

Manipur CM apologises for ethnic conflict, urges all communities to forget, forgive past mistakes

IMPHAL, Dec 31 (PTI)

MANIPUR Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday apologised for the ethnic conflict in the State which claimed over 250 lives and rendered thousands homeless, and appealed to all communities to forget and forgive past mistakes and live together in a peaceful and prosperous State.

Addressing reporters here, Singh said that there has been relative peace in the State in the last three-four months, which gives him hope that normalcy will be restored in the New Year.

"I want to say sorry for what happened in the State. Many people lost their loved ones and many had to leave their homes. I regret and want to apologise. But after seeing relative peace in the last three-four months, I hope that normalcy will be restored in the coming year.

"Whatever happened has happened... I want to appeal to all

communities to forgive and forget our past mistakes and start life afresh by living together in a peaceful and prosperous Manipur," he said.

Singh said firing incidents have declined in the state over the last 20 months since the ethnic con-

flikt began in May 2023.

"From May to October, 2023, 408 firing incidents were reported. From November 2023 to April 2024, there were 345 firing incidents, whereas from May this year till now, 112 firing incidents were reported," he said.



Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh addresses a press conference on Tuesday.

(PTI)

Manipur accounted for 77 per cent of total violence in N-E in 2023: MHA

NEW DELHI, Dec 31 (PTI)

MANIPUR, which has been witnessing prolonged ethnic violence between majority Meitei and tribal Kuki communities, accounted for about 77 per cent of the total violence in the entire Northeastern region in 2023, according to the latest annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In 2023, Manipur witnessed an increase in violent incidents owing to the prevailing ethnic strife and the resultant increase in the casualties of civilians and security forces personnel as compared to 2022.

Elon Musk softens stand on H1-B visa programme, calls for major reforms

WASHINGTON, Dec 31 (PTI)

AFTER vowing to "go to war" to defend the H-1B visa programme, tech billionaire Elon Musk has softened his stand on the issue by calling for reforms in the "broken" system used to bring skilled foreign workers to the US.

Musk, along with Indian-American tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, has been tapped by Trump to lead his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Last week, Musk argued that foreign workers were needed for tech companies like Musk's SpaceX and Tesla. "The reason I'm in America

along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H-1B," Musk wrote on X. Musk, however, appeared to retract his earlier statement in response to a post by an X user who said America needed to be a destination for the world's most "elite talent" but argued the current H-1B system was not the solution. "Easily fixed by raising the minimum salary significantly and adding a yearly cost for maintaining the H-1B, making it materially more expensive to hire from overseas than domestically. I've been very clear that the pro-

gramme is broken and needs major reform," Musk on Sunday said in a post on X.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The tech industry has long called for more H-1B visas to attract highly skilled workers to the US. Musk, who was once on an H-1B visa and whose electric vehicle company Tesla has hired workers using the pro-

gramme, defended the tech industry's need to hire foreign workers. "Anyone - of any race, creed or nationality - who came to America and worked like hell to contribute to this country will forever have my respect. America is the land of freedom and opportunity. Fight with every fibre of your being to keep it that way!" he wrote on X on December 28.

Musk's statement also received backing from President-elect Donald Trump whose first administration restricted the programme in 2020, arguing that it allows businesses to replace Americans with lower-paid foreign workers.

Quad vows to work vigorously towards free, stable Indo-Pacific

NEW DELHI, Dec 31 (PTI)

INDIA and other Quad member nations on Tuesday reaffirmed the grouping's steadfast commitment to work towards a free, open and peaceful Indo-Pacific amid China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the region.

The Foreign Ministers of the member nations of the grouping made the pledge in a joint statement commemorating the 20th anniversary of "Quad cooperation".

India, the US, Australia and Japan came together 20 years ago to extend assistance in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, and that coalition subsequently

took form of the Quad.

In the last few years, the Quad has rolled out a number of initiatives addressing some of the

most pressing needs and challenges of the Indo-Pacific region, including in areas of maritime security, infrastructure and connectivity.

to take place in the second half of 2025.

The Foreign Ministers of the four nations said the Quad will

The Foreign Ministers of the member nations, consisting of India, the US, Australia and Japan made the pledge in a joint statement commemorating the 20th anniversary of "Quad cooperation"

work together in responding to the future needs of the Indo-Pacific.

"As four partners, we share a vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific that is peaceful, stable and prosperous, underpinned

by effective regional institutions," the joint statement said.

The Quad foreign ministers also talked about the centrality of 10-nation grouping Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the Indo-Pacific.

"We reaffirm our unwavering support for ASEAN's centrality and unity as well as mainstreaming and implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," the ministers said.

"We respect Pacific-led regional architecture, foremost the Pacific Islands Forum. We are also steadfast in our support for the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the region's premier organisation," they said.

