

Enforcement Directorate raids Sheikh Shahjahan's brick kiln in Sandeshkhali

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate early on Thursday conducted raids on a brick kiln belonging to suspended Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan in trouble-torn Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district. The raids were done in connection with a land grab case filed against Sheikh Shahjahan. Probe agency officials were accompanied by paramilitary personnel, including women jawans. Several teams of the Enforcement Directorate reached Sandeshkhali around 6:30 am. While one team was raiding Sheikh Shahjahan's brick kiln, another team was conducting searches in the Dhamakhali area in Sandeshkhali. The Enforcement Directorate also carried out raids at

Trinamool Congress leader Nazrul Mollah's residence in Kolkata. Nazrul Mollah runs fisheries in Sandeshkhali. Meanwhile, Sheikh Shahjahan is currently in Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) custody till March 14 (Thursday) in connection with the attack on an Enforcement Directorate team in Sandeshkhali on January 5. The CBI has taken over investigation in three cases related to incidents on January 5, when probe agency officials were attacked by an around 1000-strong mob when they went to search Sheikh Shahjahan's premises in connection with the agency's investigation into an alleged ration distribution scam case. A former state minister has been arrested in the ration case. Sheikh

Shahjahan was arrested by the West Bengal Police on February 29 after being on the run for nearly two months. The arrest came a day after the Calcutta High Court ordered that the CBI, Enforcement Directorate or the police could arrest him. Several women in Sandeshkhali have been staging protests against Sheikh Shahjahan and his associates and accusing them of land grab and sexual assault under coercion, a controversy that has sparked a war of words between the Trinamool Congress and the BJP. The CBI on Monday arrested three alleged associates of Sheikh Shahjahan, including his security guard, in connection with the January 5 attack on an Enforcement Directorate team, officials said. The CBI



had also summoned nine aides and associates of Sheikh Shahjahan for questioning in the case on Monday. The agency suspects that these nine individuals were allegedly part of the attack on Enforcement Directorate officials and instigated the crowd to target the team when they went to raid the premises of Sheikh Shahjahan at Sandeshkhali, officials said.

Dearness Allowance Hiked By 4 pc For Assam Government Employees

New Delhi: The Assam government has hiked dearness allowance by 4 per cent for state government employees and state pensioners. The announcement was made by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The DA hike will be effective from January 1, 2024. "Assam Government has announced 4% DA for the government employees. DA has now increased upto 50%," Sarma said. Himanta Sarma also added that due to the impending Lok Sabha elections, the government will disburse the amount in the accounts of the state government employees in installments. At the press conference, Sarma also made crucial announcements on the recruitment of Grade IV employees in Lower Primary (LP) and Middle English (ME) Schools in

Assam. "Assam Government has decided that the 4th grade post recruitment will be from the local locality in LP, ME, High School on a merit basis," he said. He also announced special discounts for individuals using solar panels, including additional benefits for journalists. "Under PM Suryaghar Muft Bijli Scheme Rs 75,000 crore has been sanctioned by the central government. 3000 houses have solar panels in the state. For state government employees and electricity board employees, the Assam Government will give 1% bank loan interest. DIPR will also give the additional cost of Rs 5,000 for a 1 kW solar panel for a journalist," he said.

DA Hiked For Centre Govt Employees

Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led



Union Cabinet had last week approved a 4% increase in Dearness Allowance (DA) for central government employees under the seventh pay commission. The new rate will be effective from January 1, 2024, and will represent an increase of 4% over the existing rate of 46% of the Basic Pay/

Pension. The hike in the Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief came as compensation against the price rise.

What Is Dearness Allowance (DA)

It is the cost-of-living adjustment allowance that the government provides to both current and retired members of the public sector. It is determined using the government employee basic salary percentage. Since it is directly related to the cost of living, the DA component is different for different employees based on their location which means Dearness Allowance is different for employees in the urban sector, semi-urban sector, or the rural sector. It is calculated as a percentage of the basic salary and is revised periodically based on changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

