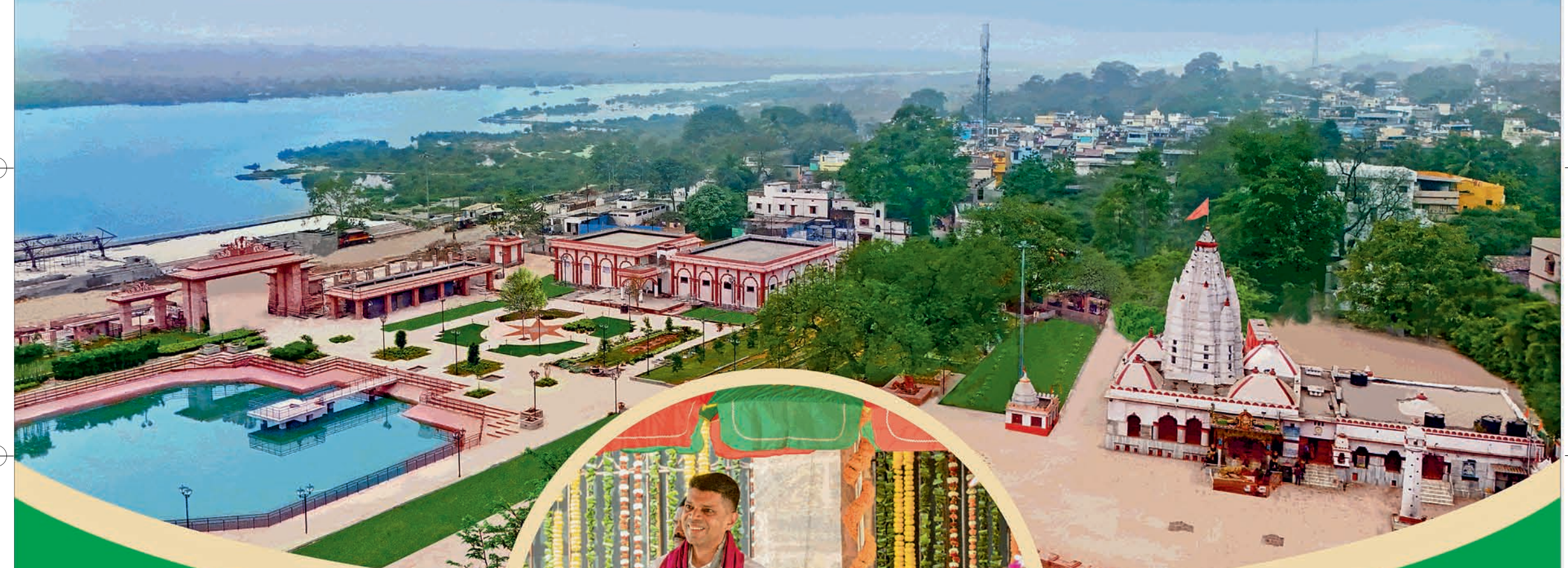


JAI MAA SAMALEI



With the blessings of Maa Samalei and cooperation of innumerable devotees, **'Samalei Prakalpa'** inauguration has been successfully completed.

Heartfelt gratitude to all devotees!

Come experience the divinity of Maa Samaleswari Temple with cultural festivities.

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com
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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
You are likely to give in to the demands of your children today. Ganesh says it is for times like this that you labour so hard. You will finish the tasks that you have been postponing for a long time. It is a good day for people in the medical field and in the public sector.

TAURUS
Ganesh finds this an excellent day for managers and administrators. If you are one, the results you will achieve by the end of the day will far exceed the efforts you put in. This is mainly because your subordinates will be enthusiastic, compliant and cooperative.

GEMINI
You will listen to your heart over your head, swept away as you will be in a flood of emotions today. This could mean that you will be unable to distinguish between good and bad. However, looking back upon your day in the evening, you are unlikely to regret any of the decisions you made, says Ganesh.

CANCER
You will be involved in a team effort and associated with work like inspection and examination. You will base your opinions on your friends' choices. So select good friends, says Ganesh. You will spend time with close circle.

LEO
Your natural self-confidence and capability will help you attain a position of strength today. As a result, all your tasks will be completed easily and you will reap rewards greater than your expectations, says Ganesh.

VIRGO
You will be faced with serious financial problems today. You may even have to pay through your nose to get what you desire. Later in the evening, you might accomplish some short-term goals. Ganesh predicts that some vital business agreements will end your day in high spirits.

LIBRA
Ganesh says you will be able to improve your relations abroad. There will be good news coming from friends or relatives living abroad. Your working ability and efficiency will make you popular in the office today. In the day today you shall have a variety of good and bad experiences

SCORPIO
An electric wire of 440 volts is apt to describe you today. According to Ganesh, you are in a belligerent mood today and can burst like a fireball. Meditation and yoga is likely to improve the situation. Remember, treat others the way you want to be treated by them.

SAGITTARIUS
Ganesh foresees a day full of promises. People in the creative field, especially artists are going to benefit more. Radio jockey and television anchors can make a note of this day in their diary, as it may serve as a memorable day, says Ganesh.

CAPRICORN
You have projected yourself as a confused individual. You may have a tendency to remain in a double mind. But, today you'll come up with a very specific plan that will surprise many of the people around you. Be clear about what you want to do in life, how you want your life to be and make sincere efforts to achieve it, guides Ganesh.

AQUARIUS
You are disappointed and you seek solace in spirituality. Don't run away from the problems; rather face them with strength and confidence, advises Ganesh, to bring your life back on track. With patience and belief in the Almighty, you will be sail through the storm.

PISCES
You will display kindness and generosity today and will do your best to help anyone in need. At work you will receive praise for the efforts that you've put in and your dedication will be validated. Even though you intend to give utmost importance to your family, this intention will trail in the shadow of pending work which will require long hours.



NICOLE EGGERT REGRETS JOINING BAYWATCH

Actress Nicole Eggert, known for her role as Summer Quinn in *Baywatch*, expressed discomfort with her iconic outfits. Unaware of her lifeguard role, she opted for breast implants at 18 due to on-screen appearance concerns, later remorseful about both the decision and the movie.

DE NIRO ENJOYING FATHERHOOD AT 80

Actor Robert De Niro gushed over his baby daughter in a new interview, describing being an 80-year-old father as 'great'. The two-time Oscar winner welcomed his seventh child with partner Tiffany Chen in May of last year, and they named their daughter Gia.



