excavations in the state and inviting political leaders to Mahakumbh.

Questioning the wisdom behind the frenzied excavations at a press conference here on Sunday, he asked, "If I say there is a Shivalinga beneath the chief minister's residence, should it be excavated?"

He said the motive behind excavations at religious places is to create tension between communities on religious lines. Without naming Yogi Adityanath, the SP chief said, "He has on his hands lines of destruction, not development. They (the BJP) will drown the state in debt and will leave only after emptying



the government treasury in 2027."

Stressing that no one is invited to the Kumbh, people come to Kumbh on their own, he pointed out that "our government is spending funds on inviting political leaders and others for the Kumbh."

"Crores of people come for the Kumbh, are they invited? This is what we have learned of our religion. This government is different in

government started conducting a reality check. Now, if cases are filed against our workers, we will expose them," he warned.

"During the SP regime, a study was done by Howard University before organising the Kumbh. The SP is ready to cooperate with the government for the success of the Kumbh," he said.

On the issue of EVMs, he said because of the voting machines, the loser won't be content with the defeat while the winner won't have the confidence of victory. Therefore, we demand that the elections should be conducted through ballot paper only.

Deputy CM Brajesh Pathak hit back at Akhilesh's comments on the preparations for the Kumbh, saying, "Akhilesh Yadav should also come to Kumbh, attain virtue and wash away his sins."

Ayodhya's Ram temple to be ready by June 2025, says construction committee chairman

AGENCIES
AYODHYA, 29 DECEMBER

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple Construction Committee Chairman Nripendra Mishra announced the completion of the temple by June 2025, with rampart and shoe racks to take until September, with rising tower construction being checked for aviation safety.

Speaking to the media persons, Mishra said: "We are committed to completing all construction work by June 2025, except for the ramparts and shoe racks, which are estimated to go on till September 2025."

"85 murals will be set up in the museum, of which work on 60 murals has already begun, and 21 murals including 6 murals

of Ram have been completed... New titanium lattices are being made for the Parikrama on the ground, first and second floors," Mishra added.

Mishra further added, "The biggest challenge is to complete the construction of the rising tower which is also being checked for aviation safety."

Earlier on Saturday, Mishra said: "All construction works will be reviewed today. Post review, we will decide the timeline for completing the pending construction. The rampart for which approximately 8,40,000 cubic feet of stones are to be laid, only 3 lakh cubic feet is left. Hopefully, will be able to complete the 1 km rampart which has 6 temples by June 2025."

Manipur: Civilian worker at military station remains untraced for 35 days, search on

AGENCIES
IMPHAL, 29 DECEMBER



Despite hectic search by Army and other security forces, the 56-year-old man who was working as a supervisor for a contractor at a Military station in Manipur went missing and remains untraced for 35 days, officials said on Sunday.

Defence sources said that around 2,000 soldiers of the Army and Assam Rifles continued their hectic search operation to locate Laishram Kamalbabu Singh, who has been missing since 25 November.

Manipur Police also separately conducted the search operation to locate Kamalbabu Singh, a resident of Gossaipur under Cachar dis-

trict in southern Assam, who was staying at Loitang Khunou village in Imphal West district. He had left his residence on 25 November for the Leimakhong military station but went missing.

He was working as a supervisor for a contractor working with the Military Engineering Services (MES) in Leimakhong Military Station of the 57th Mountain Division at Kangpokpi.

A top Manipur government official told IANS on Sunday

that the state government handed over the "missing" case to the CBI.

A Joint Action Committee (JAC) and the Meira Paibis (women vigilantes in Manipur), which have been separately agitating demanding the rescue of the "missing" man, have also sought intervention of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to locate the man.

The JAC leaders and other agitating organisations' representatives on a number of occasions met Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and discussed the "abduction" of Kamalbabu Singh.

The Chief Minister earlier urged the Army to undertake all-out efforts to locate and rescue Kamalbabu Singh and

take responsibility for finding him.

State Social Welfare Minister Heikham Dingo Singh said that all documents related to Kamalbabu Singh were sent to the Prime Minister's Office as well as the offices of Defence Minister and Home Minister to take appropriate action.

According to a defence spokesman, the Army officials are constantly interacting with village heads and community elders to gather information to further intensify the search operation.

