

VERY BIG DAY for Assam

ULFA signs peace accord with Govt

NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (PTI)

THE pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) on Friday signed a peace accord with the Central and Assam Governments, agreeing to shun violence, disband the organisation and join the democratic process.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who was present along with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the signing of the accord here, said it was a very big day for the peo-

ple of Assam.

"Assam has suffered for long due to the violence of the ULFA and 10,000 people lost their lives in this violence since 1979," he said.

Shah said the ULFA, the oldest insurgent group of Assam, agreed to abjure violence, disband the organisation and join the democratic process.

He said a big development package will be given to Assam as part of the accord. Every clause of the pact will be implemented fully, he said.

He said that now violence has come down in Assam by 87 per cent, deaths by 90 per cent and kidnappings by 84 per cent.

Accord comes after 12 years of unconditional talks between ULFA faction and Government

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'Next steps after examining ruling, legal discussion'

MEA on 8 ex-Navy personnel in Qatar

NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (PTI)

INDIA on Friday said its next steps in the case relating to eight former Indian Navy personnel will be decided after examining the ruling of a Qatari court and discussions with the legal team handling the matter.

Qatar's Court of Appeals has commuted the death sentences handed out to the Navy veterans by another court earlier.

"The interests of Indians and their family members is our foremost concern," Ministry External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said at a media briefing. "We will be discussing the next pos-

sible steps with the legal team and the family members," he added. Bagchi said he would not like to say anything more as the matter is sensitive.

The Indian nationals, who were working with Doha-based Al Dahra Global Technologies, were taken into custody in August 2022 in a case of alleged espionage.

While the charges against them were not made public by Qatari authorities, they were sentenced to death by the Gulf country's Court of First Instance in October this year.

The private firm provided training and other services to Qatar's armed forces and security agencies.

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World population to exceed 8 bn by Jan 1

WASHINGTON, Dec 29 (AP)

THE world population grew by 75 million people over the past year and on New Year's Day, it will stand at more than 8 billion people, according to figures released by the US Census Bureau on Thursday.

The worldwide growth rate in the past year was just under one per cent. At the start of 2024, 4.3 births and two deaths are expected worldwide every second.

The growth rate for the United States in the past year was 0.53 per cent, about half the worldwide figure. The US added 1.7 million people and will have a population on New

Year's Day of 335.8 million people. If the current pace continues through the end of the decade, the 2020s could be the slowest-growing decade in US history, yielding a growth rate of less than 4 per cent over the 10-year-period from 2020 to 2030, said William Frey, a demographer at The Brookings Institution.

The slowest-growing decade currently was in the aftermath of the Great Depression in the 1930s, when the growth rate was 7.3 per cent.

"Of course, growth may tick up a bit as we leave the pandemic years. But it would still be difficult to get to 7.3 per cent," Frey said.

Elon Musk returns as world's richest man

NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (IANS)

TESLA and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk has returned as the world's richest man, recapturing the title from French luxury tycoon Bernard Arnault.

Musk earned an additional \$95.4 billion through Thursday's close, boosted by the success of Tesla and SpaceX, after losing \$138 billion in 2022, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. His net worth now exceeds Arnault's by more than \$50 billion after LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE shares fell due to a global slowdown in demand for luxury



products. As per the Index, Musk's net worth is now estimated to be \$232 billion.

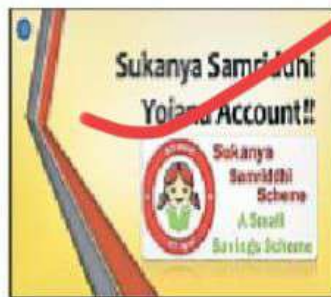
Amazon founder Jeff Bezos added more than \$70 billion to his wallet this year and is now neck-and-neck with Arnault for second place, while Meta Founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg's fortune increased by more than \$80 billion. Arnault is the second richest in the world with net worth of \$179 billion, followed by Bezos (\$178 billion), Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates (\$141 billion), ex-Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer (\$131 billion), and Zuckerberg (\$130 billion).

HIKE in interest rates on SUKANYA SAMRIDDHI

NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (PTI)

THE Government on Friday raised the interest rates on Sukanya Samriddhi scheme by 20 basis points and three-year term deposit scheme by 10 basis points for the January-March quarter, while retaining the rates for all other small savings schemes.

According to a Finance Ministry circular, the deposit under Sukanya Samriddhi scheme would



attract an interest rate of 8.2 per cent from the existing 8 per cent, while the 3-year term deposit would become 7.1 per cent from the current 7 per cent.

However, the interest rates for popular PPF and savings deposits have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively. The rates were the same during the December quarter.

