

RBI's Monetary Policy Committee starts discussions on next bi-monthly policy

MUMBAI, April 6 (PTI): The Reserve Bank of India's rate-setting panel on Wednesday started discussions to firm up the next bi-monthly monetary policy amid expectations that it might retain status quo on interest rate but change its monetary policy stance amid rising inflation on account of geopolitical developments.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), headed by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, is holding its first meeting in the current financial year. The meeting will be from April 6 to 8 and the outcome will be announced on April 8.

In the last 10 meetings, the MPC left the interest rate unchanged and also maintained an accommodative monetary policy stance.

The repo rate or the short-term lending rate was last cut on May 22, 2020. Since then, the rate remains at a historic low of 4 per cent.

In a report this week, State Bank of India (SBI) said the cen-



tral bank may increase its inflation projections for fiscal 2022-23 considerably and also lower growth projections.

It expects the RBI to continue with a pause on short-term lending rate (repo).

"Prolonged growth supportive stance may have created a signal extraction and coordination problem with administered rates being cut even as inflation has contin-

ued to tread up," SBI said in the report.

According to the report, real rates have been negative for a persistent period and "the RBI may like to create a discordant note by emphasising inflation as a threat but at the same time emphasising it is fully seized of it!"

Industry body PHD Chamber's president Pradeep Multani on Wednesday said the economy is

still in the recovery process from the daunting impact caused by the coronavirus pandemic and that an accommodative policy stance at this juncture would be inevitable to strengthen the economic fundamentals.

"The recent geopolitical developments though stoke inflation, status quo of the policy rates will help the economy to cope up with the impact of external shocks," he said.

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and surging oil prices are pushing the cost of commodities higher, resulting in rising inflationary trends.

The government has mandated the central bank to keep the inflation at 4 per cent, with an upper and lower tolerance level of 2 per cent.

After the February MPC meeting, the RBI had decided to hold its key lending rates steady at record low levels for the 10th straight meeting to support a durable recovery of the economy.

Sensex, Nifty decline for 2nd day on fears of aggressive rate hike by US Fed

MUMBAI, April 6 (PTI): Benchmark BSE Sensex tumbled 566 points to close below the 60,000-level on Wednesday, extending its losses for a second day due to profit taking in banking and IT stocks amid a fall in global stocks.

The 30-share BSE barometer tanked 566.09 points or 0.94 per cent to settle at 59,610.41 as 20 of its constituents closed in red. During the day, it plunged 666.66 points or 1.10 per cent to 59,509.84.

The broader NSE Nifty declined by 149.75 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 17,807.65 with 30 of its stocks ending with losses.

Analysts said rate-sensitive stocks declined as US Federal Reserve Governor Lael Brainard's comments fueled expectations of more aggressive US rate hikes and the White House announced more sanctions on Russia.

"Markets inched lower for the second consecutive session. Weak global cues viz. hawkish commentary from the US Fed and the possibility of fresh sanctions on Russia largely impacted investors' sentiment," Ajit Mishra, VP - Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

"The main indices are muted due to drop in HDFC group stocks after the rally, the subdued performance of IT sector in anticipation of weak results on a QoQ basis and weak global cues. We can expect volatility in the near-term ahead of the RBI policy meet," said Vinod Nair, head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

The Fed Governor said the central bank is set to keep raising rates after its March hike and might decide at its May meeting to reduce bond holdings "at a rapid pace".

HDFC Bank fell the most by 3.51 per cent among Sensex stocks. HDFC tanked 3.26 per cent due to profit taking.

HCL Tech dropped by 2.07 per cent, Tech Mahindra by 1.97 per cent, Infosys by 1.75 per cent and TCS by 1.52 per cent.

Among banking stocks, Kotak Bank fell by 1.27 per cent, Axis Bank by 1.26 per cent and IndusInd Bank by 0.68 per cent.

Reliance Industries, M&M, Dr Reddy's, Wipro, Bajaj Finance, and Titan also declined.

On the other hand, NTPC emerged as the lead gainer among index stocks, rising by 2.61 per cent. Tata Steel rose by 1.94 per cent, Power Grid by 1.52 per cent and Bharti Airtel by 1.17 per cent. Nestle, L&T, SBI and Asian Paints also advanced.



"Domestic equities moved in tandem with US markets to close lower, fuelled by investors' expectation of a stricter interest rate hike by Fed," according to Mitul Shah, head of Research at Reliance Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap index gained 0.41 per cent and smallcap gauge jumped 0.38 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, IT declined 1.40 per cent, financial by 1.25 per cent, tech by 1.22 per cent and banking by 1.04 per cent.

Shrikant Chouhan, head of Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities Ltd, said, "Traders rushed to trim their position further in banking and IT stocks, thus pulling down key benchmark indices sharply lower. Weakness in other global markets and concerns of hawkish US Fed likely to hike interest rates along with caution ahead of RBI's policy meet prompted investors to turn risk averse."

The Reserve Bank of India's rate-setting panel on Wednesday started discussions to firm up the next bi-monthly monetary policy amid expectations that it might retain status quo on interest rate but change its monetary policy stance amid rising inflation on account of geopolitical developments.

On Tuesday, the BSE Sensex slumped 435.24 points or 0.72 per cent to finish at 60,176.50. Similarly, the NSE Nifty tumbled 96 points or 0.53 per cent to 17,957.40.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude gained 0.93 per cent to USD 107.6 per barrel.

Elsewhere in Asian markets, bourses in Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul settled lower, while Shanghai was in the green. Indices in the US also ended on a lower note on Tuesday. Foreign portfolio investors bought shares worth ₹ 374.89 crore on Tuesday, according to stock exchange data.

Flipkart forays into healthcare sector with the launch of the Health+ App

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 6: Flipkart Group announced the launch of the Flipkart Health+ app on Wednesday. Notably, the tech platform aims to enable access to genuine medicines and healthcare products for customers across the country. It aims to strengthen India's healthcare ecosystem by enabling affordable access to a wide range of medicines and healthcare products and services while partnering with the healthcare ecosystem in terms of long-term sustainable well-being and social development.

Commenting on the launch of the Flipkart Health+ app, Prashant Jha, chief executive officer, Flipkart Health+, said, "Since the Covid-19 pandemic, Indians have witnessed a tremendous shift in favoring wellness and preventative healthcare and there is an increased focus on health and wellness, like never before. Through Flipkart Health+, we aim to solve the critical gap of accessibility to genuine medicines and healthcare products and services across the country, especially in the remotest parts

of the country that have been underserved until now. We want to leverage technology in a way that strengthens the healthcare ecosystem and enables it to serve customers better by making access to healthcare simpler even for those residing in distant areas of the country and contributing towards a healthier India."

To begin with, the Flipkart Health+ platform will have over 500 independent Sellers who have a network of registered pharmacists for validation of medical prescriptions and accurate dispensation of medicines. Even though it is an intermediary marketplace platform, Flipkart Health+ has put in place various quality checks and verification protocols, which will facilitate the delivery of genuine medicines and healthcare products from independent sellers to the customer's doorstep. In the coming months, Flipkart Health+ plans to onboard third-party healthcare service providers who will offer other value-added healthcare services like teleconsultation and e-diagnostics to the customers.

Vi set to empower youth with employment opportunities

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 6: Vi announced a set of offerings for the youth to help them with finding employment, becoming more employable, and also help them prepare for government jobs. Giving wings to its customer's aspirations, for a better tomorrow, Vi Jobs & Education is integrating India's largest job-search platform 'Aapna', leading English learning platform 'Enguru' and 'Pariksha' a platform specialising in government employment exam preparation. Primarily targeted toward the large prepaid user base in India, Vi Jobs & Education on the Vi App offers a one-stop solution for youth to search for jobs, improve spoken English skills, and excel in government employment exams, empowering them to fulfill their career dreams.

Commenting on the launch of this unique proposition, Avneesh Khosla, CMO, Vodafone Idea Limited, said, "In line with Vi's brand promise 'together for tomorrow', we've been looking at the need gaps in consumers' daily lives, where we believe we can play a role of an enabler to help them get ahead in life. When we look at youth in this country their key aspiration is to get a good job and become more employable. The relevance of digital skills and fluency in spoken English has become more pronounced for today's youth. Further, government employment remains a top choice for a large part of this segment, particularly for those coming from tier 2/3 cities. Based on these insights, we have curated the Vi Jobs & Education proposition in partnership with Aapna, Enguru, and Pariksha. We believe that these integrated solutions will enable Vi customers to further their efforts in gaining a competitive edge and march ahead to meet their career aspirations."

and Investment Dan Tehan said the trade pact is "unity agreement" and a comprehensive one. Goyal is leading a business delegation here. Exporters' body FIEO president A Sakthivel, who is here as part of the delegation, said the agreement would help in boosting trade between the countries.

Council for Leather Exports (CLE) vice-chairman Rajendra Kumar Jalan said that leather is a part of the agreement and the pact would promote its trade with Australia.

Australia is the 17th largest trading partner of India, while New Delhi is Canberra's 9th largest trading partner. India's goods exports were worth USD 6.9 billion and imports aggregated to USD 15.1 billion in 2021.



The minister also sought investments from Australia in areas like infrastructure.

"We have a big market and people aspire for a better quality of life. This gives a huge opportunity for India and people around the world," he said, adding that Australia has a huge investible surplus. "Your investible surplus can get a fair return in India," he said.

The minister also emphasised on the need to strengthen air and shipping connectivity.

"I have already talked to DP World for example in the UAE last week when I was there that they may look at expanding direct shipping lines and connectivity to Australia from India," Goyal said.

Speaking on the occasion, Australian minister for Trade, Tourism

India, Australia should look at USD 100 bln bilateral trade by 2030: Goyal

MELBOURNE, April 6 (PTI): Commerce and Industry minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said that India and Australia should look at boosting the bilateral trade to USD 100 billion by 2030 from the current level of around USD 27.5 billion.

Goyal, who is in Australia on a three-day visit, said that both the countries are already at an advanced stage of entering into an agreement for greater collaboration in the education sector.

On April 2, India and Australia signed the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (IndAus ECTA) under which both the countries are providing duty free access to a huge number of goods and relaxing norms to promote trade in services.