The CCTV feeds have been scanned, Kamalbabu Singh's co-workers were being spoken to, and an intense search operation, including with the aid of sniffer dogs, has been continued, he said.

A year after losing power, KCR family faces heat of probe agencies

AGENCIES
HYDERABAD, 29 DECEMBER

Two months ago a senior Minister in Telangana had predicted political fireworks before Diwali. This did not happen, prompting the opposition Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) to ridicule the ruling Congress party over its 'empty threat'.

Two months later, the state seems to be witnessing the promised fireworks with both the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and the Enforcement Directorate proceeding against BRS Working President and former Telangana Minister K. T. Rama Rao for alleged irregularities in the conduct of the Formula-E car race in Hyderabad last year when BRS was in power.

With Governor Jishnu Dev Varma granting permission for the prosecution of K. T. Rama Rao (KTR), the ACB moved swiftly to book a case against the former Minister.

The ACB registered the First Information Report (FIR) under Sections 13(1)(A) and 13(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, along with Sections 409 and 120(B) of the Indian Penal Code, naming KTR as the accused number one.

Senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar and Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) former chief engineer BLN Reddy were named as accused number two and three respectively.

The anti-graft agency has also recorded the statement

Denying the allegation of corruption, KTR maintained that the Formula-E race was organised to make Telangana the hub of electric vehicles.

of M. Dana Kishore, Principal Secretary, Municipal Administration and Urban Development, on whose complaint the case was booked.

The move was apparently aimed at preparing the ground for issuing notices to the accused.

The allegations centre around the payment of more than Rs 54.88 crore to UK-based Formula-E Operations Limited (FEO) and others in gross violation of established

procedures.

Denying the allegation of corruption, KTR maintained that the Formula-E race was organised to make Telangana the hub of electric vehicles.

Terming the case a political vendetta, the BRS leader dared the ruling Congress government to have a debate on the issue in the Assembly.

It tried to stall the proceedings during the recent Winter session to press the demand for a debate.

However, the Congress government argued that an issue which is under investigation can't be debated in the House.

KTR, who had earlier declared that he was ready to go to jail, approached the High Court, seeking orders to quash the FIR.

'Kalpwas' to witness confluence of restraint, meditation and penance in Prayagraj Mahakumbh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 29 DECEMBER

The confluence of penance, meditation, and restraint is flowing at the largest religious and cultural gathering at the Sangam coast of Prayagraj.

This stream of devotion and spirituality, known as 'Kalpwas', will begin with the bath on Pausa Purnima on 13 January, 2025. 'Kalpwas' represents a sacred retreat, a period of intense spiritual discipline, and a devoted dwelling in the pursuit of higher consciousness.

The Yogi Adityanath government of Uttar Pradesh has made elaborate arrangements for Kalpwas' stay during the Maha Kumbh.

The banks of the Ganga will be filled with over 7 lakh

Kalpwas during the Mahakumbh, the world's largest spiritual and cultural event. The event showcases various aspects of knowledge, devotion, and meditation. Along with the grandeur of the Akharas, the 'triveni' of meditation, penance, and restraint by the Kalpwas also flows here. There has been a rise in the number of Kalpwas who perform meditation in freezing temperatures, setting up tent camps on the banks of the Ganga and Yamuna for an entire month starting from Pausa Purnima.

Vivek Chaturvedi, ADM, Mahakumbh, stated here on Sunday that the administration has made arrangements for about 7 lakh Kalpwas. These devotees are being settled with consideration to their age and condition in approx-



imately 900 highas across various sectors of the fair.

Tents have been set up near the Ganga banks for those performing Kalpwas, ensuring they don't have to walk long distances every morning to bathe in the river. Cleanliness has been given top priority in the Kalpwas' camps.

The UP government is giving the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh

a divine, grand, and clean appearance. Special arrangements are being made for cleanliness throughout the entire fair area.

According to Abhinav Pathak, SDM, Mela, cleanliness is a top priority in the camps of Kalpwas, who are settling in various sectors. Colour-coded dustbins will be placed in the Kalpwas camps, with separate bins for dry and wet

waste. Additional dustbins will be provided along the banks of the Ganga to prevent any garbage accumulation.

Kalpwas will be urged not to use single-use plastic in the camps, and posters will be displayed outside all camps to encourage this practice.