ISRO gears up for 100th launch from Sriharikota with GSLV mission

SRIHARIKOTA, Dec 31 (PTI)

INDIAN Space Research Organisation (ISRO), is gearing up to achieve a significant milestone with a Geosynchronous Launch Vehicle mission scheduled in January set to become the 100th launch from the Sriharikota spaceport, a top official said.

The 99th launch from Sriharikota was Monday's PSLV-C60 mission which successfully placed two spacecraft for conducting the Space Docking Experiment in a circular orbit, ISRO Chairman S Somanath said.

"So, all of you have seen the majestic lift-off and the launch of the SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment) rocket, and for us, this is the 99th launch of any

vehicle from Satish Dhawan Space Centre so, that is also a very important number. So, we are going for the 100th launch at the beginning of the next year", he said.

Somanath, also the Secretary, Department of Space, was talking to reporters after the PSLV-C60 mission successfully placed the Space Docking Experiment spacecraft A and B in a circular orbit.

On future launches planned by ISRO, Somanath said, "In 2025, we will have many missions to start with the GSLV launching the (navigation satellite) NVS-02 in the month of January."

ISRO successfully placed a navigation satellite onboard the GSLV-F12/NVS-01 rocket in May 2023. This GSLV rocket suc-

cessfully deployed the NVS-01 navigation satellite, weighing about 2,232 kg into a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO).

The NVS-01 was the first of the second-generation satellites envisaged for the Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) services.

On Monday's PSLV-C60 mission, Somanath expressed hope that many more Space Docking Experiments would be taken up by the scientists in the coming days.

"It is really an important mission with (India's) space sector reforms and expansion of space activities. There will be many more SpaDeX varieties including complex missions of docking systems in the coming days," he said.

Meanwhile, referring to the rescheduling of the PSLV-C60 rocket from the earlier planned 9.58 pm to 10 pm on December 30, Somanath said, scientists do a conjunction study to check whether a satellite going to an orbit comes very close to another satellite while travelling in the same orbit.

"If you find there is any close proximity (between satellites), then we have to move the current satellite a little bit. Either, we delay it (the launch) or make it early, so that this proximity condition does not occur," he said. Scientists undertook time to fix the launch for the lift-off and decide on the best time which gives the maximum distance to be away from the other satellite in the orbit, he added.

Country's first inter-State cruise to be launched this year

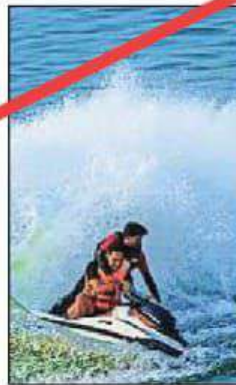
■ By Bhavana 'Aparajita' Shukla
Bhopal, Dec 31

AIMING to be a key participants of Union Government's five-year Cruise Bharat Mission, Madhya Pradesh is all set to expand cruise tourism.

In a statement, Principal Secretary Tourism, Culture and Religious Trusts & Endowments Department and Managing Director Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board Sheo Shekhar Shukla said that State is set to launch India's first inter-state cruise route connecting Meghnath Ghat (Kukshi) and Sakarja in Madhya Pradesh with Hafeshwar and Mokhad in Gujarat. The 120-km-long route promises a thrilling adventure amidst tranquil and scenic beau-

ty. A state-of-the-art solar-powered cruise terminal is being constructed in Sakarja offering outstanding connectivity with major cities. It is in the pipeline, Sakarja will be the first cruise terminal in the country. State's tourism sector is set to boost cruise tourism, rural tourism, textile tourism and niche tourism products in this year.

Madhya Pradesh, a land proudly boasting lush natural beauty, historical sites, and cultural heritage, is undeniably a multispeciality off-beat destination of first choice. The State beckons travellers from every nook and cranny paving the way to a surge in tourism. Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is now gearing up for an even more ambitious target in 2025. The State unveils a comprehensive



plan focusing on cruise tourism, safe tourism destinations for women, wellness and medical



tourism, textile tourism, rural tourism and niche to boost tourism further and establish

Madhya Pradesh as a global destination. Noteworthy to mention that

Central Government has launched the five-year Cruise Bharat Mission, aiming to boost cruise tourism in India to 1 million passengers and create 4,00,000 jobs by 2029.

The mission includes setting up of a dedicated fund, easing of cabotage regulations and financial incentives.

"Cruise, with its tremendous potential in our country, has remained unexplored for long as the experts opined and finds tremendous potential in this sector.

Based on critical pillars of infrastructure development, and cruise experience for tourists and sustainability of resources, the three-phase mission will develop world class infrastructure and enable growth of cruise tourism and maritime trade.