"I would suggest that our teams should drill down sector by sector to see how we are going to grow this relationship... Let's be more ambitious, let's look at USD 100 billion engagement by 2030... So, we are looking at quadrupling this relationship in eight years," Goyal said on Wednesday.

Both the countries are also looking at things like providing dual degrees and signing mutual recognition agreements to promote services trade.

Goyal said that areas where both the countries can increase collaboration include education, research, startups and agri tech.

Services sector activities rise in March though input costs touch 11-year high: Survey

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): Service sector activities improved in March, mainly supported by strengthening demand conditions, even as input costs spiked to the highest level in 11 years during the month, according to a survey.

The seasonally adjusted S&P Global India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from 51.8 in February to 53.6 in March, pointing to the strongest rate of expansion since last December.

For the eighth straight month, the services sector witnessed an expansion in output. In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"The war in Ukraine exacerbated lingering issues in supply chains, triggering a re-acceleration in inflation across the Indian service economy. The March results showed the sharpest upturn in input costs for 11 years, but this did not put a brake on the recovery of the sector," Pollyanna De

Lima, Economics associate director at S&P Global, said on Wednesday.

Further, Lima noted that buoyed by the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions, consumers were eager to go out and spend. "Service providers recorded the fastest upturn in new business in 2022 so far, with an equal outcome seen for business activity."

Firms recorded the fastest expansions in sales and activity in 2022 so far while business confidence remained subdued due to inflation concerns.

Input costs increased at the sharpest pace in 11 years at the end of fiscal year 2021/22 but companies mostly absorbed additional cost burdens and raised their charges only moderately.

"Inflation risks continued to curb business optimism regarding growth prospects, with sentiment among services companies remaining subdued by historical standards. This lack of confidence in the outlook also meant that employment continued to fall



in March," Lima said.

Inflation expectations continued to dampen business confidence in March. Companies remained upbeat towards growth prospects but the overall level of

sentiment remained subdued in the context of historical data, the survey said.

Meanwhile, the S&P Global India Composite PMI Output Index -- which measures combined services and manufacturing

output -- was quoted at 54.3 in March, up from 53.5 in February, highlighting the strongest rate of expansion so far this year.

For the first time in seven months, input price inflation was more acute in the service economy than in the manufacturing industry. Across the private sector, cost burdens rose at the sharpest pace in almost a decade.

Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to maintain status quo on interest rates in its forthcoming monetary policy review but may change the stance in view of retail inflation piercing its upper tolerance limit, global uncertainties created by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, and the urgency to protect and boost growth, according to experts.

The RBI Governor-headed rate setting panel -- Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) -- will be holding its first meeting of the 2022-23 fiscal from April 6 to 8. The outcome will be announced on April 8.

TM unveils new Electric SUV Curvv

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 6: Tata Motors (TM) showcased its Electric SUV Concept -- Curvv, conceptualised to offer practicality and elegance. The Curvv is Tata Motors' rendition of the modern SUV typology. Expected to storm the market within the next two years, this Concept will introduce India to a unique, edgy, and sporty coupe body style that in the past has only been prevalent in the high-end luxury segment. Speaking at the event, Shailesh Chandra - managing director, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd., and Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd., ecstatically said, "Our ongoing business turnaround is history in the making. From record sales to upping our market share game, the last fiscal has been nothing but magical for us. We not only emerged as the No. 1 SUV player with our array of products in our portfolio, but we also continued to supercharge our growth in the EV space with our highest ever annual EV sales going up by 353% vs FY21."

Notably, Tata Motors has been a pioneer in the Indian SUV market, always pushing boundaries of technology and innovation while developing products for India. Additionally, the Generation 2 EV architecture will be advanced, flexible, and capable of offering multi-powertrain options. Products on this architecture will be crafted to deliver a higher range while retaining the credibility and reliability standards set by the Generation 1 products powered by Ziptron.

IT spending in India to hit USD 110.6 bn despite inflation, geo-political disruption

NEW DELHI, April 6 (IANS): The overall IT spending in India is likely to reach USD 110.6 billion in 2022 -- growing 6.3 per cent from 2021 -- as inflation, geo-political disruption and talent shortages are not expected to slow down IT investments, a Gartner report said on Wednesday.

In India, the forecast has been revised from the earlier estimate of USD 105.2 billion, primarily due to the growth in devices in 2021.

"In 2022, along with devices, Indian CIOs and business leaders will continue to increase their spending towards analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, customer experience and cloud," said Naveen Mishra, senior research director at Gartner.

Indian CIOs are contemplating to restructure their existing IT vendor engagement programmes "with an eye on co-creation of solutions in close partnership with their providers and newer contracting models," Mishra added. The spending on IT services in India is likely to reach USD 19.7 billion in 2022 -- an 8.6 per cent growth from last year. The increasing cost of talent will be one of the major growth drivers in the country.

Governor Mukhi interacts with teachers, students of Nowgong College (Autonomous)

'Higher educational institutions are those places where pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed'

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 6: Governor Jagdish Mukhi on Wednesday visited the historic Nowgong College (autonomous) for the first time after the institution was scheduled to be promoted to a state university by the state government.

During his trip to the institution, Prof Mukhi participated in an interactive programme with the teaching staff as well as the students of the college.

Dr Sarat Borkatoki, principal of the college delivered the welcome address while Dr Bhuban Chandra Chutia, coordinator of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) anchored the interactive programme.

Professor Mukhi presented 'Dulal Chandra Goswami Memorial Research Award 2021', facilitated by Dulal Chandra Goswami Memorial Trust, to noted research scholar and assistant professor, Department of Chemistry, Parikshit Gogoi. Significantly, the award contains a cheque of Rs 30,000, appraisal letter, memento, etc. The award is



offered to a noted research scholar every year to encourage the research fellows of the district as well as the state by the noted physician of the town and donor of the Trust Dr Mukut Goswami.

Besides, he also ceremonially released a book written in Hindi language entitled as 'Hindi Ki Nayi Kahani Mein Nari Ka Monu-bishleshan' by Karobi Devi, Department of Hindi, Nowgong College.

While addressing the interactive programme, professor Mukhi said only scholars and academicians can build a university and urged the principal of the college as well as other teaching staff to prepare the new text books as per guidelines of the New Education Policy 2020 as early as possible.

Referring to the top priority of a university, professor Mukhi said the teaching and research work are quite reciprocal and hence he urged the teaching staff to maintain the balance between teaching and research work.

While interacting with the students, he urged the students to follow the discipline as well as other moral values of a good student so that they can carry on the merits of the institution where they studied.

During the visit of professor Mukhi to the institution, he was accompanied by Swapnali Dutta, secretary to the Governor of Assam, deputy commissioner Nagaon, deputy commissioner Nisarg Hivare and superintendent of police Nagaon, a release added.

Biennial conference of KSA to be held in May

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 6: The 31st biennial conference of Karbi Students Association (KSA) will be held on May 5 and 6 at the playground of Diphu Govt College, the president Simeon Rongphar informed. In a press conference held at District Press Club of Karbi Anglong here on Wednesday, the KSA president Simeon Rongphar said, "KSA conference is not held annually but biennially. The 31st conference for the central committee, KSA, will be held on May 5 and 6 at Diphu Govt College playground." He also informed that due to his preoccupation in other areas he will be leaving the KSA in that conference. "To the best of my capacity, I have devoted myself to the KSA to serve society. As I have to give time in my other spheres, I will leave from active participation in KSA after the biennial conference. Though I have not resigned from the post of president but after coming to an agreement in the central executive meeting, Sumit Timung has been appointed as the in-charge president up to the conference."

Lorulatingso reels under artificial floods

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 6: The village headman of Chephongsajir, Lorulatingso, Ram Teron has said that one Kamal Timung of Lorulatingso has filled up earth close to Longrunlungso which is inviting artificial floods in the summer. The village headman Teron said, "Kamal Timung has filled up earth in his compound which is very close to Longrunlungso and is inviting floods in the summer. The villagers have requested Timung to stop filling the earth so close to the river as it is narrowing the free flow of water which will invite floods in summer." The narrowing of the river course has already eroded the river embankment near the main road. As Timung has not paid heed to the request of the villagers, they have to approach the chairman of Diphu Municipal Board to take up the matter as it is a concern for the whole village.

UPPL eyes massive development in BTR

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 6: The new office bearers of six block committees of the ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) under Kokrajhar district, took oath of office at a party meeting held at Kokrajhar Girls' College auditorium hall on Wednesday.

The UPPL party has recently formed a new executive committee of all six block committees under Kokrajhar district to work for the uplift and welfare of the common masses in the district. President of Kokrajhar district UPPL party and MLA Lawrence Islay administered the oath of office of the party members of the block level committee in the presence of senior party leaders.

Islay said that the UPPL party has been emphasising towards the welfare and integration among all sections of the society with a dedicated manner since its inception in the region. He informed that recently the UPPL has inducted an MP in the Rajya Sabha through the spirit of BJP-AGP-UPPL alliance.

He said that the BTR government and state government are jointly carrying various developmental projects for the welfare of the region. He also urged the party workers to be dedicated in their works to achieve the best results.

DEMU special train to operate between Dangiri and Tinsukia stations soon

NFR to resume train services with easternmost station of India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 6: The Northeast Frontier Railway has decided to resume the train service connectivity with Dangiri, the easternmost station of Indian Railways from April 12, 2022. The train service of Tinsukia - Dangiri DEMU Special was earlier suspended due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, as the situation is almost under control nationwide, almost all train services are being resumed day by day. So for the ease of transportation of the commuters from Makum-Dangiri region the train services will be resumed w.e.f. next week.

Train No. 07904 (Tinsukia - Dangiri DEMU Special) will depart from Tinsukia railway station at 04:30 hours and will operate six



days a week (except Sunday) from Tuesday next. The special train will reach its destination at Dangiri at 06:00 hours via Makum Jn., Bara Hapjan, Hansara, Dum Duma Town, Rupai and Talap stations. Train No. 07905 (Dangiri - Tinsukia DEMU Special) will start its journey from Dangiri railway station at 06:30 hours on the same day i.e., Tuesday next. The special train will also serve for six days a week (except Sunday) from Dangiri railway station and will run via

the above mentioned stations in a reverse direction to reach its destination Tinsukia railway station, at 08:00 hours on the same day.

The DEMU special train will operate with a total of 8 coaches consisting of 2 driving power coaches with accommodation facilities and 6 passenger coaches. The fare from Tinsukia and Makum to Dangiri will be Rs 30. The fare for the return direction will also be the same.