The month of Magh, during which Kalpwas observe Kalpwas on the banks of Ganga, is a time of severe cold temperatures. To protect the elderly Kalpwas from the cold wave conditions, the administration is taking several precautions. Pathak mentioned that arrangements will be made to light bonfires outside the Kalpwas' camps, providing them warmth and protection from the harsh weather.

All India Muslim Jamaat issues fatwa discouraging New Year celebrations

AGENCIES
BAREILLY, 29 DECEMBER

Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Bareilly, the National President of All India Muslim Jamaat on Sunday issued a fatwa against New Year celebrations, discouraging Muslims from celebrating it, instead urged them to focus on religious practices that align with their faith.

According to Razvi, the fatwa was issued by Chashme Darfta Bareilly and urged both young Muslim men and women to refrain from participating in the New Year festivities.

"The young men and women who celebrate New Year have been instructed in this fatwa that celebrating New Year is not a matter of pride and neither should this

celebration be celebrated nor should it be congratulated," Razvi said, emphasising that the New Year marks the beginning of the Christian calendar, or the "English Year." He further stated that such non-religious practices are strictly "prohibited for Muslims."

Razvi continued, urging young Muslim people to avoid participating in New Year celebrations, stressing that Muslims should instead focus on religious practices that align with their faith. "New boys and girls have been instructed not to celebrate New Year... Muslims should avoid celebrating New Year," he said.

Meanwhile, Bareilly amid reports of author Salman Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses' being available for sale over three decades after it was

"banned" in the country, had voiced his opposition and said that the "ban should continue".

He said there should have been dialogue with people demanding a ban before allowing the sale of the book.

"There should have been dialogue because there is a Muslim perspective," he said.

Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Bareilly, president of the All India Muslim Jamaat, also echoed similar views.

He expressed concern that the availability of the book could "harm the social and religious fabric of the country".

"I request the government that in the manner in which the then government had imposed a ban on the eighties, this ban should continue," he said.



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From the North-East: An epilogue to the parting year

SHIBDAS BHATTACHARJEE

In these chilly days of December, the mercury is high in the eastern frontier of the country and, more precisely, in India's north-eastern region for various concerning reasons. The region is marked with internal complexities and volatilities resulting in conflicts and bloodshed. The internal dynamics of the region are always challenging because of several factors. But the geo-strategic location of the region makes it more vulnerable. The issues related to India's northeastern region can never be perceived keeping aside the neighbouring nations. The region shares both land and river borders with a number of countries. India's bilateral relations with most of these nations are uneasy. Naturally, the developments taking place on the other side of the border bear great significance for the northeast. In this context, two major factors that seem to be crippling India's strategic and security interests are Bangladesh and Myanmar. Bangladesh evolving as a Chinese proxy under the caretaker government led by Md Yunus is obviously a strategic setback for India. However, the situation in Bangladesh has larger implications for the north-eastern region. Similarly, the developments and power shift in Myanmar enhance India's concern and make things more complicated for the northeast for obvious reasons. Chinese design against India has been tactical use of its proxies to sabotage New Delhi's interests.

The year 2024 has been eventful in the northeast for the wrong reasons. Manipur kept on burning throughout the entire year. In fact, the affairs revolved around Manipur in this region in 2024 as well. This is true that among the northeastern states, Manipur is more complicated compared to other northeastern states. The issue started with the proposal to grant scheduled tribe status to the Meitei ethnic group

of the state. The Meiteis are the dominating ethnic group in the state, belonging mainly to Hinduism. Naturally, the proposal of granting scheduled tribe status to the Meitei ethnic group was vehemently protested by the Kuki ethnic group, who follow Christianity. Similarly, a significant number of Naga people also live in Manipur who also follow Christianity. This is true that the religious affinity creates bonding between the Kuki and Naga people in Manipur. The rivalry between the Meitei and Kuki ethnic groups of Manipur is age-old. But this became uglier last year. Like other northeastern states, issues related to Manipur are land rights and reservation. As Kukis got scheduled tribe status long back, the proposal of granting the same status to the Meitei community was perceived as a stand against the interest of the Kuki people.