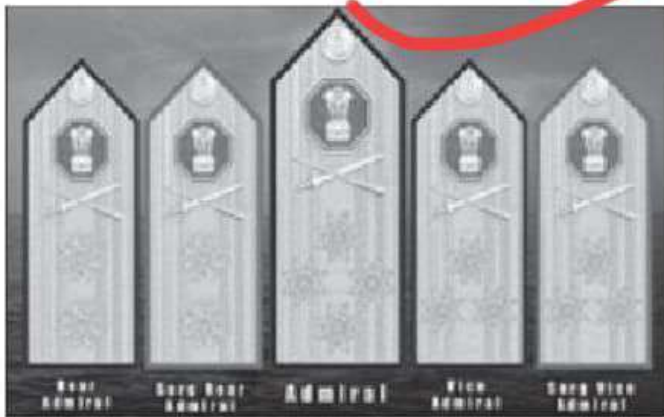
The interest rate on the Kisan Vikas Patra is 7.5 per cent and the investments will mature in 115 months.

The interest rate on the National Savings Certificate (NSC) remained unchanged at 7.7 per cent for January 1 to March 31, 2024, peri-

od. There is no increase in interest rate for the Monthly Income Scheme, and this will earn 7.4 per cent for the investors. The Government notifies the interest rate on small savings schemes, majorly operated by post offices, every quarter.

The Reserve Bank since May 2022 has raised the benchmark lending rate by 2.5 per cent to 6.5 per cent, prompting banks to raise interest rates on deposits as well.

Navy unveils new design for Admirals' Epaulettes



NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (ANI)

THE Indian Navy has revealed the new design for Admirals' Epaulettes. The announcement on a new design for the Epaulettes was made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during Navy Day 2023 at Sindhudurg in Maharashtra.

The design draws inspiration from the Naval Ensign and features elements inspired by the

Rajmudra of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the statement said.

Rajmudra is an authentic stamp or the Royal Seal that Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj used to use in his letters and ordinance. There are several letters that have the Rajmudra printed on it. Legend has it that the Rajmudra was given to Shivaji Maharaj by his father Shahajiraje Bhosale.

The epaulettes consist of the Golden Navy Button, the Octagon, the Sword and the Telescope.

The Golden Navy Button reiterates the Navy's commitment to do away with the colonial mindset. The Octagon represents the eight cardinal directions, indicative of an all-round long-term vision. The Sword emphasises the very essence of the Navy's Raison d'etre, viz. being the cutting edge of national power and winning wars through dominance, defeating adversaries and overcoming every challenge. The Telescope symbolises a long-term vision, foresight and a weather-eye in an ever-changing world.

Rlys promises 'jerk-free' journey in new Amrit Bharat Express trains

NEW DELHI, Dec 29 (PTI)

THE first two Amrit Bharat Express trains, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off on December 30 from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, are equipped with the latest technology to ensure that passengers do not feel any jerk at any point of the journey.

The trains will run between

Darbhanga in Bihar and Anand Vihar in Delhi via Ayodhya, and Malda Town in West Bengal and Sir M Visvesvaraya Terminus in Bengaluru. With the help of semi-coupler technology, a unique innovation in train operations, Amrit Bharat trains offer a smooth journey across various destinations running at a maximum speed of 130 km.

This technology helps join

two coaches in such a way that it negates the jerk effect when the train starts and stops. In the old technology, used in several existing trains, the coaches were joined with the help of a kind of coupler due to which passengers felt a jerk when the train stopped or started.

The Amrit Bharat trains have a special type of coupler called semi-permanent coupler.

Israeli-Hamas war drives 85% of Gaza's people from their homes

JERUSALEM, Dec 29 (AP)

THE Israeli-Hamas war has already driven around 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes, levelling the northern part of the territory and heightening fears about a similar fate for the south as Israel's air and ground offensive widened on Friday.

ISRAELIS WOUNDED BY A CAR DRIVEN BY A PALESTINIAN IN THE WEST BANK

TEL AVIV — Israeli authorities say four Israelis were wounded after a Palestinian rammed his car into them in the occupied West Bank.

The military said the inci-

dent on Friday occurred near a military post in the southern West Bank. Israeli rescue service Magen David Adom said four people in their 20s were wounded, one moderately and the rest lightly. The military said troops had stopped the driver, whose condition was not immediately known. Violence in the West Bank has surged alongside Israel and Hamas' war in Gaza.

The Palestinian Health Ministry says more than 300 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since Hamas' attacks against Israel on Oct 7, in Israeli raids or in clashes with Israeli forces. More than

2,500 have been arrested.

AID GROUP WARNS OF FAMINE: The international aid group Mercy Corps is warning about famine and disease affecting Palestinians in Gaza as Israel and Hamas continue their war. Kate Phillips-Barrasso, vice president of Mercy Corps, said that relentless fighting and insufficient humanitarian aid were compounding the crisis.

She said the amount of life-saving goods being allowed inside Gaza is a drop in the ocean and has not yet increased to the level necessary to meet Gazans' basic and critical needs.