13th IFFB concludes with the screening of *Joram*

Bhubaneswar: The seven-day-long Indian Film Festival Bhubaneswar (IFFB), organised by the Film Society of Bhubaneswar (FSB) here at Odissi Research Centre came to an end, Sunday.

The first screening of the last day was Mani Kaul's *Siddeshwari* which explores the life of Siddheshwari Devi, a classical singer from Varanasi.

Next in line was the Nepali film *Bahadur* by Diwa Shah. The movie showcases the woes of the working class during the nationwide lockdown imposed in India following the outbreak of the COVID pandemic.

The day continued with the repeat screening of the Malayalam film by Jeo Baby, *Kaathal*, centering around the captivating narrative of Mathew



Volunteers of Film Society of Bhubaneswar

PHOTO CREDIT: FSB

and Omana, a seemingly harmonious couple residing in the serene village of Teekoy in the Kottayam district of Kerala.

The last movie of the day was Manoj Bajpayee-starrer *Joram* by Devashish Makhija, a story of a desperate man and his infant daughter fleeing a system that wants them crushed at any cost.

Opium by Aman Sachdeva, which got the highest number of votes, was screened again on the last day.

Addressing the audience at the end, Subrat Beura, the honorary president of FSB, extended gratitude to the viewers and all the partners for being a part of the week-long event. PNN



'Have always aimed at being pan-Indian'

Mumbai: Actress Shruuti Haasan, who was recently seen in *Salaar*, says that she doesn't like comparing herself to her peers in the film industry, who have made the most of the pan-India trend. She has been working in several Indian film industries since she started her career in 2005 and always took up films based on what felt organic to her.

In the last couple of years, several actors such as Ram Charan, Prabhas, Allu Arjun, and others have reached new heights of fame, thanks to the crossover between several language industries and awareness through social media and OTT.

"I have never really compared myself to a contemporary male or female actor. I have just followed a path in my career that has felt natural to me at the time," said Shruuti in an interview.

She adds, "At the time I started, there was no social media, OTT. I think a lot more people would have seen a lot more of my work, but I am happy for every journey and phase of my life."

"For me, it's not a pan-India fever. If you look back to the interviews I gave 11 years ago, I have always aimed at being pan-Indian, and I have always used that word 'pan Indian'," concluded the actress.

On the work front, Shruuti will be seen next in the Telugu-Hindi film *Dacoit* alongside Adivi Sesh.

MANORANJAN DAS' BIRTH CENTENARY CELEBRATION

1st state-level play reading fest in City

BIJAY MANDAL, OP

Bhubaneswar: Odisha Natya Sangh (ONS), a confederation of nearly 150 theatre troupes of the state, in collaboration with Odisha Sahitya Akademi (OSA), organised the first state-level Shruuti Nataka Mahotsav, or play reading festival, here at Sanskruti Bhawan (Dept of Culture), Sunday.

The event was held to celebrate the centenary birth anniversary of eminent playwright Padma Shri Manoranjan Das.

Four theatre troupes from four zones under ONS presented the same number of dramas written by Das.

Nayeeka from Balasore in the north zone performed *Sandhan* (Direction-Susmita Rana), while the west zone's Swara of Sambalpur presented *Katha Ghoda* (Direction-Manas Mishra). Similarly, Golden Mig Kala Parishad of Sunabeda in the south zone and Dynamic



Members of Swara, a theatre troupe from Sambalpur, presented *Katha Ghoda* at Sanskruti Bhawan, Bhubaneswar, Sunday

Platform of Bhubaneswar in the east zone performed *Klanta Prajapati* (Direction - Samir Mohapatra) and *Buxi Jagabandhu* (Direction-Debabrat Pattnaik), respectively.

Among the dignitaries were legendary theatre personality Anant Mahapatra, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi president Aruna Mohanty, OSA secretary Subodh Acharya, All India Radio Director Tarunkanti Rout, ONS president Manoj Pattanaik, secretary Suvakanta Padhy, and eminent critic Sanghamitra Mishra. Odissi Research Centre chief executive officer Sikata Das,

who is also the daughter of Manoranjan Das, was also present at the event.

Natya Chetana founder Subodh Pattnaik who was in the audience gallery said, "Play reading has been a high level artistic event in many theatre centres of India and abroad where eminent theatre actors demonstrate their voice culture and high-priced tickets are sold out."

For the uninitiated, Shruuti Nataka is a public reading of a play with dramatic use of voice. It is a form of theatre without sets, props, special lighting, or full costumes.



Sobhita eyes all out action roles

Mumbai: Actress Sobhita Dhulipala, who has been actively working on acquiring new skills, harbours a dream of working on an all-out action film, which she hopes will become a reality soon.

"At the moment, I'm in an inspired state of mind, I'm working on my skill set, and I'd love to do an action film. I'd absolutely love to do period cinema. I have a special love for them. Maybe that's why I obsessively train in MMA and classical dance every day," she says.

Talking about her learning, the *Made in Heaven* actress adds, "Whatever happens, happens for a reason. I think it's important to respect our journey so far and not be obsessed with the idea of 'better'. I don't know about shattering stereotypes and all that, but I have definitely changed as an actor and as a human being. It is only natural. I don't think anyone is ever-changing. We are all ever-moving work in progress."

On the work front, Sobhita will be seen next in Hollywood film *Monkey Man* with Dev Patel.

AGENCIES

FUN post

PEANUTS



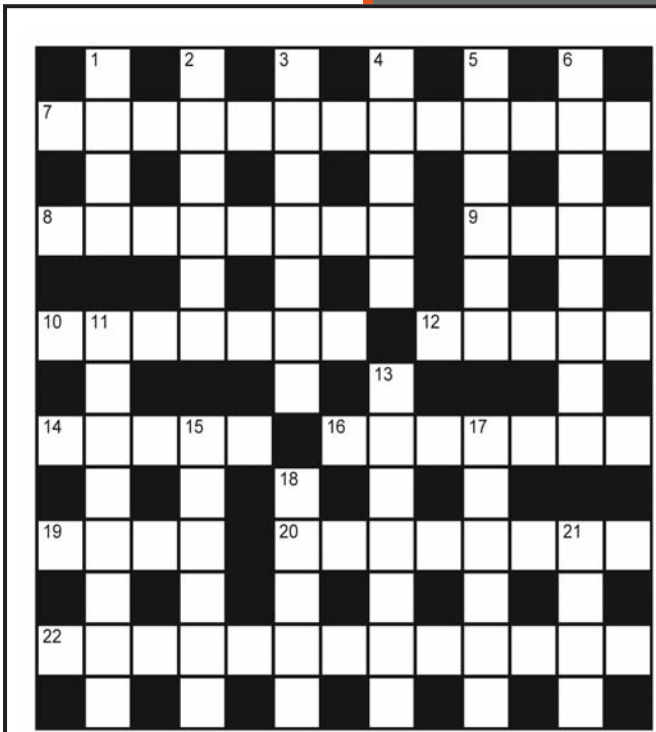
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