NF Railway has facilitated the passengers to avail on board railway tickets during their journey by this train. As NF Railway discourages ticketless travelling of passengers, this facility will add provisions to the commuters to get journey tickets even during their train journey.

One held for murder

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 6: Babu Das (31), a resident of Malowkhat under Pulbar Police Station was sent to judicial custody on Wednesday on charges of killing Kushal Das of the same village on Tuesday evening.

A police source said that Babu Das waylaid Kushal Das on the Malowkhat Road while the latter was on his way home and reportedly killed him with a knife.

In this regard, a case has been registered vide Pulbar PS C/no. 82/2022, U/S 302 IPC.



Sawn timber seized

HT Correspondent

BAKALIA, April 6: Forest officials of Northern Range Forest, West Division have seized sawn timber from Hatipura area under Bakaliaghat police station on Tuesday night. Range officer Harinath Ronghang led the operation in which a pickup truck bearing registration number AS-02-E-2887 was seized which was used to carry illegal timber. The market value of seized timbers is more than Rs 50,000, informed ACF Ronghang.



GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM



National Health Mission, Assam

COMMITTED TO DELIVER QUALITY HEALTHCARE SERVICES



On the occasion of World Health Day

7th April, 2022

The Department of Health and Family Welfare and National Health Mission, Assam presents
Award Distribution Ceremony
for **NQAS, Laqshya and Kayakalp**
for Quality Assurance in the Health Institutions of Assam.



The occasion will be graced by
Shri. Keshab Mahanta
Hon'ble Health Minister, Assam
at

Administrative Staff College, Khanapara, Guwahati

Keeping in mind this year's theme
'Our Planet, Our Health, let us pledge
to be the change agent by raising our voice and
engage in climate actions to protect our health.

FOLLOW ALL COVID-19 APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR EVEN
AFTER VACCINATION



WEAR WELL-FITTING
MASK



USE
SANITIZER



MAINTAIN PHYSICAL
DISTANCE



REGULARLY
WASH HANDS

(NHM/D/2022-23/03)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age. -James Joyce

India must help Lanka in political crisis

The ongoing Sri Lanka crisis finds echoes across the Palk straits in Tamil Nadu as refugees have started arriving in the state over the past fortnight. Since the Eelam war ended in 2009, this is the first-time refugees have arrived on the Tamil Nadu coast. The crisis has further deepened with the entire cabinet resigning to prevent the anger against them for mismanagement. Driven by hunger, the Tamil community has taken refuge with their Tamil brethren in India. About 16 of them landed in Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu in two batches. They are the Sri Lankan Tamils who cannot face the untenable situation in the island country undergoing an unprecedented economic crisis, including severe food shortage. Sri Lankan refugees fleeing to India is not a new phenomenon as Tamil Nadu had provided them shelter and food since the days of the Eelam War. These refugees landed in Tamil Nadu at different times, mainly to avoid violence. But today, they have left the island country for economic reasons and hunger. Some of them are still living in the state in shelters.

The second generation of refugee Tamils is also living in the camps in the state. They have no identity, don't belong to any country, and are stuck in no man's land. The Tamil Nadu government provides them free education, healthcare, ration cards, and a meager allowance for their families. They hope to get Indian citizenship, while the older generation is open to returning to Sri Lanka. Tamil Issue has become political with all the Dravidian parties sympathising and speaking for them. They all vie with each other to plead for their Tamil brethren. They also put pressure on the Centre for the Sri Lanka reconciliation process with the Tamils. It has also become an issue in many past elections. Well, India has received refugees from many countries, including Tibet, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. According to UNHCR, there are about 2 lakh refugees in India. The tricky point here is that India is not a signatory of the UN Refugee Convention (1951) or its Protocol (1967), so the Tamil refugees face the problem of not belonging to a country.

This time too, Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin has sought the Centre's approval for providing the Tamil refugees with humanitarian relief. During his visit to Delhi last week, Stalin revealed to the media that he had also spoken about the new arrivals running away from the Sri Lankan crisis. He has suggested that they could be accorded refugee status and rehabilitated. How far it is correct to send aid to a section of Sri Lankan is a question when the whole country suffers from hunger. Tamil Nadu puts pressure on India's foreign policy towards Sri Lanka on three main issues. The other issue pending is the resumption of talks between India and Sri Lanka about the frequent detention and arrest of Tamil Nadu fishermen who stray into the Sri Lankan waters. The third is retrieving Katchatheevu, a small island Indira Gandhi ceded to Sri Lanka in 1974. The Tamil Nadu Government has been insisting on its retrieval. In the Indian subcontinent, Pakistan is undergoing a political crisis while Sri Lanka has an economic crisis that has turned now into a full-blown political crisis. The entire cabinet resigned on Sunday night and the ruling establishment is clueless. India has to play its role in helping its island neighbour deal with the burgeoning crisis.

CPI(M)'s 23rd party Congress must help unite seculars against saffrons

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] is holding its 23rd Party Congress in Kerala this month, from April 6 to 10. The delegates attending this five-day session will be deliberating on both the national and international situations, and, on the final day, will be adopting a document which will guide the party leadership in framing strategy and tactics for the next three years till the 24th Party Congress, possibly in 2025.

The draft political resolution (DPR) for the 23rd congress was adopted at the meeting of the central committee in Hyderabad on January 7 to 9 this year. Since then three months have passed and new developments have taken place at both international and national level. At the global level, Russia is in war with Ukraine and even after 41s days, there are no signs of this devastating war coming to an end anytime soon. China is giving critical support to the Russian invasion. CPI(M) has condemned Russian 'invasion', though simultaneously the role of NATO and the West's moves to endanger the security of Russia have been mentioned. Globally, the communist parties are also taking position against the authoritarian Putin, while equally taking to task the West for its war-mongering.

At the national level, the assembly elections were held in five states, and in four states, the BJP retained its power. In Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party gave a good fight but Yogi Adityanath was finally winner with comfortable majority. The Congress, the main challenger to the BJP in four states, lost its ruling state Punjab to AAP in a humiliating defeat. AAP now rules Punjab and Delhi, and the party has announced its decision to make a strong bid for Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, which will go for assembly elections by the end of this year. The massive roadshow organized by the two AAP chief ministers in Ahmedabad last week has given fresh confidence to AAP. Both the BJP and the Congress are worried, the Congress more.

The party draft has correctly focused on fighting BJP as the main enemy both at political and electoral level and reiterated the last party congress observation that BJP and the Congress cannot be equated at the same level. The main task is to isolate and defeat the BJP. So the party will cooperate with secular opposition parties in Parliament on agreed issues. Outside the Parliament, the party will work for the broadest mobilisation of all secular forces against the communal agenda of the BJP.

The DPR has mentioned that the BJP has

emerged as the principal political party of the Indian ruling classes and has spread its influence all over the country on the back of the RSS network that is rapidly expanding. The BJP currently leads the governments in 12 states and is in coalition in six others. It controls both the houses of Parliament.

All this information in the DPR document is fine, but not adequate enough to understand what a mammoth organisation the BJP is. In any war, real or electoral, one must understand the strengths of the main enemy and take follow-up measures to meet the challenge. The CPI(M) has declared the BJP as the main enemy in its DPR. So the delegates must know more about the political party they will be fighting.

BJP is now the political party with largest membership in the world. The Party claims a membership of 19 crore and this may go up to 21 crore by 2024. RSS has a membership of more than 20 crore, though there are a large number of common members. The present BJP under the dominant leadership of Narendra Modi is one of the most modernised parties in the world. The

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Nitya Chakraborty

party machinery works round-the-clock and its information cell and the think-tanks continuously monitor the status of the party organisation, irrespective of whether there are elections or not.

The Party is mega rich. Earlier dependence on traders and petty shoppers is gone. The industry people in general contribute to the party funds and render other assistance. There are many big industrialists who think themselves as Hindu nationalists. They like Narendra Modi. That is why, 90 per cent of the electoral bonds go to BJP. The Congress used to get considerable funds from the corporate sector during its tenure, but under the regime of Narendra Modi, the corporate funding to the Congress declined drastically and now after eight years, it has come to a mere trickle.

Further, the BJP's big source of funding is their global organisation 'Overseas Friends of BJP' and the VHP bodies in the western countries, especially in the UK and the USA. During my visit to Germany, UK and USA, I met many senior BJP functionaries who boasted that "even if the funds in India dry up for the BJP, we can take care of the entire election expenses". This financial muscle power has been added to the organisational muscle power of the RSS and the

myriad militant groups wreaking incremental violence on a daily on the minority populations almost all across the country.

That is the real challenge for the opposition parties including the Congress and the Left. They are facing a highly organised, meticulously planned, ruthless BJP in 2022 which seeks to pursue its Hindutva strategy with missionary zeal. It's this mammoth Hindutva machinery that is challenging the much smaller anti-BJP parties in the electoral battle in the states in 2022 end and 2023, and in the Lok Sabha in 2024. The party has a scientific feedback process to



take corrective measures. After the latest elections in Uttar Pradesh, the RSS conclave did not boast about the victory of the BJP, rather they identified their faultlines and decided to take corrective measures to reduce the strength of the rival Samajwadi Party in the next round of battle.

The opposition parties which want to fight BJP and are talking of uniting to combat the saffron challenge in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections have to face this massive strength of BJP and work out an understanding between them so that they fight jointly both in Parliament and outside. Right now, while the BJP led by PM Modi is working 24x7 to retain power in the states in the next round of elections, the Congress, the main challenger in most of the states, is in internal crisis. The United Progressive Alliance, the main front of the opposition parties since 2004, is inactive since last year. Sonia Gandhi is still the chairperson and no concrete action plan has been taken by the UPA in the last eight months. This is damaging the opposition plans for action against the BJP.

It is high time the UPA is revived. It will be in the best interests of the opposition if the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin is made the new chairman of UPA. NCP supremo Sharad Pawar has already declined to be the chairman and he has assured to

help any new UPA head. Stalin is best suited because his anti-BJP credential is impeccable and he has the capacity to bring both the Congress and the regional parties including Trinamool Congress under one umbrella. Stalin has a good equation with the CPI(M) and the CPI. This step of rejuvenating UPA is of crucial importance now. Sonia Gandhi will be free then to concentrate all her focus on the next round of assembly elections the outcome of which is important for the survival of the Congress as the credible political party of the opposition.