In 2024, New Delhi experimented with some measures to sort out the Manipur conflict under the leadership of Union Minister for Home Affairs Amit Shah. But Shah has miserably failed to win the confidence of the people of Manipur. People of Manipur make serious allegations regarding shifting stands and statements of Shah. There is no doubt in the fact that despite repeated assurances, Shah has failed to bring the two conflicting ethnic groups to the negotiating table. Similarly, as the BJP is in power in Manipur, more was expected from the ruling party of New Delhi and Imphal. Naturally, 2024 ends with the concerning reality that even after 19 months, Manipur is burning, and the government is yet to sort it out, which puts a big question mark not only before Shah but the state government of Manipur as well.

Another turbulent state in the northeast is certainly Nagaland. In the case of Manipur, Nagaland has been reported adding fuel to escalate tension. But the most concerning development is the failure of several rounds of talks between the government and the Naga outfits



in 2024. The initiative of resolving the Naga issue faced setbacks because of several reasons. One is obviously the demand of appointing a new interlocutor. The other one is the use of a separate flag for the state. Naturally, the government turned down both the demands. Similarly, the government-NSCN-IM talks remained inconclusive in 2024 too, despite the fact that talks held on the framework were made in 2015. The year ends with the warning of NSCN-IM resuming insurgency. The leadership of NSCN-IM feels that the present government of New Delhi has not displayed commitment and accountability to address the Naga issue. This is a major cause of concern not only for the northeast but also for the internal security of India.

Similarly, Mizoram also seemed to be taking the wrong path yet again in 2024. The report of Mizo insurgent groups trying to fry bread putting into use the chaotic situation in Manipur also came to light this year. But the statement issued by the Mizoram chief minister, Lalduhoma, during his visit

to the United States created much controversy. His speech to consolidate the Mizo people and other sub-tribes following Christianity can be perceived as a challenge to India's sovereignty. The larger question is how a chief minister taking an oath of office as per the Indian Constitution can speak in this way. Whatever he said, his statement in the United States resembles the language of a separatist leader, which can never be accepted. Apart from anything else, such a statement will instigate insurgent activities in Mizoram and other Christian-dominated regions of northeast India. The year 2024 ends with such apprehension.

This year is also important for Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya. Under the initiative of Assam's chief minister, political initiatives have been made to resolve the age-old inter-state border disputes in 2024. But as was apprehended, these initiatives are yet to achieve success. The ruling BJP in various northeastern states has made fresh attempts to expand the saffron

agenda following the patterns of the Hindi heartland. On the one hand criminal activities increased substantially in Assam, on the other, fresh debate began regarding the cut-off year related to the NRC. The strife of the ethnic community to create a separate state also got momentum on the backdrop of abnormal demographic changes in Tripura. Some incidents of separatist activities have also been reported from Arunachal Pradesh. Similarly, increasing activities of crime have been reported from Meghalaya. The narcotic trade increased considerably this year in these states.

However, it would be wrong to perceive the issues related to India's northeast without referring to the developments in the neighbouring countries. The situation in Bangladesh since the ouster of Hasina has proved to be one of the major challenges before India. However, this challenge is larger in the context of northeast India. As Hasina left Bangladesh on 5 August, the anti-Hasina movement began targeting religious minorities and their worship places across Bangladesh. On the backdrop of inhuman atrocities against the Hindu community in Bangladesh, a fresh spell of refugees tried to enter India. The government of India made a heavy deployment of force across the India-Bangladesh border to restrict people entering India. The northeast-Bangladesh border is no exception. Bangladesh becoming the new destination of Islamic terror bears great implications for northeast India. Pakistan gaining ground in Bangladesh shows the level of concern happening adjacent to northeast India in 2024. This is a matter of grave concern for the northeast. The religious demography of northeast India makes it obvious. The situation in Bangladesh has larger implications for the northeast, as apprehension is larger considering the track record of Bangladesh that provided asylum to the northeast-based insurgent outfits earlier. The

caretaker government of Bangladesh has completely failed to control the situation. Under the rule of Md Yunus, Bangladesh seems to follow the same pattern that Jaiur Rahman once did. In fact, Bangladesh seems to follow the footprint of Syria. The regular provocative statements of Bangladeshi Islamic leaders during the so-called religious gathering and the challenge to annex Assam and Tripura with Bangladesh have already created religious intolerance across northeastern states. The tone and trajectory of the insurgent leaders of the northeast prove that a section is happy with what has happened in Bangladesh so far.