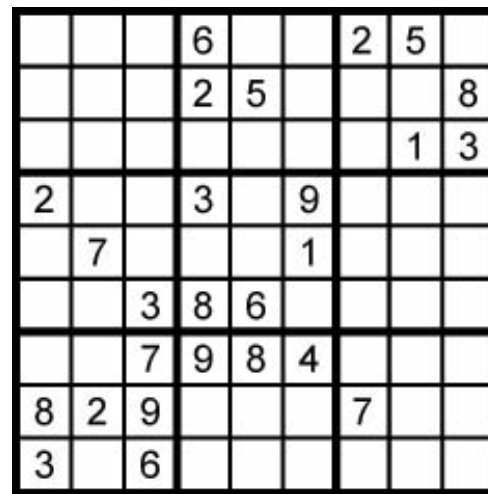
CROSSWORD



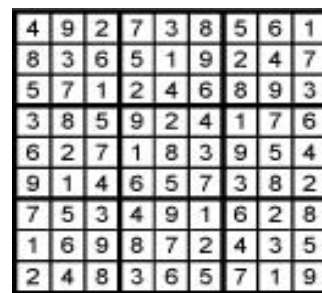
- Across**
- 7 Not up to expectations
 - 8 Driving hazard
 - 9 Vichyssoise ingredient
 - 10 Environmental science
 - 12 Savoury jelly
 - 14 Heap starter
 - 16 Social blunder (4,3)
 - 19 *The Art of Fugue* composer
 - 20 Elaborated
 - 22 Newspaper reporter
 - 5 Pointed tool for writing
 - 6 Seasoning
 - 11 Australian parrot
 - 13 Satirise
 - 15 Hang on
 - 17 Idyllic, beautiful place
 - 18 Savage
 - 21 Geologic periods

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

OrissaPOST

HERE . NOW

AAP to go solo

Delhi CM Kejriwal says his party will contest all the 90 Assembly seats in Haryana on its own, but the LS polls will be fought as part of INDIA bloc

NATIONAL | P7

Space race

Iran successfully launches three satellites into space with a rocket that had multiple failures in the past

INTERNATIONAL | P8

Arnault richest again

Bernard Arnault returns as world's richest man as Elon Musk lost more than \$18 billion in his net worth after Tesla stock nosedived

BUSINESS | P9

Maiden Grand Slam win

Italy's Jannik Sinner beats Daniil Medvedev to win his first Grand Slam singles title at the Australian Open in Melbourne

SPORTS | BACK PAGE

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BHUBANESWAR | MONDAY JANUARY 29 | 2024

P1

Constable held for role in ₹30L robbery attempt

POST NEWS NETWORK

Paralakhemundi, Jan 28: Police arrested two persons including a constable posted with Reserve Police, Paralakhemundi over their alleged involvement in a ₹30 lakh robbery bid on an Andhra trader here in Gajapati district.

The accused constable was identified as Tanuj Kumar Sabat, president of Gajapati District Constables' Association, and his accomplice as Binod Raypalli of Saluru village in Parbatipuram Manyam district in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.

Tanuj was suspended from service after a case was registered against him. Five mobile phones were also seized from the duo's possession. This was stated here by SDPO Madhav Chandra Nayak in a presser, Sunday.

Police said the duo was planning to loot ₹30 lakh from Vishakhapatnam-based trader T Naga Rabinranath on the pretext of exchanging ₹2,000 denominations worth ₹60 lakh with currency notes of ₹500 denomination. To lure him, they also offered to pay him ₹30 lakh out of the total amount of ₹60 lakh in exchange of the favour.

When Rabinranath came with cash as discussed, Tanuj and Binod tried to snatch the cash bag in his possession and run away. However, some local youths overpowered the accused duo and informed the police.

Police rushed to the spot and nabbed the two accused. They were taken for interrogation during which Tanuj admitted to their crime. Police registered a case and produced the two accused in the court.



SNOW RETURNS TO VALLEY: Tourists amid light snowfall at ski resort Gulmarg, in Baramulla district, Sunday. Gulmarg received a fresh snowfall breaking a two-month-long dry spell

PTI PHOTO

Guterres: UN to punish staffers with terror links

REUTERS

New York, Jan 28: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres vowed Sunday to hold to account "any UN employee involved in acts of terror" after allegations that some refugee agency staffers were involved in the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel.

But Guterres implored governments to continue supporting the UN refugee agency for Palestinians (UNRWA) after nine countries paused funding.

"Any UN employee involved in acts of terror will be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution," the UN chief said in a statement.

In his first direct comments on the issue, the UN chief gave details about the UNRWA staffers implicated in the "abhorrent alleged acts". Of the 12 implicated, he said, nine had been terminated, one was confirmed dead and the identities of the other two were being clarified.

Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Finland Saturday joined the United States, Australia and Canada in pausing funding to the aid agency, a critical source of support for people in Gaza, after the allegations by Israel.

U-turn on de-reservation

After facing backlash from several quarters and fearing a repercussion in the upcoming polls, the Centre rushed into damage control mode prompting the Edu Ministry to post a clarification

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 28: The Ministry of Education (MoE) Sunday clarified that no reserved posts can be de-reserved after severe outcry over draft guidelines by the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposing that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be declared unreserved if enough candidates from these categories are not available.

The 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)' are in the public domain for feedback from stakeholders.

The draft guidelines have been receiving backlash from several quarters. The Congress alleged there is a conspiracy to end reser-



vation given to SCs, STs and OBCs in posts in HEIs and that the Modi government is only doing politics of symbolism on the issues of Dalits, backward classes and tribals.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the BJP is "only busy in snatching the jobs of youths".

The party's General Secretary Jairam Ramesh demanded that the proposal be withdrawn immediately.

The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) also staged a protest against it and burnt an effigy of UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar. He also clarified that there has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions (CEIs) in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation.

Reservation in Central Educational Institutions is provided for all posts in direct recruitment in Teacher's cadre as

per the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.

After enactment of this Act, no reserved post is to be de-reserved. Ministry of Education has given directives to all the CEIs to fill up the vacancies strictly as per the 2019 Act, the Ministry of Education wrote on X.

Later, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan clarified that not a single post will be de-reserved and there is no scope of ambiguity about reservations after the introduction of the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.