CPI(M) and the CPI have got a total of five seats in the present Lok Sabha — CPI(M) three and the CPI two. Out of these five, four are from Tamil Nadu where the victory was possible because of the alliance led by the DMK which includes Congress. That way, only one seat was won by the CPI(M) on the basis of its own strength. But in 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the prospects may be better for the Left. In fact, there is a possibility of getting many more seats from Kerala in next Lok Sabha poll. But the fact is the 2019 figure of five was the lowest in the history of the united Communist party since the first Lok Sabha elections were held in 1952. In 2004, Lok Sabha elections, the Left got 61 seats, out of which the CPI(M) got alone 44 and this was mainly due to elected MPs from West Bengal. With Bengal gone, only Kerala remains as the only state from which the Left can expect to get Lok Sabha seats on its own strength, in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The 23rd party congress of the CPI(M) is being held two years before the scheduled Lok Sabha elections in 2024. Preceding that, the elections to few more state assemblies are there. The delegates will have to scan the significance of that and frame a practical tactical line to be followed in the coming two years preceding the Lok Sabha elections in 2024. Right now, the task is to unite at the national level as many non-BJP parties as possible including both the Congress and Trinamool to challenge the BJP and remove Narendra Modi from power. That has to be the main focus for CPI(M) also at its party congress and nothing else. This is the time for the combined Left to act as a catalyst for the setting up of a broad-based front of democratic and secular forces to remove BJP from power in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. (IPA Service)

BASANTI PUJA- When the Goddess in Awakening (Jagroto)

By: Ranjan Jyoti Sarma

Durga (Sanskrit: दुर्गा) is a major deity in Hinduism. She is worshipped as a principal aspect of the mother goddess Devi and is one of the most popular and widely revered among Indian divinities. She is associated with protection, strength, motherhood, destruction and wars. Her legend centres around combating evils and demonic forces that threaten peace, prosperity, and Dharma the power of good over evil. Historians of religion and art tend to trace the earliest depiction of Durga - the primordial energy (Adya Sakti) integrated into the samsara (cycle of rebirths) concept and built on the foundation of the Vedic religion, mythology and philosophy evolved over time in the Indian subcontinent-to the seals of Indus Valley Civilization.

The puja of Devi Durga is celebrated two times of a calendar year - one in Shorot; Autumn and other in Boshonto; Spring, but the puja performed during the spring is said to be the original. The legend in Markanda Puran states that first puja of Devi Durga is said to be initiated and performed by Suratha.

Suratha was an emperor of ancient Vanga Kingdom. He was also a proverbial person of Hindu lore. His capital was in Bolipura, now Bolpur. He was an extremely democratic emperor of the ancient Vanga Kingdom. He was a devotee of Devi Durga. According to the Markandeya Purana he

preached the Devi Mahatmya (Sri Sri Chandi) in Marthya (earth) among the dweller of Marthya and also he was the first organizer of durga puja in Vanga (modern Bengal) and later this durga puja festival became popular in other parts of India.

King Surath lost his kingdom and all his property. Losing everything he left his capital Bolipur (currently Bolpur) to re-explore his fate. Later, he met with Vaishya Samadhi, who was a businessman. Coincidentally he also was bankrupt, as he was cheated with his family. Then, fortunately they met Sumedhas Muni. Sumedhas advised them to bring back their fate they must worship the Goddess Devi Durga.

King Surath and Boishyo (Vaisya) Samadhi worshipped Devi Durga as Durga Puja or Durgotsob at the ashram of Medhas Muni in the Garh Jungle of West Bengal. It was the first durga puja of world. In current days, the garh jungle is in Durgapur, Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal. They worshipped Devi durga in spring time. So, this festival is called Basanti puja or "Basanto kalin durgotsob". This started the ritual of performing Basanti Durga in Basant season or Chaitra Month. According to Sri Sri Chandi, they made this durga image clay in the Garh jungle. After puja Surath return back all his lost property and he came back to his capital Bolipur (now Bolpur). Surath enroated durga puja in his capital Bolpur in spring. During this puja, he sacri-

fices lakhs of animal. From this Bengali term "boli" (animal sacrifice), this place called as "Bolipur" (currently Bolpur).

The Durga Puja performed during Shorot; Autumn is said to be performed by Ajodhya King RAM with a aim to kill the powerful Lankan King Ravana. As it is not the proper time of worship of Goddess Durga, so it is known as Akalbodhan ("untimely awakening of Durga"). The Durga Puja performed during Boshonto; Spring is the real in the sense that in this time Devi is said to be in awakening state. The cusp of the ending of the eighth day and beginning of the ninth day is considered to be the moment when per scriptures Durga engaged in a fierce battle against Mahishasura and was attacked by the demons Chanda and Munda. Goddess Chamunda emerged from the third eye of Durga and killed Chanda and Munda at the cusp of Ashtami and Navami, the eighth and ninth days respectively. This moment is marked by the sandhi puja, involving the offering of 108 lotuses and lighting if 108 lamps. It is a forty-eight minutes long ritual commemorating the climax of battle. The rituals are performed in the last 24 minutes of Ashtami and the first 24 minutes of Navami. Ashokastami or Ashtami is one of the major occasions of this festival.

Assam, the gateway of the North-Eastern States, is known as a place of Sakti worship. Basanti Puja is observed in most of the places of Assam. Guwahati City of Assam is no exception. In Guwahati; one of the prominent Basanti puja is being organized by Sarbajanini Sri Sri Basanti Puja Utsah Uddjapan Samiti since the year 1987 starting on Chaitra Shukla Saptami and ends on Chaitra Shukla Navami i.e. Ram Navami or Dashami. The Samiti, presently under the able leadership of Secretary, Sri Nabin Chandra Sarma, performed puja with strict sakti rituals with a group of priests. The puja draws crowds of almost 600 devotees per day at minimum. It is in common belief that every wish of devotee is fulfilled on praying in this Basanti puja. This year the Basanti Puja will be observed from 7th April.

Chhath Puja: Inextricable part of Indian culture

By: Er. Prabhat Kishore

Chhath Puja is the festival of adoration of Adishakti Sun. The early hymns of the Vedic texts are the hymns of worship of these powers. Ancient Magadh region has been a stronghold of Brahmanism and hypocrisy. The entire region has been marked as the site of resistance to social rigidities and discrimination in Vedic religion and thus originated the natural festival of Surya Puja with name Shashti (Chhath) Vrat. Some "Maga" priests (from whose name the word Magadh is derived) from Aryan (present-day Iran) were called on to assist.

Whenever there were restrictions for women and the marginalized sections of the society, the people developed new methods of worship without detaching themselves from original roots. Against the declaration of the sanctity of the Ganges and other Holy rivers by the Pundits, they even chose beaches, ponds, puddles, other sources of water logging built by their own labour. They built Surya Mandirs at several places on the banks of rivers, which are ample testament of artistic glory.

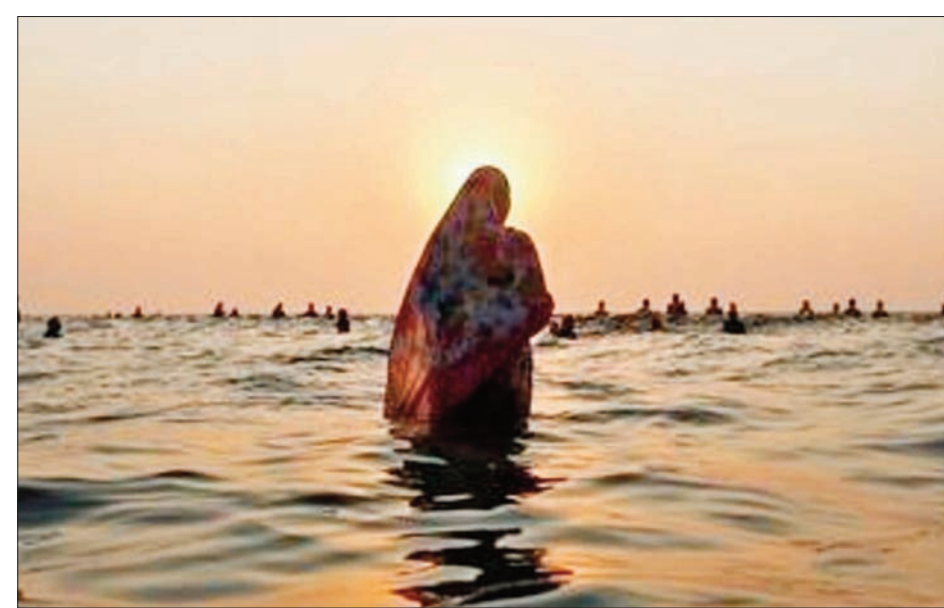
Chhath Pujais the only festival among all Hindu worships that does not require a third person (i.e. the priest) between Bhakt and Bhagwan. It is not a festival of idol worship, but adoration of the almighty natural God "Surya", whom everyone sees and who is the survivor of life. With the migration of people, Chhath Vrat also reached other parts of Magadh and became an integral part of the Indian culture. Later it crossed the boundaries of the states and attained world-wide identity.

Along with water, woman (Parvati) and Sun, purity has a special significance in Chhath Vrat. All Vedic texts, provide for the worship of the rising Bhuvan-Bhaskar, but the Chhath ritual is the only worship in which the first Ardhya is given to the setting Sun, while the second Ardhya is offered to the rising Sun. This is a classic example of the capability of the Sun setting in the world.

Chhath Puja is a celebration of solidarity and purely folk faith. The Ardhya ends with folk songs and locally grown fruits, flowers and roots in the fields. Common fruits and flowers such as radish, tubers, succulents, sugarcane, turmeric, ginger, coconut, banana etc., on which our life survives, are the materials of worship. No Vedic Mantra, Havan or any other ritual is required. It is celebrated with complete simplicity, cleanliness and participation. All parvatis are equal and there is no restriction of Varna (castes) on the banks of rivers, ponds, puddles. No one asks anyone's class from those who give Ardhya. The folk songs of Chhath festival underscore the importance of environment, biological balance and identity of women in the family.