India needs to overcome China factor in ties with Greece

NEW DELHI (ROYAL JOURNALISM): Amidst the warm welcome extended by New Delhi to Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on February 21, experts are lauding this diplomatic overture as a pivotal step towards establishing a strategic partnership that goes beyond the confines of the European Union (EU). The discussions revolving around the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) are widely seen as a groundbreaking development, positioning India as a key entry point into Asia for Greece in this transformative initiative. Despite the promising alliance indicated by the reception and ensuing dialogues between the two countries, it is essential to recognise that characterising India solely as a pathway for Greece oversimplifies recent developments. Concurrently, Greece has maintained close ties with China, benefiting from their evolving relationship over the past few decades. This was reiterated during Mitsotakis visit to Beijing in November, adding a nuanced dimension to Athens' engagement in the Asian theatre. Historically, Greece has stood by China at times when its European counterparts have chosen to criticise the Asian giant. In July 2016, after the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) dismissed China's claims over the South China Sea, the EU



failed to adopt a common statement on Beijing's legal defeat at the PCA as the statement was blocked by Athens. Similarly, in June 2017, Greece blocked an EU statement at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) criticising human rights abuses in China, marking the first time the EU refrained from issuing such a statement at the UNHRC. Greece, singularly blocking EU statements on China initiated after the European country sold majority stakes of the Piraeus port to Chinese shipping company COSCO in April 2016. In 2018, Greece also became the first EU country to become a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the Piraeus port playing a crucial role in connecting Europe to Asia, as part of BRI. Thus, Greece's commitment to China due to its investment in Piraeus port is massive, which is not only limited to connec-

tivity but also to providing political support across international forums. At a time when China-EU relations are at a crossroads, Greece continues to present an opportunity. During the Greek Prime Minister's visit to China in November, a resonating statement emphasised across media was that the friendship between China and Greece transcends conventional partnerships between nations; it encompasses a profound dialogue between 'civilisations'. A significant focus was placed on promoting high-quality BRI co-operation and ensuring the long-term, stable, and sustainable development of the Piraeus port. Over the past decade, the successful development and operation of the port has positioned Greece as a crucial gateway for China connecting land and sea, linking Europe to Asia, thereby, strengthening and expanding the co-operation between the two nations. Thus, India, clearly, is not Greece's gateway to Asia. The European nation has ensured quite a robust connectivity route to Asia via China. Moreover, while for connectivity purposes, India and Greece recently discussed that direct flights should be established by encouraging the private sector, flight connectivity between Athens and Beijing has been operational since 2017, and it will be further increased

from April 1. Despite the close co-operation between Athens and Beijing, Mitsotakis said that China doesn't feature prominently as an investor in Greece, apart from the notable investment made towards the Piraeus port. Additionally, last month, during Mitsotakis visit to India, at the Raisina Dialogue, he emphasised the importance of advancing IMEC and how partners should continue with it despite the ongoing conflict in Gaza. Access to the Piraeus port is crucial for ensuring the fulfilment of the IMEC, but with the port under Chinese ownership, a massive roadblock stands in the way. During a special briefing of the Ministry of External Affairs, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said that no particular ports were discussed as part of the IMEC discussions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mitsotakis, hinting at the China hurdle. Given the Piraeus port is crucial to both, the BRI and the IMEC, the pertinent question that needs answering is where will Greece place its bets? Currently, Greece seems to be employing strategic hedging against both New Delhi and Beijing, which no doubt helps it get the best of both worlds in Asia; but, at the same time, it presents a humongous task for the Indian administration to not find a fully committed partner

The cursed legacy of Koh-i-Noor: How it mysteriously affect it's owners

The Koh-i-noor, a dazzling 105.6-carat diamond, is a famed member of the Crown Jewels in the UK, currently held by King Charles III and Queen consort Camilla.

The cursed legacy of Koh-i-noor Despite its name meaning "Mountain of Light" in Persian, the Koh-i-noor is believed to bring misfortune to its male owners. Recent discussions arise as King Charles III faces a health challenge.

Origin and prestige of Koh-i-noor Discovered in Kollur Mines, Golconda, during the Kakatiya Dynasty's rule, the Koh-i-noor became a coveted jewel, leading to conflicts between rulers eager to claim it as a trophy.

Peacock throne: A diamond's central stage Shah Jahan, in 1628, commissioned a magnificent Peacock Throne adorned with rubies, emeralds, and the Koh-i-noor. The throne gained fame, but the diamond faced turmoil as the Mughal Empire expanded.