It is important for all HEIs to ensure that all backlog positions in the reserved category are filled up through concerted efforts.

According to new draft guidelines by the UGC, a vacancy reserved for SC or ST or OBC cannot be filled by a candidate other than an SC or ST or OBC candidate, as the case may be.

However, a reserved vacancy may be declared unreserved by following the procedure of de-reservation where after, it can be filled as an unreserved vacancy.

There is a general ban on de-reservation of reserved vacancies in case of direct recruitment.

Modi likely to visit state twice in Feb

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Odisha twice in February, state BJP president Manmohan Samal said Sunday.

Modi, who is scheduled to visit Sambalpur February 3 and address a public meeting, may also visit the state capital February 10 when the saffron party holds its national women's conference here, Samal said.

The party has decided to hold two women's conferences, one in Madhya Pradesh and the second in Odisha in February.

The prime minister is likely to attend the women's conference in Odisha tentatively February 10. The PM has given his consent to attend it, Samal said, adding that the details of the February 10 programme will be announced soon.

He said around 25,000 women from 14 states are likely to attend the Mahila Samavesh, which is being seen as an attempt by the BJP to make a dent into the trusted women vote bank of Biju Janata Dal.

Earlier in the day, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan who hails from Odisha had indicated regarding the PM's programme in the coastal region of Odisha after the tour of the western region February 3.

Nitish at it again

BACK IN NDA, NITISH KUMAR TAKES OATH AS BIHAR CM FOR RECORD 9TH TIME

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, Jan 28: JD(U) president Nitish Kumar Sunday took oath as Chief Minister of Bihar for a record ninth time after a dramatic volte-face, ditching the Mahagathbandhan and the Opposition bloc INDIA and forming a new government with the BJP, which he had dumped less than 18 months ago.

Kumar was sworn in by Bihar Governor Rajendra Arlekar at Raj Bhavan in the presence of senior leaders including BJP national president JP Nadda, hours after he resigned from the post, saying "things were not working well" for him in the Grand Alliance and the Opposition bloc.

BJP leaders -- Samrat Choudhary and former Speaker Vijay Kumar Sinha -- were among those who took oath of office. The two are named as Deputy Chief Ministers.

Earlier, Choudhary and Sinha were named as leader and deputy leader, respectively, of the BJP legislature party. They thanked the party's top leadership for the opportunity and



vowed to "protect Bihar from the jungle raj unleashed by Lalu Prasad's RJD".

JD(U) members Vijay Kumar Choudhary, Vijendra Yadav and Shrawan Kumar also took oath apart from former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi-led Hindustan Awam Morcha's Santosh Kumar Suman and independent legislator Sumit Singh.

Congratulating Kumar and his two deputies, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that the newly sworn-in NDA government in Bihar will leave no stone unturned for the state's development and to fulfil people's aspirations.

In a post on X, Modi said he is confident that the new government in Bihar will serve the people with full dedication.

Notably, no leader of the RJD, the single largest party in the assembly, was present at the ceremony.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Our ideology is same. We both believe in shamelessness

WEATHER

| | BBSR | CTC |
|----------|--------|--------|
| Max Temp | 29.6°C | 26.6°C |
| Min Temp | 15.1°C | 14.5°C |
| Humidity | 50% | 67% |
| Rainfall | Nil | Nil |

FORECAST

FOG/MIST IN THE MORNING



SHORT TAKES

Child rape cases up 96% from '16 to '22

New Delhi: Child rape cases, encompassing all forms of penetrative assaults, have registered a rise of 96 per cent from 2016 to 2022, according to an analysis of the NCRB data by child rights NGO CRY. Discussing the potential reasons behind this surge, Subhendu Bhattacharjee, the director of research and knowledge exchange at Child Rights and You (CRY), said the improved public awareness has led to a higher number of reported cases of sexual offenses against children. The analysis conducted by CRY revealed a consistent upward trajectory in these rape incidents since 2016, with the exception of 2020.

P7

3 Americans killed in Jordan drone attack

Columbia (US): Three American service members were killed and 'many' were wounded in a drone strike in Jordan, President Joe Biden said in a statement Sunday. He attributed the attack to Iran-backed militia groups. They were the first US fatalities in months of strikes against American forces across the Middle East by Iranian-backed militias amid the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, increasing the risk of escalation. US officials have assessed that one of several Iranian-backed groups are responsible. Biden said the United States "will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner our choosing."

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Paris, Jan 28: Two climate activists hurled soup Sunday at the glass protecting the Mona Lisa at the Louvre Museum in Paris and shouted slogans advocating for a sustainable food system. This came amid protests by French farmers against sev-

Angry French farmers have been using tractors to set up road blockades and dumping stinky agricultural waste at the gates of government offices across France

ASSOCIATED PRESS

eral issues, including low wages. In a video posted on social media, two women with the words 'FOOD RIPOSTE' written on their t-shirts could be seen passing under a security barrier to get closer to the painting and throwing soup at the glass protecting Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece. "What's the most important thing" they shouted. "Art, or right to a healthy and sustainable food?" "Our farming system is sick. Our farmers are dying at work," they added.

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In a video posted on social media, two women with the words 'FOOD RIPOSTE' written on their t-shirts could be seen passing under a security barrier to get closer to the painting and throwing soup at the glass protecting Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece. "What's the most important thing" they shouted. "Art, or right to a healthy and sustainable food?" "Our farming system is sick. Our farmers are dying at work," they added.

The Louvre employees could then be seen putting black panels in front of the Mona Lisa and asking visitors to evacuate the room. Paris police said two people were arrested following

Climate activists throw soup at Louvre's Mona Lisa



the incident. On its website, the 'Food Riposte' group said the French government is breaking its climate commitments and called for the equivalent of the country's state-sponsored health care system to be put in place to give people better access to healthy food while providing

farmers a decent income.

Angry French farmers have been using their tractors for days to set up road blockades and slow traffic across France to seek better remuneration for their produce, less red tape and protection against cheap imports. They also dumped stinky

agricultural waste at the gates of government offices.

On Friday, the government announced a series of measures that farmers said do not fully address their demands. Those include "drastically simplifying" certain technical procedures and the progressive end to diesel fuel taxes for farm vehicles.

Some farmers threatened to converge on Paris, starting Monday, to block the main roads leading to the capital.

New Prime Minister Gabriel Attal visited a farm Sunday in the central region of Indre-et-Loire. He acknowledged farmers are in a difficult position because "on the one side we say we need quality" and on the other side "we want ever-lower prices."