Humanization of Surya

Ved, Puran, Upanishad, Mahabharat and other religious scriptures describe glory of the Sun. There is a tradition in Indian culture to offer water to the Sun every day. On the occasion of Chhath Puja the setting Sun on the evening of Karthik



Shukla Paksha Shashti and the redness of the rising Sun on the morning of Saptami bring different colors to crores of fasting women and men. The Sun is special and lakhs of people standing in the water bodies with Ardhya in their hands wake up cheering the Sun on seeing its redness.

In this festival, women put her feelings to the Sun: "Anna, Dhan, Lakshmi, He Dinanath, Ahai Ke Del; Ek Putra He Dinanath Sagar Andhar", (i.e., Food, wealth, prosperity all have been provided by you. If there is any shortage that is a child). In other festivals, where there is male dominance; in Chhath Puja, women even pray for daughters as Runki-Jhunki, which is characterized in the folk song "Runki Jhunki Beti Mangila, Padhal Panditawa Damad; Ye Chhati Maiya, Darshan Dihin Na Apan".

In the songs sung on Chhath Vrat, is his sister. Surya's son and the mother and Moon is his himself. Surya's mother and the sister Moon wake him up - "Utho Babua Bhel Bhinsar, Ardh Kera Ber Bhel". Even the sun is not less naughty, after getting the opportunity, He also pinches the woman: - "Deve Ke Deliau Ge Abla, Garva Jani Bol, Garva Se Bolve Ge Abla, Uho Lebau Chhin". These Magahi folk songs have a deep meaning. People have been explained about life and the world in a subtle way. Everything is from the sun. He is the one who gives and takes away life. Fruits, flowers, intact and all other things, which are dedicated to the Sun, are given by him. Worshiping the Almighty Sun brings kindness, sympathy and affection to the masses as well.

Kosi Bharai

If a person has made vow or wish and it is fulfilled, then some families perform extra ritual of "Kosi Bharai" during the Chhath festival. In this, the role of sugarcane, which is called Kosi or Kusiya in the western region, is considered important. Five sugarcane with leaves are erected in the form of a mandap. The five canes represent "Panch Tatwa" (i.e. Bhumhi, Vayu, Jal, Agni and

Aakash). Either elephant or Jhilmiliya (a type of Tub), made of clay is placed inside it, over which the Kalash is kept. Dhapani (lid). Diyas are placed around it and gram, Arva rice, Thekua, rice laddoos etc. are tied in the sugarcane.

All this is decorated in the courtyard after returning from Sandhya Ardhya. Women sing the song of Kosi and Sindoor is applied to the married women. Devotees do Jagran throughout the night. In the morning, all the items are decorated in the same way at the Ghat. After this, except the cane and Prasad, the remaining items are immersed.

The glory of Chhath is immeasurable. It is believed that observing Chhath Vrat not only liberates from diseases, but also increases wealth and prosperity. Seeing the importance of Chhath, peoples of other faiths apart from Hindus have also started worshipping the natural God Surya.

The festival of folk faith has been governed by the Chhath tradition and its strict legislation. But now the market, which specializes in taking advantage of all the opportunities, has diluted this festival as well. With the changing times, the market has also started merchandising the people's faith, belief, sensibility and joy. Now sporadically, an idol of Sun is being installed and superstitions, Pandas, Priests are being used as tools, although it is not needed in this festival. There is a competition to spoil the taste by parodying and fusion of Chhath songs settled in female vocals. The flood of cassettes coming every year in the name of Chhath festival has expanded a huge market of profits. Branded companies are attracting customers with their products. The politicization of Chhath Vrat has started in some parts of the country, especially in Mumbai and Delhi and vote bank is being created by this. The good wishes of the world, state, society and family for which women worship the Sun; their own faces have started to wither due to rising inflation. (The author is a technocrat & academician)





By: Snigdendu Bhattacharya

Dams to generate hydropower, considered a clean energy source by many, were expected to usher development in Manipur but they have caused more damage than gains, alleges the residents of villages around operational, incomplete, and failed dams.

Due to such projects, villages upstream of barrages have lost farmlands and forest resources, while those downstream have faced water crisis, economic stress and increased hardships.

The state's ecologically significant Loktak lake and the people living around it for centuries have undergone significant changes impacting local ecology and livelihood.

"Ngamu, pengba, ngaton or khakab, ngakra..." Tongbram Ahongjao names fish varieties that have gone missing from his environment over the past 40 years. A sexagenarian resident of Thanga, an island village inside Loktak, the largest freshwater lake of northeastern India located in Manipur state, he has seen the lake area change.

Loktak multipurpose project: Manipur's main source of power

"Moirang phou, kakching phou, chimlei, tao thabi..." he continues, speaking of rice varieties that disappeared from the lowlands around the lake. To be fair, the lowlands disappeared in the first place.

At some mythological time, Poubi Lai, the giant, dragon-headed python, which lived under the waters of the Loktak lake, ate one man every night, until King Kabui Salang Maiba killed it with a trick, goes the legend. For centuries, Poubi Lai symbolised disaster at the community level for the Loktak people.

Then, four decades ago, in 1983, disaster came in the shape of a hydropower project, say the local people — the Ithai barrage on Manipur (or Imphal) river that uses Loktak as the reservoir.

As of March 2022, the Loktak multipurpose project is Manipur's only functional hydropower project, with an installed capacity of 105 megawatts (MW) of electricity, and is Manipur's main source of power.

Declared a Ramsar site, or wetland of global importance in 1990, it was listed in the Montreux Record as early as 1993, signifying "Ramsar sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur."

Three decades since then, there is no dearth of stories that reflect the dirty side of clean energy.

Dam's negative impacts

"Tao thabi (a rice variety), in particular, was a great source of energy... it'd been a favourite with local sportspersons... And don't forget the heikak (water chestnut), a cheap source of nutrition and also income, once found in abundance, growing increasingly rarer," Ahongjao told Mongabay-India.

Among the fishes he named, ngamu is channa/snakehead, pengba is Osteobrama belangeri, ngaton or khakab is Labeo bata and ngakra is catfish, going by their other names.

At a young age, Ahongjao fished in the lake during monsoon and farmed on the lowlands during winter, just like most other people living in and around the Loktak wetlands.

But the dam has impacted all local sources of nutrition and income — fish, rice and edible plants.

"Fish varieties dwindled because the Ithai barrage blocked the path of the migratory fishes that used to swim upstream from Bay of Bengal through Chindwin river (in Myanmar) to spawn in Manipur river and Loktak lake," environmentalist Salam Rajesh, a member of the technical committee of Manipur State Wetlands Authority, told Mongabay-India. "It took a big economic toll on the fishing community of the Loktak wetlands."

Loktak lake: Source of livelihood for about 10,000 people

Sprawling over 230 square kilometres, Loktak is large; it has a direct catchment area of 1,064 sq km and serves as a source of livelihood for about 100,000 people living in and around the wetlands.

But size is not its claim to fame: it's the phumdis, the floating islands of biomass that make Loktak a unique landscape. Described as 'thick, floating mats of weeds covered with soil' in the Ramsar listing, the phumdis usually have about 2 metres floating above water level and 3 metres below. They used to sink during winter to extract nutrients from the base of the lake. But that cycle has stopped. The water level never goes down.

The phumdis are also the only natural habitat of the endangered Sangai, the brow-antlered or dancing deer which dwell on a 22 sq km stretch of phumdis inside the 40 sq km Keibul Lamjao National Park, the world's only floating protected area, is part of the Loktak landscape.

Before the barrage came up, the water level at

Manipur's push for dams threatens local ecology and communities

the lake used to go down in winter, receding from hectares of lowlands, making them available for growing rice. But the barrage requires maintenance of a particular water level throughout the year. The lowlands never come out of water.

"Heikaks (water chestnuts) used to grow mostly in winter when the lake was less deep. Sunlight reached the bottom of the lake and helped the heikak germinate. Now, as the water level is always high, heikaks do not grow that much," Budha Khwairakpam, a resident of Ithai village on the edge of the lake, explained to Mongabay-India.

The National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), which built and operates the project, claimed that apart from generating 105 MW of hydropower, the surrounding area "has also been benefited by development of infrastructure, education, medical facilities and employment avenues" and that the power station also provides lift irrigation for over 23,000 hectares of land in the valley.

Notwithstanding their claims, the demand for decommissioning the Ithai barrage has continued to grow. In 2017, the then Manipur governor Najma Heptulla had said at a programme that she was "working very hard for the removal of Ithai barrage" due to its adverse economic and ecological impact.

In fact, flood has become a regular phenomenon both in the villages upstream and downstream of the Ithai barrage.

Chairen, a village about 11 km downstream of the barrage, bore the brunt. "Chairen has been famous for its pottery. But sediments deposited by successive floods due to the barrage have covered the village's original soil under layers. The new soil is unfit for their craft," Jiten Yumnam, secretary of the Imphal-based non-profit Center for Research and Advocacy, Manipur (CRAM), told Mongabay-India.

A renewed thrust on hydropower projects

In March 2019, the government of India decided to declare large hydropower projects as renewable energy sources. Until then, only hydropower projects of lower than 25 MW of installed capacity were categorised as renewable energy, apart from solar, wind and biomass projects. The decision opened the door for a prospective boom in building large dams across the country, with the Himalayan region in northern India and the hilly terrain of the northeast being the prime target zones.

According to a Central Electricity Authority report, a total hydropower capacity of 148,701 MW has been identified across the country, of which 58,971 MW (39.65 percent) were in northeastern India. This excluded Sikkim (4,286 MW), which was clubbed under the eastern region. The report said, of the total identified capacity in the northeast, only 1,427 MW of installed capacity had been developed, leaving 93 percent yet to be exploited.

The lion's share of identified capacity in the northeast goes to Arunachal Pradesh, 50,328mw or 85 percent of the northeast's total potential, followed by Meghalaya (2,394 MW), Mizoram (2,196 MW) and Manipur (1,784 MW). Manipur

had 94.04 percent of its identified capacity yet to be tapped, the report says.

In 2020, following the Union government's drive, and perhaps backed by the confidence of five years of relative peace in this insurgency-affected state, the Manipur state government decided to push for hydropower projects. It said it estimated the state's hydropower potential at more than 2,000 MW and identified 29 new projects with a total proposed installed capacity of 300 MW.