The diamond's travels and wars From Nader Shah's armband to the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh's possession, the Koh-i-noor journeyed through wars, changing hands between Hindu, Persian, Mughal, Afghan, and Sikh rulers.

The British connection In 1849, the British East India Company seized the Koh-i-noor after imprisoning Ranjit Singh's family. Throughout history, any ruler possessing the diamond faced a downfall.

The East India Company's fate The Revolt of 1857 nearly destroyed the East India Company, raising questions about whether they were aware of the Koh-i-noor curse. The British Royals, cautious of this belief, avoided male heirs wearing the diamond.

Royal heirs and Koh-i-noor To avert the curse, only female members of the British Royal family have worn the Koh-i-noor. Queen Victoria, Queen Alexandra, Queen Mother, and Queen Elizabeth II all adorned the diamond during special occasions.

Controversies and demands Calls to return the Koh-i-noor to India persist, with demands and protests against the UK. Despite the controversies, the diamond remains an integral part of the British Crown jewels. Centuries after its discovery, the Koh-i-noor continues to captivate, with legends and folktales surrounding its curse still believed by many.

Free distribution of PM Modi's 'Exam Warriors' among students in Chhattisgarh

NEW DELHI (ROYAL JOURNALISM): Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai has announced the complimentary distribution of 'Exam Warriors,' a book authored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to students in grades 9th to 12th, starting from the upcoming academic session. On Tuesday, the corridors of the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly resonated with youthful vigor as students from the tribal-dominated Jashpur district, fresh from their educational voyage to eminent institutions like ISRO and IIT Madras, experienced the legislative proceedings for the first time. Guided by the vision to ignite a passion for science and technology among students, Chief Minister Sai facilitated the enlightening journey of students

from Jashpur to ISRO and IIT Madras. Representing various schools including Swami Atmanand English Medium School, Pathalgaon, Bagicha, and Jashpur, Sankalp Shikshan Sansthan Kunkuri, and Higher Secondary Girls School Bagicha, these students embarked on a captivating exploration of space research and technical innovation. During their interaction with Chief Minister Sai, students conveyed their delight at the enriching experiences garnered during their visits to ISRO and IIT Madras. They recounted their awe-inspiring encounters with space technology at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota and the insightful immersion into the heritage and achievements of IIT Madras. The initiative received commenda-

tion from School Education Minister Brijmohan Agrawal, who emphasized the transformative potential of such educational escapades. He underscored the significance of broadening students' horizons beyond conventional academics, nurturing holistic development, and fostering a spirit of inquiry among them. Capturing memorable moments with Chief Minister Sai, the students expressed gratitude for the opportunity to witness democracy in action and engage with visionary leaders. As they departed from the hallowed halls of the Legislative Assembly, they carried them not only cherished memories but also a renewed zeal to pursue knowledge and contribute to the progress of their communities and the nation at large.

India sees US as weak, played smart by staying close to Russia: Nikki Haley

NEW DELHI (ROYAL JOURNALISM): Republican presidential aspirant Nikki Haley on Wednesday said that India wants to be a partner with the US, but as of now they don't trust Americans to lead. The Indian-American presidential aspirant also said that India has played smart in the current global situation and stayed close with Russia. Nikki Haley, in an interview with Fox Business News, said that, as of now, India sees the United States as weak, reported news agency PTI. "I have got to say, I have dealt with India too. I have talked with Modi. India wants to be a partner with us. They don't want to be a partner with Russia. The problem is, India doesn't trust us to win. They don't trust us to lead. They see right now that we're weak.

India has always played it smart. They have played it smart, and they have stayed close with Russia, because that's where they get a lot of their military equipment," she said. "When we start to lead again, when we start to get the weakness out and stop putting our head in the sand, that's when our friends, India, Australia, New Zealand, all of them will -- and Israel, Japan, South Korea -- all of them want to do that..." Haley said. "India gave themselves a billion-dollar stimulus to become less dependent on China," she told Fox Business News, adding that the US needs to start building up its alliances. Meanwhile, Nikki Haley recently faced a setback as Grand Old Party (GOP) voters collectively chose the



"none of these candidates" option on the ballot in the Nevada primary. Haley had hoped to position herself as a genuine competitor against Trump but ended up losing to the 'none of these candidates' option, becoming the first presidential candidate to face such a defeat since the option was introduced in Nevada in 1975.