Similarly, despite the shift in power in Myanmar, the situation has hardly changed in India's favour. Be it Manipur, Nagaland or Mizoram, the impact of Myanmar is obvious. One may rejoice that the Arakan Army is challenging Bangladesh in Chittagong. But the reality is: like the previous junta, the Arakan Army is also dependent on China. In fact, Myanmar does not have the leverage to run the affairs without China. In the last week of December, China recognised the Arakan Army that virtually replaced the former regime. This means Myanmar remains in the same place as it has been so far for India.

Thus, the year 2024 is ending with several concerning developments for Northeast India, and all these are viable strategic and security challenges for New Delhi. There is no magic stick that can change things with the first sunrise of 2025. But that does not mean that there is any scope to be casual. In fact, India does not have that leverage considering all these things. This is not a New Year greeting but a wakeup call to resolve the issues plaguing the northeast with larger pace. All hope to see solid policy decisions in 2025 to secure India's interests in the northeast like in other parts of India.

The writer is an independent contributor. Views expressed are personal.

LitFest concludes enriching search for socio-cultural roots

NAVA THAKURIA

Breaking the conventional territory of a standardised literature festival in India, the Pragjyotishpur Literature Festival 2024 unveiled a series of panel discussions and special sessions with eminent authors to motivate the audience to look beyond the current narrative and search for socio-cultural roots. Organised for the second time by the Sankardev Education and Research Foundation on 13, 14 and 15 December, the LitFest in the prehistoric city of Guwahati also comprised different sessions on multilingual poetry recitation, regional literature aspiration, a few selected cultural programmes with local flavours that flourished on the bank of the Brahmaputra, and workshops on creative writing and environmental protection to attract people with a variety of interests in literature, art, culture and traditions that prevailed in northeast India. The inaugural ceremony of the national-level LitFest opened up for thousands of literary enthusiasts, art connoisseurs, and novice writers with a real intellectual and interactive treat propagating the rich cultural heritage of the land. The closing ceremony witnessed the presentation of Pragjyotishpur LitFest Literature Awards to veteran Nepali writer Bidyapati Dahal and in the promising writer's category to Suprakash Bhuyan.

Dahal, a revered Sanskrit scholar who has immensely contributed to Nepali and Hindi literature, expressed his gratitude for the honour and stated that it gave him a motivation to create more literary works in the coming days. On the other hand, Bhuyan, who is a stimulating story writer regularly contributing to prominent Assamese literary magazines like Prakash, Gariyosi, Prantik, Satsori, etc., stated that the award has made him more responsible for his literary activities. Assam's widely acclaimed academician Amarjyoti Choudhury, who graced the occasion as the chief guest, observed that the national-level LitFest would open doors to new ideas, which became necessary for the younger generation. He mentioned that Bharat Ratna Bhupen Hazarika always maintained a sense of national responsibility, harmony, and universal philosophy in his creations. An actor and writer by passion, Choudhury lauded the initiative to organise a series of discussions on heritage, tradition, self-awareness and pride during the event.

Prior to the closing function, five intriguing sessions were organised on the last day of Pragjyotishpur LitFest. Prof. Gajendra Adhikari (centre-head at North Eastern Studies of Mohapurush Srimanta Sankardev University), Prashanta Chakrabarty from Cotton University and Jogendra Nath Sharma (retired



orately on 'Swabodh & Swabhimaan: From the time of Pragjyotishpur to present-day Assam,' which was moderated by award-winning Assamese author Anuradha Sharma Pujari. Four young cultural researchers from Tripura, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh graced another session titled 'Exploring Regional Literature & Culture: Voice of North-East India.' Moderated by Pari Hiloidari from Handique Girls' College, the session was enlightened by Bompy Riba (Rajiv Gandhi Regional University), Gankhu Sumnayan (Wangsa Government College), Dilip Mayengbam and Ashok Dev with their stimulating views. Kavya Kaveri (multilingual poetry session) was enriched by moderator Ratneshwar Basumatary (Bodo poet) along with Deven Chapkata (Nepali), Ravi Shankar Ravi (Hindi), Welsing Hanse (Karbi), Midul Halai and Abhijit Gogoi (Asomiya). Two parallel workshops attracted a good number of young participants where writer Atanu Bhattacharya conducted the training program on 'Creative Writing: The Art of Storytelling' and environmentalist author Soumyadeep Dutta conducted a session on 'Preserving Assam's Natural Heritage.'