These include projects with a capacity as low as 0.44 MW and 0.78 MW to 49.5 MW. Five of them are above 25 MW of proposed/tentative installed capacity, meaning large dams — Barak 4 HE Project (49.5 MW), Irang 3 HE Project (46.50 MW), Ijai HE Project (28.70 MW), Imphal HE Project (28.3 MW) and Barak 3 HE Project (26 MW). The state planned to get the detailed project reports for these 29 projects to be formulated by 2022.

Work on another big-ticket project, the Loktak Downstream Hydroelectric Project (66 MW) on 211.5 acres of land on Leimatak river in Tamenglong district, is also finally set to start after a long delay of over two decades. In 2020, when the Manipur government signed the power purchase agreement, its project cost was pegged at Rs 1,311.05 crore (Rs 13.11 billion). Land acquisition is expected to start anytime soon.

"Ithai barrage, instead of irrigating 50,000 hectares as promised, actually flooded a similar size of land. The Loktak downstream project is going to see a similar outcome," said Yumnam of CRAM.

But for environmentalists in Manipur, the state's experience with Loktak is not the only reason to trigger anxiety when they hear of more dams, especially large dams. There are other dams, failed or incomplete dams, which never took off but added huge costs to the state exchequer and misery to the people living around the project area.

Manipur's Power Minister Thongam Biswajit Singh, who also holds the portfolio for environment, forest, and climate change, did not respond to Mongabay-India's queries.

Old wounds spark fear

Khuopam dam was constructed in 1978 as the first dam in northeast India, on Machengdui river in Tamenglong district. Its irrigation canals collapsed over a decade ago, causing loss of farmland and income from fishing. Another dam, the Khuga dam in Churachandpur district took decades to complete and has been defunct since its inauguration in 2010, though it impacted fishing, farming and keeps flooding downstream villages regularly. It has neither produced any electricity nor generated revenue. The more recent Dolathabi dam has also run into rough weather soon after its hurried inauguration.

Ram Wangkheirakpam, convenor of the Imphal-based non-profit, Indigenous Perspectives, said that whether big dams can be called sources of clean energy has been questioned worldwide because of their wide-ranging adverse impacts and Manipur stands as an example.

"Take the case of the Mapithel dam on

Thoubal river. It took the state government decades but they have not completed it yet. This supposedly multipurpose dam has not supplied water for drinking and irrigation and has not generated any electricity," he told Mongabay-India.

Alleging that the government had not properly rehabilitated any village, he said, "Affected people have been left high and dry by just giving them some cash compensation."

The multipurpose project on river Thoubal was sanctioned in 1980 for an estimated cost of Rs 47.25 crore (Rs 472.5 million). People in some of the villages were displaced in the 1990s, while some others had to leave in 2015 after the villages submerged following the shutting down of the watergates. In 2012, the project cost of this Centre-state joint venture was re-estimated at Rs 1,387 crore (Rs 13.87 billion) at the price of 2011 and in 2016 re-estimated as Rs 1,694 crore (Rs. 16.94 billion).

The state authorities had informed the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in February 2016 that "Rs 1,202.391 (Rs 12.02 billion) crore approximately has already been spent till February 2014." It was formally inaugurated in 2020.

This inordinate delay, to some extent, has been due to protests.

Among the upstream villages, Loupong, Maphou Kuki, and Chadong are totally submerged, while Lamlai Khunou, Ramrei, Riha, Thoyee, and Sarkarpurong have been badly affected. Tumukhong, Moirangpurel, Laikhong, and Nungbrang are among the downstream villages affected by the Mapithel dam.

"We have got only 60 percent of the promised compensation. They haven't given us the church, land and other livelihood options they promised," said P Mahangmi, headman of Lamlai Khunou, dominated by the Tangkhul Naga, a Scheduled Tribe.

At the neighbouring Ramrei village, Themson Jajo produced a February 2022 reply from the Manipur water resources department to questions filed under the Right to Information (RT) Act, 2005. The total fund utilised stood at Rs 997.77 crore (Rs. 9.97 billion), of which Rs 550 crore (Rs. 5.5 billion) was paid to two construction companies. Rs 22.71 crore (Rs. 227.1 million) was paid as compensation for land and Rs 39.54 crore (Rs. 395.4 million) was deposited to district authorities for disbursements as an economic package.

"Farmlands on the upstream are submerged and downstream they are dry, running short of water for farming, fishing and animals. Then, there are floods," Chadong resident Dominic Kashung told Mongabay-India.

Chadong disintegrated into four separate habitations — Chadong Maphou, Chadong Original, Chadong West, and Chadong New Site — separated either by the lake or the hills. At Ramrei, which originally stood on the bank of the Thoubal river, four-fifths of land and forest resources are now on the other side of the river.

"Getting access to resources means taking the boat, crossing the river..." Jajo said, as weary creases formed on his forehead. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Clean energy transition must be fast and fair: Climate scientists

By: Laurie Goering

As climate-heating fossil fuel emissions continue to rise, renewed efforts to slash them must be fair and take into account countries' other key priorities — such as development in poorer nations — or they will likely fail, scientists warned on Monday. Emissions will have to be cut swiftly and deeply across economies to limit global warming to internationally agreed temperature limits, they said in a new flagship science report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

But "if you do that at the expense of justice, of poverty eradication and the inclusion of people, then you're back at the starting block", said Fatima Denton, one of its 278 authors.

The report's release was delayed by six hours, after governments tasked with approving a key policy summary wrangled over equity, finance and other thorny issues, including how big a role "nature-based solutions" like tree-planting should play in cutting emissions.

The report did not call for the full abandonment of fossil fuels but emphasised that the technology needed to shift to clean energy is largely available and getting ever cheaper.

However, the finance required to deploy it on a large enough scale is still lacking, it added, particularly in poor nations.

Far more than in its previous reports, the IPCC highlighted inequalities in who produces the emissions driving climate change, pointing the finger at the world's richest as having "the highest potential for emissions reductions".

The Russia-Ukraine war, like the COVID-19 pandemic, shows how rapidly countries can make dramatic economic changes to deal with an emergency — something most are not yet doing to lower increasingly clear risks from climate change, said Denton.

"Sometimes it's just about political will — what we're willing to do," said the director of the U.N. University Institute for Natural Resources in Africa. She questioned the current rush by many wealthy nations to temporarily re-open closed gas and coal facilities to cope with energy shortages brought on by the Ukraine conflict, even as fossil fuel-rich poor countries are exhorted to adopt clean energy.

Socially acceptable

The new IPCC report, focused on ways to cut planet-heating emissions that increasingly endanger lives through impacts from wildfires to floods and droughts, explores social barriers and accelerators of climate action in more depth than past reports.

It warns that the unequal social and economic



consequences of emissions-cutting efforts, from affordability to where green jobs are created, can "affect social cohesion and the acceptability of mitigation".

But making sure that a broad range of people — including youth, workers and indigenous groups — are involved in decision-making about a low-carbon transition "can build social trust and deepen and widen support for transformative changes", it noted.

Joyashree Roy, coordinating lead author of a new chapter on the social aspects of mitigation, said efforts to cut emissions needed to pay attention to often overlooked realities, from cultural norms to the human desire for social status. Policies that ignore the situation on the ground, which varies widely between countries, are unlikely to work, the Indian economist said during an online event. The report noted emissions-cutting options "that align with prevalent ideas, values and beliefs are more easily adopted and implemented". Policies to reduce emissions should not be pursued separately from sustainable development efforts, as is too often the case now, Ghana-based Denton told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

For instance, as many countries grow more crops for biofuel in a bid to hold down emissions, they can undercut agriculture, harming food security, or displace people from their traditional land and rob them of an income, she said. Denton said many oil-rich poorer countries, including in Africa, still want to develop using the fossil fuels they have and cut emissions later, as richer nations are doing, because they lack the means to grow only with clean energy.

"It's doing it all at once that feels a little too stringent," she said.

Political pressure

Rachel Kyte, dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts University in the United States, said many people around the world want to make low-carbon shifts in their lives but need help doing it.

"If you deal with the upfront cost of moving from a gas boiler to a heat pump and make it

easy to do ... people will do it," she said during an online event.

Michael Grubb, a professor of energy and climate change at University College London and an author of the IPCC report, said cutting emissions had costs but also significant potential to improve lives, something that needed more political emphasis.

The price of zero-carbon electricity, for example, is half to a third of what most people now pay for their power, he noted.

"If that's not an opportunity... in terms of political narrative, I don't know what is," he added, especially as the Ukraine crisis sends gas bills soaring.

"This low-carbon stuff could actually be rather nice," he added, from cleaner cities to quieter cars and cheaper energy.

The reason such changes are not happening faster, he and others said, is not due to a lack of technology or even finance but rather political resistance or social roadblocks.

"A lot of things economists say would make sense haven't happened because of policy and politics," Grubb told an online event.

Robert Brulle, an environmental sociologist at Brown University in the United States, said early drafts of Monday's report had referenced threats to climate action from things like political donations, lobbying and deliberate misinformation.

But those references did not make it into the final version or the summary for policymakers, the most public-facing part of the document, which he called "an enormous disappointment". "If you read it, you wouldn't know there is a large-scale organised effort to stop action on climate change. You wouldn't know anything about climate misinformation or greenwashing," he said in an interview.

That is a serious problem if the report aims to spur emissions cuts, because "the political and cultural barriers to climate action are one of the major reasons we aren't doing it", he added. Denton said one answer lies with social movements pushing for a stepped-up response, such as the Fridays for Future student strikes launched by Sweden's Greta Thunberg, which are likely to play a growing role in pressuring governments.

Protesters on the streets could swell as climate disasters hit more people and they start to wonder if governments are doing enough to protect them, Denton predicted.

"What we're seeing with Greta... is going to continue until the problem is solved or people have faith in where we're headed," she added. (Courtesy: The Wire)

By: Prabhat Misra

"The world needs to get water-smart. Everyone has a role to play, and we cannot afford to wait."

— UNICEF.

World Water Day raises awareness about the 2.2 billion people who are living without access to safe water. It is about taking action to tackle the global water crisis. The focus of World Water Day 2022 is groundwater, an invisible resource with an impact visible everywhere. The idea for this international day goes back to 1992 when a United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro took place and the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution by which 22 March of each year was declared World Day for Water.

First World Water Day was observed in 1993. The core focus of World Water Day is to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6: water and sanitation for all, by 2030.