Darjeeling hills to get school service commission

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, Jan 28: In order to combat the acute shortage of teachers in the hills of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong in North Bengal, a spate regional school service commission has been constituted for the hills. The term of the regional school service commission exclusively for the hills will be till January 2028. The seven-member commission will be headed by retired teacher and Kalimpong resident Vijay Kumar Rai, according to a notification issued by the West Bengal Education Department.



Welcoming the development, the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration's (GTA) chief executive and Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM) chief Anit Thapa said that the

long-standing demand for the hills has been finally fulfilled. "The commission will work to strengthen the education system in West Bengal. The people of the hills have started realizing how important it is to have a cordial relationship with the state government," said Thapa, whose party has a political understanding with the ruling Trinamool Congress.

Another popular leader from the hills, Harka Bahadur Chhetri, also welcomed the decision for a separate regional school service commission for the hills. "This will make the process of appointment of teachers in the state-run schools in the hills smoother. At the same time, the school boards in the hills will be able to operate with bigger autonomy," Chhetri said. Currently, there are around 1,000 primary schools, 300 junior high schools and 700 high schools in the hills.

The term of the regional school service commission exclusively for the hills will be till January 2028

Punjab seeks Israel's help for virus-free horticulture

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE



Chandigarh, Jan 28 : With depleting rivers and groundwater, high pesticide dependence, climate risks and unsustainable cropping patterns like paddy growing, Punjab seeks Israel's support to develop agri-infrastructure, minimise production and price risks and provide high-yielding and disease-free horticultural varieties that require less water.

Punjab Agro Industries Corporation Ltd launched last year that was brewed in Goa, has failed to make waves despite its huge value. A Punjab Government spokesperson told IANS that during the meeting with Hadas Bakst, Political Domestic Advisor, Embassy of Israel, January 23 in Chandigarh, the state's Horticulture Minister Chetan Singh Jauramajra highlighted that underground water was depleting rapidly -- a critical issue that needs urgent attention. Chetan Singh Jauramajra highlighted key areas for collaboration, including digital solutions for pest control, climate and soil monitoring systems, use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for crop yields, decision support systems, drones for harvesting and spraying, as well as precision farming software solutions. The discussion touched upon the potential of year-round cultivation in greenhouses and hydroponic farming to address the increasing demand for food, the spokesperson told IANS. The minister focused on extending sensor technology-based irrigation systems and innovative storage solutions for efficient and sustainable farming. Addressing the need for advancements in citrus cultivation, he proposed the integration of byproduct technologies to manage biowaste effectively. On an average, a single piece of kinnow mandarin contains 45-50 per cent juice and the rest of the percentage is peel, rag and seeds, which is of no use so far. With the introduction of new machinery at processing units, the management of biowaste of citrus such as extraction of limonin, peel oil, etc., will help a lot. He asked to introduce new patented citrus varieties, rootstocks resistant to pests and the cultivation of new crops like dragon fruit and raspberries. In the vegetable sector, the minister advocated for the introduction of seedless varieties of melons, single-picking varieties of peas and tomatoes suitable for mechanisation and binjal varieties resistant to fruit and shoot borers.

According to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann rice is not even the state's staple food and its cultivation depleted Punjab's groundwater. Agriculture experts foresee a major threat to the country's food security if the state's groundwater goes dry as it has already reached the depths of 150-200 metres in most places. Groundwater contamination is another concern in Punjab that is not getting public attention. To reduce farm distress, as a majority of the growers of Punjab are small and marginal farmers with declining and fragmenting landholdings, the state government last week explored opportunities to collaborate with Israel as it excels in advance farming technologies. This collaboration with Israel would benefit local farmers as it would give them access to the latest farming technologies and teach them sustainable practices through centres of excellence. It would also build on existing partnerships in horticulture projects with the need for a digital revolution. Also an attempt was initiated to provide farm-to-market technology to facilitate the marketing of kinnow, the state's flagship citrus fruit with an average annual production of over 5 lakh tonnes, mainly in the South Malwa belt, in case of a bumper crop. Field reports say this year the kinnow mandarin had bumper production but farmers stared at poor income as they fetched an average rate of ₹9-10 per kg, compared to ₹20-25 per kg they got in the previous year when the crop was not bountiful. This season 47,000 hectares of land was brought under kinnow production. Also the kinnow flavoured gin, a product of

SINCE INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE, PUNJAB HAS BEEN THE FOOD BOWL OF THE NATION AND HAS MAINLY TWO CROP SYSTEMS -- WHEAT AND PADDY

FARMING EXPERTS SAY THAT IT TAKES 3,800-5,000 LITRES OF WATER TO PRODUCE ONE KG OF RICE

TMC DEMANDS RELEASE OF CENTRAL FUNDS DUE TO BENGAL



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Jan 28: The Trinamool Congress Sunday took out a rally in the metropolis, demanding the immediate release of MGNREGA funds due to the state by the Centre. Thousands of TMC activists and senior party leaders took part in the rally that started from Golpark area and culminated at Hazra Crossing, in south Kolkata. Senior minister Firhad Hakim and Rasbehari MLA Debashis Kumar were among those who led the march. "The youth and students have taken to the streets today in protest against the anti-people policies of the Narendra Modi government, which wants to weaken organisations like the Election Commission," Hakim said. "Depriving a state of its rightful dues is akin to disrespect of the Constitution," he said. The saffron party only knows how to "politically torment its opponents through the ED and CBI", Hakim alleged.

Rahul urges WB to fight against injustice

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Siliguri (WB), Jan 28: Amidst differences in opposition bloc INDIA over seat sharing with TMC in Bengal for Lok Sabha polls, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Sunday called on the Bengal and Bengalis to spearhead the battle against prevailing injustices in the nation. Rahul's statement, delivered during the ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in North Bengal, followed closely after Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's announcement that her party would contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections independently in the state. Expressing gratitude for the warm reception in West Bengal, Rahul Gandhi remarked, "Bengal holds a special place. Bengal led the ideological fight during the Independence struggle. It is the duty of Bengal and Bengalis to lead from the front to combat injustice, foster unity, and curb hatred in the present circumstances." He emphasised, "If you don't rise to the occasion, people will never forgive you. It is not about any single individual; it is about Bengal showing the way and leading in this fight." Although Gandhi refrained from directly naming any political entity, his comments elicited diverse reactions from