The second day witnessed four appealing panel discussions exploring socio-cultural and political developments of the far eastern part of Bharat. The discussions witnessed vibrant intellectual exchanges delving into heritage, culture, cinema and journalism in the region. Experts from various fields shared their perspectives, contributing to a deeper understanding of the local culture and society. The session titled 'Heritage and Cultural Identity: The Role of Technology' explored the possibilities of preservation for the cultural heritage through technological advancements. Moderated by Rakhee Kalita Moral from

Cotton University, the session was addressed by Dhruvajyoti Bora, vice-chancellor of Srimanta Sankardeva Health Science University, where he highlighted the importance of regional languages in maintaining cultural authenticity. Bhaskarjyoti Sharma from Anundorham Borooah Institute of Language, Art & Culture discussed how traditions shape identity and stressed the role of technology in conserving these legacies.

Similarly, Arup Nath from Tezpur Central University stated that some traditions are tangible and visible to us. These are markers of history, but there are also intangible traditions that can only be felt (for instance, the melodies in Bhupen-da's songs), he added. Participating in the discussion titled 'Role of Brahmaputra in Assam's Diverse Society,' Er Pradeep Bhuyan cautioned about ecological and cultural threats posed by a number of hydroelectric dams on Brahmaputra in the upper riparian localities (including Tibet). Prashanta Boro from Bodo Sahitya Sabha spoke about the mighty river's historical significance from ancient Pragjyotishpur to modern-era Assam, where the session was moderated by Padma Shri awardee author Arup Kumar Dutta.

On the 'Changing Media Landscape: Credibility and Reliability,' which was moderated by Prasanta Jyoti Baruah of Assam Tribune, focused on the evolving characteristics of journalism in the region. Senior journalist Rupam Barua discussed the challenges ahead of mainstream media persons while maintaining factual accuracy amidst the aggression of social media. As a panellist, this writer emphasised truth-driven reporting and highlighted the adverse impacts of unchecked misinformation spread by some media outlets. The panel on 'Beyond Entertainment: The Role of Cinema in Shaping Societal Narratives,' which was moderated by film critic Aparajita Pujari, examined cinema's transformative potential in shaping societal norms and perceptions. Atul Gangwar, a veteran filmmaker, spoke about cinema's power to address misconceptions and foster positive social changes. Popular Assamese actor Kapil Bora highlighted the importance of

conveying meaningful messages through film works. Accomplished speaker Dabang Tayeng and academician Samrat Bora highlighted how cinema (celluloid to current digital forms) can introduce new ideas to influence social growth and progress.

The unique literary confluence of author-translators, art connoisseurs, critics, budding writers, and commentators on economics & history was inaugurated by celebrated educationist Malini Goswami in the gracious presence of acclaimed economist Swaminathan Gurumurthy, prominent author-columnist J Sai Deepak, JNU professor Anand Ranganathan, well-known historian Sanjeev Sanyal, SERF chairman Lt Gen (retired) Rana Pratap Kalita, Smriti Kumar Sinha, vice-chancellor of Pragjyotishpur University, LitFest organising committee chief Taren Boro, and many others. The inaugural function began with an Assamese devotional song, Borgeet, performed by classical musician Vidyasagar, to greet the audience comprising several distinguished personalities, including Basistha Bujarbaruah, Narendra Kumar, Sunil Mohanty, Khagen Saikia, Ramen Sarma, Jagadindra Raichoudhury, Devajit Bhuyan, Bikram Kalita, etc.

In recent days, literature festivals organised in different parts of India have become popular among writer-authors, playwrights, music-film appreciators, social thinkers and editor-journalists, where the regional literary works are often propagated with great enthusiasm. Pragjyotishpur LitFest has joined the group of annual literary events, including the Jaipur Literature Festival, Kolkata Literary Festival, Bangalore Literature Festival, Kerala Literature Festival, Pune International Literary Festival, Mumbai Queensline LitFest, Hyderabad Literary Festival, Nagpur Literature Festival, Ahmedabad International Literature Festival, Chandigarh Literature Festival, Dehradun Literature Festival, Goa Arts and Literature Festival, Bhubaneswar Literary Festival, Srinagar Literature Festival, Lucknow Literature Festival, etc., but maintains a difference, which was reflected in the last edition as well.