The significance of groundwater

Groundwater is water found underground in aquifers which are geological formations of rocks, sands and gravels that hold substantial quantities of water. It feeds springs, rivers, lakes and wetlands and seeps into oceans.

Life would not be possible without groundwater. Most arid areas of the world depend entirely on groundwater. Groundwater accounts for 99% of all liquid fresh water on Earth. Covered by active soil and sediment layers, groundwater is better protected than surface water from the negative impacts of human activities.

Abstraction of groundwater significantly exceeds the natural renewal rate.

It is recharged mainly from rain and snowfall infiltrating the ground. It supplies a large proportion of the water we use for drinking, sanitation, agriculture, food production and industrial



processes. It is critically important to the healthy functioning of ecosystems, such as wetlands and rivers.

In many places, groundwater feeds springs that are of high spiritual importance, such as the sacred spring in the Grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes, France; the Chalice Well at Glastonbury, UK; sacred hot springs in Hierapolis, Turkey; the Ban Ban Springs, an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage site in Queensland; and similar sites in Australia.

Moreover, groundwater resources are facing quantitative problems. Abstraction of groundwater from many large aquifers worldwide significantly exceeds the natural renewal rate, as recently estimated by the groundwater footprint approach. This deficit poses a threat to the health of aquifers and groundwater-dependent ecosystems (GDEs), such as rivers and wetlands.

The largest-ever assessment of global groundwater wells by the University of California found that up to one in five wells were at the risk of running dry. Millions of wells around the world could run dry due to declines in groundwater levels; it will have cascading implications for livelihoods and access to reliable and convenient water for individuals and ecosystems. Asia and the Pacific region has the lowest per capita water availability in the world, with groundwater use in the region predicted to increase 30% by 2050.

Growing industrialisation, waste deposition, use of pesticides and

weedicides in agriculture, use of synthetic chemicals and pollutants released via sewage contaminate groundwater resources. Around 74% of natural disasters between 2001 and 2018 were water-related, including droughts and floods, and climate change-related.

In North America and Europe, nitrates and pesticides represent a big threat to groundwater quality: 20% of European Union (EU) groundwater bodies exceeds EU standards on good water quality due to agricultural pollution.

According to the latest edition of the United Nations World Water Development Report, when disasters hit, they destroy or contaminate entire water supplies and increase the risk of diseases like cholera and typhoid, to which children are particularly vulnerable.

Every day, over 700 children under 5 die from diarrhoea linked to inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene. By 2040, almost 1 in 4 children will live in areas of extremely high water stress.

The frequency and intensity of such events are only expected to increase with climate change. Climate change is disrupting weather patterns, leading to extreme weather events, unpredictable water availability, exacerbating water scarcity and contaminating water supplies.

Globally, water use is projected to grow by roughly 1% per year over the next 30 years. Our overall dependence on groundwater is expected to rise as surface water availability becomes increasingly limited due to climate change.

Groundwater — which exists almost everywhere underground, in gaps within soil, sand and rock — has the potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives and be the world's insurance policy against climate change. But groundwater will only be able to lessen the impacts of climate change if it is carefully managed and if we invest in mechanisms to ensure that it gets to the people who need it most. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

National Assembly Dy Speaker Suri ruled that the no-confidence motion was linked with a 'foreign conspiracy' to topple the govt and hence was not maintainable

Pak's apex court seeks minutes of NSC meeting; adjourns hearing till Thursday on no-trust motion

ISLAMABAD, April 6 (PTI): Pakistan's Supreme Court on Wednesday sought minutes of the National Security Council meeting from the government as it adjourned till Thursday the hearing of the crucial case about rejection of the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan through a controversial ruling by the deputy speaker of the National Assembly.

National Assembly Deputy Speaker Qasim Khan Suri on Sunday ruled that the no-confidence motion was linked with a "foreign conspiracy" to topple the government and hence was not maintainable. Minutes later, President Arif Alvi dissolved the National Assembly on advice of Prime Minister Khan.

The apex court within hours took suo motu notice of it and a five-member bench started hearing the case on Monday. The bench is headed by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial and includes Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Munib Akhtar and Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail.

During the third day of the hearing on Wednesday, Babar Awan appeared for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and Ali



Zafar represented President Alvi.

Chief Justice Bandial asked Awan about the minutes of the recent meeting of the National Security Council which had discussed a letter purportedly showing evidence of a foreign conspiracy to oust the PTI-led government.

During the hearing, Justice Bandial questioned the basis on which the speaker issued

the ruling, Dawn newspaper reported.

"Can the speaker announce such a ruling without presenting the facts," he asked, adding that this was the constitutional point on which the court had to make a decision.

He also asked Awan to inform the court whether the speaker could issue a ruling that was not on the day's agenda by bypassing Article 95. He told the PTI counsel to defend

the ruling with "solid" evidence.

"Where are the minutes of the NSC meeting?" he asked Awan, also asking the PTI counsel about the basis on Suri exercised his authority. After Awan, Zafar began his arguments, insisting that any direction from the court on the matter of the deputy speaker's ruling would exceed its jurisdiction.

Pakistan Peoples Party lawyer Raza Rabani and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz counsel Makhdoom Ali Khan have already completed arguments.

However, Naeem Bokhari, counsel of deputy speaker Qasim Suri, and Attorney General Khaled Javed Khan, representing the government, are among the lawyers who have not yet presented their views on the case.

During the hearing on Wednesday, the chief justice repeatedly reminded the lawyers to conclude their arguments at the earliest to let the bench issue an order.

However, since the process was not completed, the court adjourned the case till Thursday while announcing to resume the hearing at 9:30am (local time). A short order may be issued at the conclusion of the arguments.

Macron leads polls but turnout a big question in French vote

PARIS, April 6 (AP): President Emmanuel Macron is the clear favourite in France's presidential race on Sunday yet a big unknown factor may prove decisive: an unprecedented proportion of people say they are unsure who to vote for or don't intend to vote at all, bringing a large dose of uncertainty to the election. The pro-European centrist is still comfortably leading in the polls. His main challenger, far-right leader Marine Le Pen, appears on the rise in recent days. Both are in good position to reach the presidential runoff on April 24, which would make them replay the 2017 election that Macron won handily.

There's "no certainty," Macron warned during his first big rally on Saturday near Paris.

"Don't believe in polls or commentators who would sound definitive and tell you that ... the election is already done, that everything is going to be all right," he told his supporters. "From Brexit to so many elections, what seems unlikely can happen!" Scenarios for the this year's second round vote show that Le Pen has significantly narrowed the gap with Macron compared to 2017 — when she lost with 34 per cent support to his 66 per cent. Polls still place her behind Macron, but much closer, apparently showing the wisdom of her



longstanding strategy to soften her rhetoric and image — allowing her to capture the anti-Macron vote as well as far-right support.

In recent days, Macron's campaign has also hit a speed bump dubbed "the McKinsey Affair," named after an American consulting company hired to advise the French government on its COVID-19 vaccination campaign and other policies. A new French Senate report questions the government's use of private consultants and accuses McKinsey of tax dodging. The issue is energizing Macron's rivals and dogging him at campaign stops.

Many in Macron's camp fear that his supporters may not go to polling stations because they already think he will win, while those angry at his policies will make sure to vote.

"Of course I have concerns," said Julien Descamps, a 28-year-old member of Macron's party, stressing that some people in his entourage "don't know what to do."

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa will not resign under any circumstances: Lanka Govt

COLOMBO, April 6 (PTI): Sri Lankan Government on Wednesday said that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa will not resign under any circumstances and will face the current issues, as it defended the embattled leader's decision to enforce a state of emergency, which he later revoked after huge public protests demanded his resignation over the country's worst economic crisis.

Speaking in Parliament, Chief Government Whip Minister Johnstone Fernando said the government will face this problem and there is no reason for the President to resign as he was elected to office. Claiming that the Opposition Janatha Vimukthi Peramunawas (JVP) party was behind the violence in the country, Fernando said that this "thug politics" should not be allowed and called on the people to end the violence. He said that the government will continue to work to address the issues faced by the public at present, the Colombo Page portal reported.

The Government also defended the President's decision to enforce a state of emergency, that had given him sweeping authority to act in the interests of public security and preserving public order, including suspending any laws, authorising detentions and seizing property, say-



ing it was declared after attempts were made to attack the President's Office and other public property.

Rajapaksa had declared the emergency last week after protesters demonstrated near his home in Colombo. The protests initially began over shortages of essentials such as cooking gas, petrol, electricity and milk powder, but now have spread across the island nation and the demonstrators are demanding the resignation of Rajapaksa and his government. The President late Tuesday night revoked the emergency after huge public protests demanded his resignation. The president and his older brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, continue to hold power in Sri Lanka, despite their politically powerful family being the focus of public ire.

On Tuesday, a verbal clash took place in Parliament between ruling

party and Opposition members when they held a debate over the current crisis in Sri Lanka. Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena was forced to suspend sittings twice as a result of a heated situation which arose in Parliament. The main Opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) also held placards in Parliament during the debate. The Opposition questioned the state of emergency enforced and later lifted by the President and also insisted that the President steps down.

Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Office on Tuesday said it is closely following developments in Sri Lanka and urged the authorities to engage in a meaningful dialogue with political parties and civil society to find a solution to the deepening economic crisis, the Colombo Page reported.

President Rajapaksa is still struggling to appoint a Cabinet as none of the political parties responded positively to his offer to form a unity government to tackle the crisis. He appointed just four ministers and one of them, the new finance minister, resigned after less than 24 hours in the job. The Ministry of Finance is without a minister and its top bureaucrat with the resignation of the incumbent S R Attiyagalle.

JERUSALEM, April 6 (AP): An Israeli lawmaker quit the government's wafer-thin ruling coalition over a dispute about Passover matzo rules in hospitals on Wednesday, throwing the fragile alliance into disarray without a majority in parliament.

Backbencher Idit Silman's departure raises the possibility of new parliamentary elections less than a year after the government took office. While Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's government remains in power, it is now hamstrung in the 120-seat parliament and will likely struggle to function. Silman, who served as coalition whip from Bennett's religious-nationalist Yamina party, had opposed allowing people to bring leavened bread and other foodstuffs into public hospitals — products prohibited according to religious tradition during the Passover holiday, public broadcaster Kan reported. For some devout Jews, the mere presence of such foods in the hospital is not kosher, but the country's Supreme Court ruled in 2021 that hospitals could not bar people from doing so.