Nawaz Sharif or Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari? What does it mean for India?

NEW DELHI (ROYAL JOURNALISM): Pakistan is holding its 12th national general elections on Thursday, February 8, to elect a new government, with multiple crises plaguing the nuclear-armed country of 241 million. Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz will likely emerge as the single-largest party and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party as a distant second followed by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf of Imran Khan and other parties, The News reported. While former prime minister Imran Khan remains in jail, Nawaz Sharif is tipped to emerge as the main face for the prime minister's post. Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf or PTI candidates are contesting the polls independently after the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the election commission to deprive the PTI of its iconic election symbol cricket 'bat'. Nawaz Sharif, 74, will be eyeing the prime ministership for a record fourth time in Thursday's election. The contest also involves the PPP of Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, who has been declared as the party's prime minister face. But whoever wins the February 8 elections will find a daunting task ahead due to the dwindling economy and deteriorating security situation. Last year, Pakistan narrowly averted a default when the International Monetary Fund or IMF provided a \$3 billion short-term loan. Economic experts believe that the new government would need an urgent new IMF program on more stringent conditions. Pakistan's over two decades-old fight against terrorism is



also unravelling as the rebels have resurged since 2021 after the Afghan Taliban came to power. The new government will find it tougher to deal with the militancy of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan and Baloch nationalists. On its eastern border, fresh tensions have risen after Islamabad accused India of running an assassination campaign inside Pakistan that New India has rejected completely. India on January 25 strongly rejected Pakistan's assertion of evidence implicating Indian agents in the targeted killings of two Pakistani citizens on its soil, dismissing it as "false and malicious anti-India propaganda". How India sees Pakistan election 2024? India is also going to the Lok Sabha elections by May, and a return to power for the Narendra Modi-led government with a heavy mandate could further complicate matters for Pakistan's new government. The extent of the Pakistan Army's influence on the country's politics has become widely recognised, with allegations of election manipulation to favour its preferred candidates. In the 2018 elec-

tions, the Pakistan Army effectively "selected" Imran Khan, a cricket icon-turned-politician, to replace Nawaz Sharif as the leader of the PML(N). Imran Khan assumed the role of prime minister after Nawaz Sharif's conviction, although Nawaz Sharif was subsequently permitted to leave the country, and only returned in October 2023, when suddenly all the cases against him vanished into thin air. Experts have indicated that this time, Nawaz Sharif has the blessings of the army. "What is scheduled to happen on February 8 seems less like an election and more like a selection because Pakistan's Army has shown us in the past few days what result they are desiring in the upcoming elections. They want Nawaz Sharif to be selected," news agency ANI quoted former high commissioner of India to Islamabad Ajay Bisaria as saying. In the Pakistan election 2024, Pakistan Army chief general Asim Munir will consolidate his authority over the political leadership of the country. The elections are significant as for the first time in the history of Pakistan, the popularity of a civilian leader (Imran Khan) challenged the dominance of the army. New Delhi would be closely monitoring all activities in its neighbouring country ahead of the elections, particularly focusing on the Pakistan Army's involvement in selecting the next prime minister. India has persistently raised concerns about Pakistan's ongoing support for terrorism, prompting the Narendra Modi-led government to adopt a stricter stance on national security matters. "India has dealt with

Pakistan's generals who took charge of the country before. But General Munir's quest for greater control may not be the movie we have seen before. To be sure, the dominant assumption in Delhi is that nothing ever changes in Pakistan. And that Pakistan's generals will muddle along as they retain hold over Pakistan. Munir, however, is taking control amid the growing prospect that the old order in Pakistan is becoming unsustainable," The Indian Express quoted geopolitical expert C Raja Mohan as saying. In recent statements, Nawaz Sharif has shown a willingness to engage with India and has recognised the neighbouring country's global progress. However, his party's manifesto states a commitment to pursue peace with India only if New Delhi reverses its decision to revoke Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Moneycontrol reported that a significant achievement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy has been the marginalisation of Pakistan in India's diplomatic agenda, a strategy that has proven effective thus far. This approach allows India to remain nonchalant about shifts in power in Islamabad while still adhering to the principle articulated by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee: "We can change our friends but not our neighbours."

Pakistan suspends mobile phone services

On Thursday, Pakistan temporarily suspended mobile phone services to strengthen security as voting