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Revisiting autonomous district councils in North-East India: Relevance and challenges

ABHIJIT DEB

The spotlight has once again turned to the autonomous district councils (ADCs) as the Meghalaya government has announced the dates for the district council elections, scheduled for 21 February 2025. This renewed focus offers an opportunity to examine the relevance and challenges of these unique administrative entities in the northeast region of India. Autonomous district councils were established under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to safeguard the rights, customs and traditions of tribal communities. Envisioned as self-governing bodies, ADCs were intended to bring governance closer to the grassroots, ensuring that the aspirations of tribal communities were met while fostering their integration into the national mainstream.

Currently, there are ten ADCs across seven states in the NE region: Meghalaya: Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC), and Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), Assam: Bodoland Territorial Council, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, and Dima Hasao Autonomous Council, Tripura: Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, Mizoram: Chakma Autonomous District Council, Lai Autonomous District Council and Mara Autonomous District Council.

Powers and functions of ADCs

ADCs possess legislative, executive and judicial powers over specific subjects, such as land, forests, marriage, divorce and inheritance. They can also manage local institutions like schools, markets, dispensaries and roads. Importantly, ADCs have the authority to establish village courts, although their jurisdiction remains subordinate to the concerned High Court.

However, the powers granted to ADCs have often led to conflicts of interest with state governments. In Meghalaya, for instance, the entire state remains under the Sixth Schedule despite achieving statehood in 1972, resulting in frequent disputes between the ADCs and the state legislature.

Despite their lofty goals, ADCs have faced significant criticism for failing to deliver on their promises. Key challenges include:

- Lack of coordination and accountability: Coordination between state governments, planning departments and ADCs remains weak, leading to poor implementation of developmental projects. The absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms has also resulted in widespread corruption and underdevelopment.
- Exclusion and conflict: Instead of empowering tribal communities, the ADC framework has often led to exclusion and disparities.

For instance, the demand for an autonomous council by the Kukis in Manipur has sparked tensions with

the majority Meitei community. Similarly, in Assam, groups like the Chutia, Koch-Rajbongshi, Matak, Moran, Tai-Ahom, and Tea Tribes have demanded inclusion under the Sixth Schedule, potentially leading to further divisions.

ADCs are frequently accused of misusing their financial autonomy. Diversion of funds, favoritism, and vote-bank politics have undermined their credibility. Corruption, as highlighted in studies like Triveni Goswami's investigation of the Dima Hasao council, has severely hampered development.

"A nexus of contractors, bureaucrats, and local elites has emerged, exploiting development funds meant for infrastructure and welfare projects. This has eroded trust in ADCs and diminished their ability to serve tribal communities effectively," the report stated.

While the Sixth Schedule aimed to protect tribal identities, it has also created disparities. Leaders from hill areas argue for greater autonomy, while plains leaders view this autonomy as excessive, fearing separatist tendencies.

This divide was evident even during the debates of the Constituent Assembly, with some members like Kuladhar Chaliha warning against creating "Trib-alstan" akin to Pakistan.

Moreover, exemptions under laws like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019, have further complicated the situation. While areas under the Sixth Schedule are shielded from CAA provisions, this has led to concerns about unequal treatment and exclusion.

Given the socio-political changes in the NE region, it is imperative to revisit and enhance the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. Key recommendations of some committee include:

- Strengthening governance and accountability: Establish efficient village and regional councils to improve grassroots governance. Introduce robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating developmental projects and fund utilisation.
- Balancing autonomy and integration: Promote collaboration between ADCs and state governments to harmonise development efforts. Ensure that autonomy does not hinder inclusive growth and integration. Addressing corruption: Enforce stricter regulations to curb financial mismanagement. Increase transparency in fund allocation and project implementation. Fostering dialogue: Encourage dialogue among various ethnic groups to address disparities and prevent conflicts. Emphasise shared development goals to unite diverse communities.

As the NE region continues to evolve, the relevance of ADCs must be reassessed. While they have played a pivotal role in preserving tribal identities, their limitations and shortcomings cannot be overlooked. By addressing these challenges, ADCs can fulfill their intended purpose of empowering tribal communities and driving holistic development in the region.