both the TMC and other political quarters. "Yes, he is correct that Bengal has historically been at the forefront of pivotal movements, notably against British rule. Mamata Banerjee halted the BJP's momentum in the 2021 assembly polls and played a significant role in forming the opposition coalition. However, it was the Bengal Congress leadership that compromised with the saffron camp in the state," remarked TMC spokesperson Shantanu Sen. Conversely, the BJP state spokesperson criticised Gandhi's remarks as divisive, stating, "It is astonishing how Rahul Gandhi can make such remarks that hint at sub-nationalism. This is unexpected from a leader of a

armed forces by introducing the Agniweer (Agnipath) scheme, a short-term recruitment scheme for the armed forces." "Hatred and violence are being spread across the country. It will serve no purpose. Instead of spreading hatred, we have to work towards spreading love and justice for our youths. The Union government is working only for big corporations and not for the poor and the youth," he said in a statement. Accusing the BJP and RSS of propagating hatred and violence, Gandhi underscored the essence of the yatra, stating, "The word 'Nyay' (justice) has been attached to the yatra because injustice prevails across the country." "We aspire for an India where even the poorest can dream big and realise their aspirations. We want an India where hard work is honoured. Today, however, Indian youth struggle to secure employment," he added. On Monday, the yatra is set to proceed to Islampur in Uttar Dinajpur district before entering Bihar in the afternoon. The yatra had entered Bengal on Wednesday from Assam and had traversed through Cooch Behar district before a two-day recess. The yatra is scheduled to travel 6,713 km over 67 days, traversing 110 districts across 15 states before concluding in Mumbai March 20 or 21.

national party." Gandhi's statement coincides with efforts by the Congress leadership to placate Mamata Banerjee, whom they regard as an "important pillar" of the opposition coalition. The Congress leadership has recently exuded confidence in finding a way forward to resolve the stalemate in the state. Addressing a gathering in Siliguri, where the yatra paused for the night before resuming from Uttar Dinajpur Monday, Gandhi lambasted the BJP government at the Centre for allegedly fomenting hatred and violence while prioritizing corporate interests over those of the poor and the youth. He said, "The Union government has made a mockery of the youths who wanted to join the

Punjab restores 10.77L ration cards

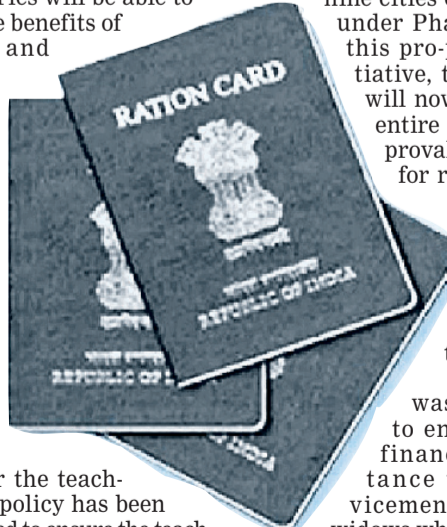
INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chandigarh, Jan 28: Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Punjab government announced restoration of 10.77 lakh ration cards to enable their holders to avail the benefits of the ration being supplied under the Public Distribution System (PDS). The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, here. The Chief Minister told the media that these cards were earlier deleted during the verification process. However, keeping in view the larger public interest, the Cabinet has decided to restore these cards. As per this decision all these beneficiaries will be able to derive the benefits of the PDS and door to delivery of ration schemes being started by the state government. The Cabinet also gave green signal to a new transfer policy for the teachers. This policy has been streamlined to ensure the teachers contribute zealously in the teaching works rather than running pillar to post for their transfers.

THE CABINET ALSO GAVE GREEN SIGNAL TO A NEW TRANSFER POLICY FOR THE TEACHERS

THIS POLICY HAS BEEN STREAMLINED TO ENSURE THE TEACHERS CONTRIBUTE ZEALOUSLY IN THE TEACHING WORKS RATHER THAN RUNNING PILLAR TO POST FOR THEIR TRANSFERS

campaign to 15 more districts -- Barnala, Faridkot, Fatehgarh Sahib, Ferozepur, Fazilka, Gurdaspur, Kapurthala, Mansa, Moga, Sri Muktsar Sahib, Pathankot, Rupnagar, SBS Nagar, Tarn Taran, and Malerkotla. This health-oriented initiative is already getting massive response after its launch in nine cities of the state under Phase I. With this pro-people initiative, the scheme will now cover the entire state so approval was given for recruitment of additional trainers and other staff for the scheme. Also a nod was accorded to enhance the financial assistance to ex-servicemen and their widows who are above 65 years and took part in World War I and World War II but were sent home without any pensionary benefits. Now their pension hiked from ₹6,000 to ₹10,000. At present, 453 beneficiaries are availing benefits under this policy of the government. This hike will be effective from July 26, 2023.



Pet's groomer Sreyashree Bhaumik takes care of a dog during the inauguration of spa and beauty care salon for the pets in Kolkata, West Bengal

Mann launches dedicated force to check road mishaps

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann named various prominent personalities, including former president Giani Zail Singh, Congress leader Rajesh Pilot, and actor and comedian Jaspal Bhatti, who died in road accidents

accidents claim 17-18 lives in Punjab every day. "More than 500 people die every month and nearly 6,000 people die (in road accidents) in a year," he added. Mann named various prominent personalities, including former president Giani Zail Singh, Congress leader Rajesh Pilot, and actor and comedian Jaspal Bhatti, who died in road accidents. He said that 65 per cent of these deaths take place on national and state highways, adding that most of these fatal accidents take place when the presence of police on these roads is minimal. Mann also flagged off 129 hi-tech vehicles of the SSF. He said SSF personnel will be deployed every 30 kilometres on roads to protect people. "This is a historic occasion as Punjab has become the first state to launch this ambitious scheme to save the precious lives of people," the chief minister said. It will go a long way in saving the lives of people and streamlining traffic movement, he added.



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann with Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav, AAP MP Sushil Kumar Rinku and others during the launch of Sadak Surakhya Force (SSF) in Jalandhar, Punjab

The idea for forming this force did not come overnight but it was the result of a serious review of this serious problem, Mann said, adding when he was an MP, he had raised the issue of road accidents in Lok Sabha. Since then, he said,

it was on his mind to form a force to save the lives of people in the coming days. "Today, my dream has come true," he said. With the constitution of this force, police will be able to discharge their duties far more effectively, the chief minister said. The SSF will be instru-

mental in saving people's lives and now monthly data will be analysed to judge the working of the force. The data will be shared with people every month, he said. Driving licenses of those who repeatedly violate traffic rules will be cancelled. This is the need of the hour, he said in a statement. The SSF has been launched as a plan for road safety for covering 5,500 km of state and national highways, said Mann. Patrolling vehicles fitted with specialised equipment to check drunken driving and over-speeding will be deployed on these routes. These vehicles will also have a complete medical kit for providing emergency treatment to any person in need. The force will be duly connected with trauma centres to ensure that people get the necessary medical help in time. Punjab minister Balkar Singh, MP Sushil Rinku, Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav and Additional Director General of Police A S Rai were among those present on the occasion.



Boats sail as confetti explodes in the air during the traditional opening rowing parade, part of the Venice Carnival in Italy



A balloon takes part in the 44th International Hot Air Balloon Festival in Chateau-d'Oex, Switzerland



A man dressed as 'Pepino', a carnival character, dances as part of a ceremony marking the beginning of the carnival in Bolivia



Artists who participated in the 75th Republic Day parade perform during a meeting with President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi



Snow covers the roofs of the so-called 'Alter Flecken' (old spot), the historic core of Freudenberg with its half-timbered houses from the 17th century in the heart of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia near the city of Siegen, Germany



Border Roads Organisation personnel along with engineers and workers during the breakthrough ceremony of Nowshera tunnel project, in Jammu & Kashmir. The tunnel is being constructed on Jammu-Poonch highway



A man works to extinguish a blaze in an area of a forest fire in Nemocon, Colombia



People visit a vintage car exhibition in Kolkata

REUTERS/PTI PHOTOS

international



Qatar hosts the leaders of Hamas, finances Hamas, and has leverage on Hamas BENJAMIN NETANYAHU | ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER

PTI COULD FACE BAN

Jailed Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party could be banned if its founder and former prime minister and other top brass are convicted in the cases relating to the May 9 violent incidents and violation of the Secrets Act in the cipher case, according to a media reports Sunday



of the day quote

A bipartisan bill would be good for America and help fix our broken immigration system and allow speedy access for those who deserve to be here, and Congress needs to get it done

The United States is currently reviewing our Venezuela sanctions policy, based on this development and the recent political targeting of democratic opposition candidates and civil society

Many agreements have been reached on the border (with India) except for Kalapani, Limpiyadhura, Lipulek, and Susta

Ukraine uncovers massive fraud in arms procurement



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected on an anti-corruption platform in 2019, long before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022

Both the president and his aides have portrayed the recent firings of top officials, notably that of Ivan Bakanov, former head of the State Security Service, in July 2022, as proof of their efforts to crack down on graft

Kyiv, Jan 28: Ukraine's SBU security service said Saturday it had uncovered a corruption scheme in the purchase of arms by the country's military totalling the equivalent of about \$40 million.

The announcement of mass procurement fraud, confirmed by Ukraine's Defence Ministry, will have a huge resonance in a country beleaguered by Russia's nearly two-year-old invasion.

The fight to root out endemic corruption remains a major issue as Ukraine presses its bid to secure membership in the European Union.

The SBU said late Saturday that five people have been charged, with one person detained while trying to cross the Ukrainian border. If found guilty, they face up to 12 years in prison.

The SBU said an investigation had "exposed officials of the Ministry of Defence and managers of arms supplier Lviv Arsenal, who stole nearly 1.5 billion hryvni in the purchase of shells." "According to the investigation, former and current high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Defence and heads of affiliated companies are involved in the embezzlement." The embezzlement, it said, involved the purchase of 100,000 mortar shells for the military.

The SBU said a contract for the shells was clinched with Lviv Arsenal in August 2022 - six months into the war - and payment was made in advance, with some funds transferred abroad.

But no arms were ever provided, the statement said, with some funds then moved to other foreign accounts.

The statement said five individuals had been served "notices of suspicion" - the first stage in Ukrainian legal proceedings - both in the ministry and the arms supplier. One suspect, it said, was detained while trying to cross the Ukrainian border.

Corruption within the military has been a particularly sensitive issue in Ukraine as it tries to maintain wartime public morale and present its case to join the 27-nation EU. Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov was dismissed last September over various corruption cases despite enjoying a solid reputation in representing Ukraine in its discussions with Western allies.

Although he was not alleged to have engaged personally in corruption, several cases hit the military under his stewardship, one for supplying troops with food, another over procuring suitable clothing for servicemen.

Burkina Faso, Mali & Niger quit ECOWAS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Abuja, Jan 28: West African nations Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have withdrawn from the regional economic bloc known as ECOWAS, their respective juntas announced Sunday, accusing the bloc of "inhumane" sanctions to reverse the coups in their nations.

The juntas said in a joint statement read out on state television in all three countries that they have "decided in complete sovereignty on the immediate withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)," alleging that the bloc has "moved away from the ideals of its founding fathers and pan-Africanism" after nearly 50 years of its establishment.

"Furthermore, ECOWAS, under the influence of foreign powers, betraying its founding principles, has become a threat to its member states and its populations whose happiness it is supposed to ensure," their statements read.

Widely seen as West Africa's top political and regional authority, the 15-nation bloc of ECOWAS - formed in 1975 to "promote economic integration" in member states - has struggled in recent years to reverse rampant coups in the region where citizens have complained of not benefitting from rich natural resources.

The bloc's regional court also ruled last year that juntas lack the power to act in place of elected governments on behalf



of their nations. Sunday's announcement is the latest twist in a series of events that have deepened political tension in West Africa since it experienced its latest of a string of coups - in Niger - last year. It also comes as the three nations have formed a security alliance after severing military ties with France and other European nations and turning to Russia for support.

The joint statement accused ECOWAS of failing to assist those three countries in fighting "existential" threats like terrorism - the common reason

cited by their militaries for deposing their democratically elected governments. "When these States decided to take their destiny into their own hands, it (ECOWAS) adopted an irrational and unacceptable posture in imposing illegal, illegitimate, inhumane and irresponsible sanctions in violation of its own texts," the statement noted.

Rather than improve their situations, the juntas said the ECOWAS sanctions have "further weakened populations already bruised by years of violence."

IT'S NOT IMMEDIATELY CLEAR HOW THAT PROCESS OF THE COUNTRIES' WITHDRAWAL FROM THE BLOC WOULD BE CARRIED OUT

ECOWAS DIDN'T IMMEDIATELY RESPOND TO AN ASSOCIATED PRESS INQUIRY, THOUGH THE BLOC HAS SAID IT ONLY RECOGNISES DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS

SHORT TAKES

UK to pause funding for UN aid agency

London: The UK is "temporarily pausing any future funding" for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the British government has said in a statement. It came after Israel accused some of the UN agency's employees of participating in the attack launched by Hamas on southern Israel October 7, 2023. Xinhua news agency reported. The country's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said in the statement on Saturday that the UK was "appalled" by the allegations, and the funding for the agency would be halted "whilst we review these concerning allegations".

33 killed in traffic crashes

Islamabad: Separate traffic crashes in eastern Afghanistan have left at least 33 people dead and 16 others injured, authorities said Sunday. Ten collisions occurred in the Sorabi district of Kabul province, on the main highway linking the Afghan capital, Kabul and the eastern Nangarhar province, killing 17 people, including two children and four women, said Khalid Zadrán, spokesman for the Kabul police chief. Ten others were injured in the crashes and they were hospitalised for treatment, Zadrán said.

4 die in shooting

Los Angeles: Four people are dead following what police in Los Angeles characterised as a murder-suicide in the Granada Hills area Saturday. Officers responded shortly before 7 p.m. To a report of a shooting in the 11600 block of Lerdo Avenue and found four people who were pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators determined the shooting was a murder-suicide, the Los Angeles Police Department said. After receiving the call, there was no answer when the officers arrived and knocked at the door, police said.

Quake jolts Japan

Tokyo: An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 4.8 jolted Tokyo, Kanagawa Prefecture and other surrounding areas in Japan Sunday morning, the country's weather agency said. The quake occurred at 8:59 a.m. local time with the epicentre in Tokyo Bay at a depth of 80 km, measuring 4 on the country's seismic scale of 7 in central Tokyo and the eastern part of Kanagawa, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) was quoted by Xinhua news agency as saying. No tsunami warnings were issued, JMA added.

SNIPPETS

China allows Philippines to supply troops at disputed reef

Beijing/Shanghai: The Chinese coastguard said it had made "temporary special arrangements" to allow the Philippines to deliver supplies to troops at a grounded World War Two-era vessel at a disputed reef. The Chinese coastguard has previously deployed vessels to block missions by the Philippines to supply troops on the transport ship, which has become a military outpost at the Second Thomas Shoal, 190 km (118 miles) off the Philippine island of Palawan. In a statement on its official WeChat account late on Saturday, the Chinese coastguard said it had allowed necessary supplies, but also that it would resolutely defend China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests at the Second Thomas Shoal and its adjacent waters. China, which claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, points to a line on its maps that cuts into the exclusive economic zones of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia.

UK says warship repelled Houthi drone attack

London: A British warship, the HMS Diamond, repelled a drone attack on Saturday from Yemen's Houthi group in the Red Sea, British officials said. "Deploying her Sea Viper missile system, Diamond destroyed a drone targeting her with no injuries or damage sustained to Diamond or her crew," the Ministry of Defence said in a statement Sunday. "These intolerable and illegal attacks are completely unacceptable and it is our duty to protect the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea."

9 Pak labourers shot dead in Iran

Islamabad: Pakistan has sought a comprehensive investigation into the killing of nine of its nationals in a brutal attack in Iran that occurred days after the tensions between the two nations following a tit-for-tat cross-border fire. Nine Pakistani workers were gunned down and three others were injured by unidentified attackers who opened indiscriminate fire on them in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province near the border with Pakistan on Saturday. Iran's Mehr news agency reported that "according to witnesses, unknown armed men killed nine non-Iranians in a house in the Sirkan neighbourhood of Saravan city" in Sistan-Baluchestan province. No group or individual immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Pakistan's Foreign Office has demanded a comprehensive investigation into the attack and swift prosecution of those responsible for it.

N Korea fired several cruise missiles: South

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seoul, Jan 28: South Korea's military said Sunday that North Korea fired several cruise missiles from waters off an eastern military port, in the country's latest weapons demonstration in the face of deepening tensions with the United States, South Korea and Japan.

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff didn't immediately say how many missiles were fired or how far they flew. It wasn't immediately clear how the launches were conducted, although the North has previously tested cruise missiles from sea assets.

The launches were the North Korea's third-known launch event of 2024, following a pre-

vious round of cruise missile tests on Jan. 24 and a Jan. 14 test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate range ballistic missile.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have increased in recent months as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continues to accelerate his weapons development and issue provocative threats of nuclear conflict with the US and its Asian allies.

The US, South Korea and Japan in response have been expanding their combined military exercises, which Kim portrays as invasion rehearsals, and sharpening their deterrence strategies built around nuclear-capable US assets.

Iran launches 3 satellites into space amid tensions

While Iran has not intervened militarily in the conflict, it has faced increased pressure within its theocracy for action after a deadly Islamic State suicide bombing earlier this month and as proxy groups like Yemen's Houthi rebels conduct attacks linked to the war

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jerusalem, Jan 28: Iran said Sunday it successfully launched three satellites into space with a rocket that had multiple failures in the past, the latest for a programme that the West says improves Tehran's ballistic missiles.

The launch comes as heightened tensions grip the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, sparking fears of a regional conflict. While Iran has not intervened

militarily in the conflict, it has faced increased pressure within its theocracy for action after a deadly Islamic State suicide bombing earlier this month and as proxy groups like Yemen's Houthi rebels conduct attacks linked to the war. Meanwhile, Western nations remain worried about Iran's rapidly expanding nuclear programme.

Footage released by Iranian state television showed a nighttime launch for the Simorgh rocket. An Associated Press analysis of the footage showed that it took place at the Imam



Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's rural Semnan province. "The roar of the Simorgh (rocket) resonated in our country's sky and infinite space," said Abbas Rasooli, a state TV reporter, in the footage. State TV named the launched satellites Mahda, Kayhan-2 and Hatf-1. It described the Mahda as a re-

search satellite, while the Kayhan and the Hatf were nanosatellites focused on global positioning and communication respectively.

Iran's Information and Communications Technology Minister Isa Zarepour said the Mahda had already sent signals back to Earth. There have been five failed launches in a row for the Simorgh programme, a satellite-carrying rocket. The Simorgh, or "Phoenix," rocket failures have been part of a series of setbacks in recent years for Iran's civilian space programme, including fatal fires and a launchpad rocket explosion that drew the attention of former US President Donald Trump.

continental ballistic missile because it uses similar technology. That report specifically cites the Simorgh as a possible dual-use rocket.

The United States has previously said Iran's satellite launches defy a UN Security Council resolution and called on Tehran to undertake no activity involving ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. UN sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile programme expired last October.

Under Iran's relatively moderate former President Hassan Rouhani, the Islamic Republic slowed its space program for fear of raising tensions with the West. However, in the time since, the 2015 nuclear deal Rouhani shepherded with world powers has collapsed and tensions have been boiling for years with the US.