Bennett's coalition of eight political parties ranging from Islamists to



hard-line nationalists and dovish liberals — all united solely in their opposition to former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu — now holds 60 seats in the Knesset, Israel's parliament.

But some members of Bennett's party have been uncomfortable with the Yamina's union with Islamist and liberal parties since the government's inception in June. One party member broke ranks rather than be part of it.

Earlier in the week Silman feuded with Health Minister Nitzan

Horowitz, head of the dovish and secular Meretz Party, over his determination that hospitals uphold the law and not bar people from bringing bread in during Passover.

Silman said in a letter to the prime minister on Wednesday that "key values in my worldview are inconsistent with current reality" and that she could no longer stand to see those unspecified values harmed as a member of the coalition. She urged the prime minister "to acknowledge the truth: we tried. The time has come to think of a new

course. To try to form a nationalist, Jewish, Zionist government". The Knesset is currently in recess, and it remains unclear if the opposition will now have enough support to hold a no-confidence vote and send Israelis to the polls for the fifth time in just over three years.

Black boxes from China Eastern crash sent to US for analysis



BEIJING, April 6 (AP): Both black boxes from a passenger plane crash in southern China last month that killed 132 people are being analyzed by U.S. experts at a government lab in Washington, D.C.

The National Transportation Safety Board said Tuesday it is helping its Chinese counterparts download information from the flight data recorder.

The American agency said last week it was doing the same for the cockpit voice recorder. Both may have been damaged by the impact of the crash.

If the information on them can be recovered, it could shed light on why the China Eastern Boeing 737-800 went into a sudden nosedive and slammed into the ground in a mountainous area on March 21.

The crash left a 20-metre-(65-foot)-deep crater in a mountain-

side, shattered the plane and set off a fire in the surrounding forest. More than 49,000 pieces of plane debris were found.

It took two days to find the cockpit voice recorder and six days for the flight data recorder, which was buried 1.5 meters (5 feet) underground. U.S. accident investigators arrived in China last weekend to assist the investigation by the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

The NTSB team is taking part because the plane was manufactured in the United States. Chinese officials have said a preliminary investigation report would be completed within 30 days of the crash. Flight MU5735 with 123 passengers and nine crew members was headed from the city of Kunming in southwestern China to Guangzhou, a provincial capital and export manufacturing hub near Hong Kong in the southeast.

Blast in Kabul mosque, 6 injured

KABUL, April 6 (IANS): At least six people were injured in a hand grenade explosion inside a mosque in Kabul on Wednesday, sources said.

"A man hurled a hand grenade inside Pul-e Khishti Mosque at midday. As a result, six people were wounded," Xinhua news agency reported citing the Afghan Interior Ministry's tweet.

The wounded were shifted to

hospitals and a suspected man has been arrested, according to the ministry. The official report spelled no further details.

"The blast occurred shortly after the people offered prayers at midday. The Taliban security forces have cordoned off the area for precautionary measures," eyewitness Najib Ullah told Xinhua.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

Political crisis in Pak won't affect cooperation, CPEC projects: China

BEIJING, April 6 (PTI): Asserting that its ties with Pakistan are "unbreakable and rock solid", China on Wednesday said the raging political crisis in Islamabad will not affect the overall cooperation between the all-weather allies as well as the projects under the USD 60 billion CPEC.

A wary China has been keeping a close watch on the recent rapid political developments in Pakistan, leading to the dissolution of the Parliament over Prime Minister Imran Khan's allegation of the US hand behind Opposition parties' no-confidence motion against him. The Opposition parties in Pakistan moved the Supreme Court to adjudicate the legality of the dissolution of Parliament and declaration of fresh elections.

When asked for his reaction to the political and constitutional crisis in Pakistan, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a media briefing here that while the political situation may not affect Beijing's close ties with Islamabad; he hoped that parties will close ranks to stay united for the development and stability of the country. "China always follows the principle of non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs," he said. "China and Pakistan are all-weather strategic cooperative partners. History has proven once again that no matter how the international landscape may evolve, and how our respective domestic situations may change, China and Pakistan relations will always stand unbreakable and rock solid," Zhao said.

"We believe that the overall China-Pakistan cooperation and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) construction will not be affected by the political situation in Pakistan. As an ironclad friend of Pakistan, we hope all parties in the country can stay united and jointly uphold national development and stability," he said. Under the USD 60 billion CPEC which connects Pakistan's Gwadar port in Balochistan province to China's Xinjiang, China is building a host of infrastructure projects. India has protested to China over the CPEC, the flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as it traverses through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Car rams Russian Embassy gate in Romania, driver dead



BUCHAREST, April 6 (AP): A car crashed into the gate of the Russian Embassy in the Romanian capital early Wednesday, bursting into flames and killing the driver, police said. The sedan rammed into the gate at about 6 am Wednesday but did not enter the Bucharest embassy compound.

Video of the aftermath showed the car engulfed in flames as security personnel ran through the area.

According to police, firefighters who arrived at the scene were able

to put the fire out but the driver died at the scene. There was no immediate information on a possible motive or other details. In a statement after the incident, the Russian embassy expressed condolences to the family of the driver. "We must state with regret that whatever the motives of the driver," the statement read. "There is no doubt that he committed this act under the influence of an explosion of anti-Russian hysteria in connection with a staged provocation in the city of Bucha." The em-

bassy said no employees were injured. Romania, which shares a long land border with Ukraine, has taken in more than 600,000 refugees since Russia invaded its neighbour.

Since the war started Feb. 24, protesters have gathered outside Russia's embassy in the capital to call an end to the Russian aggression. On Tuesday, Romania ordered 10 diplomats from the embassy expelled following a string of expulsions of Russian officials across the 27-nation European Union. Romania's Foreign Ministry said the actions of 10 embassy workers, who have been declared persona non grata, "contravene the provisions of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relationships." The incident comes days after Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed Romania's parliament Monday, when he labeled the slaying of civilians in the town of Bucha a "war crime" and called for tougher sanctions against Russia.

Study explains link between oestrogen, high risk of dementia in women

Dementia is fast becoming a global epidemic, currently affecting an estimated 50 mn people worldwide

SYDNEY, April 6 (IANS): Researchers have suggested that the oestrogen levels in women could provide clues to their increased risk of developing dementia.

A team from the George Institute for Global Health in Australia analysed data on a total of 2,73,240 women without dementia and found that some reproductive events - like an early or late start to menstruation, early menopause and hysterectomy - were linked to higher risk of the neurological disorder characterised by impairment in memory, thinking and social abilities.

However, the findings, detailed in the journal PLoS Medicine, showed that childbearing event -



both pregnancy and abortion - and late menopause linked with lower risk. Dementia is fast becoming a global epidemic, currently affect-

ing an estimated 50 million people worldwide. This is projected to triple by 2050 - mainly driven by ageing populations. Rates of de-

mentia and associated deaths are both known to be higher in women than men.

According to lead author Jessica Gong from the Institute, although it appeared reproductive events related to changes in hormone levels in women may be involved in dementia risk, the exact relationship was still unknown. "While the risk of developing dementia increases with age, we don't yet know whether the higher rates seen in women are simply because they live longer," explained Gong. "But it's possible that female-specific reproductive factors may be able to explain some of the sex differences." Oestradiol is the most predominant form of oestrogen during

reproductive life (from the start of menstruation to menopause) and oestriol is the primary oestrogen during pregnancy.

Use of hormones that originate from outside the body, such as oral contraceptives during reproductive years, and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in later life can also influence oestrogen levels.

Further, the study found that the higher dementia risk linked to early (natural and artificial) menopause was more pronounced in women of lower socioeconomic status.

"Social deprivation is likely to be an important determinant of dementia risk as well as other aspects of women's health," Gong said.

Jamir pushing for Naga solution based on Agreed Position: NSCN (IM)

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 6: The NSCN (IM) alleged that former Nagaland chief minister and veteran Naga politician SC Jamir's recent meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi sends out strong hints to sign an agreement for solution to the Naga issue based on Agreed Position "which favour his political dream".

"But in the process, he (Jamir) does not foresee that it will invite another era of bloodshed... The choice is left for the Prime Minister of India, either to choose Jamir the trouble maker or the permanent peaceful settlement of the Naga issue," the NSCN (IM) said in a statement.

The government of India signed the Agreed Position with the seven-Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) in 2017 while the Framework Agreement between the NSCN (IM) and the Centre was signed in 2015.

Stating that the Agreed Position is just a re-edited version of the 16-Point Agreement, the NSCN (IM) accused Jamir of campaigning for the new version of his 16-Point Agreement. It also criticized him for his alleged "repeated disparaging remark against the inclusion of the Naga flag and constitution in the Naga solution".

The NSCN (IM) said Jamir misinterpreted the political meaning of



every single word of the Framework Agreement to suit his own political propaganda. It called the former chief minister a "political criminal".

Stating that he is the only living architect and signatory of the 16-Point Agreement, the NSCN (IM) alleged that Jamir who was serving as a parliamentary secretary at the time of the pact "protested and successfully prevented" a meeting between Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Naga leader AZ Phizo to resolve the Naga issue once and for all, as "...Nehru knew very well that the 16 points would not go far enough to resolve the Naga issue."

The statement also accused Jamir of attempting to "finish" the NSCN by raising forces like the Nagaland Youth Front, 9th Brigade and 6th Brigade and also implementing a dreaded policy of peace offensive with the sanction of the government of India to go all out against the NSCN during his tenure as the Nagaland chief minister, among others.

"With his inherent tendency to stoke fire of controversy, while the peace process was at its peak, Jamir published a book 'Bedrock of Naga Society' where he stated that the 16-Point Agreement is the Alpha and Omega for the Indo-Naga political agreement. Burdened with this

turnout, the government of India was thrown into an uneasy position and consequently, the Indo-Naga talk was unjustly delayed," the statement said.

"Nevertheless, there was a high pitch for the success of the Naga political solution and the Naga people's unflinching support was evidently displayed," the NSCN (IM) said. It added that it finally resulted in the signing of the Framework Agreement which generated much political fervour.

Since the signing of the Framework Agreement, Jamir has been burning the midnight oil "as he knew too well that his 16-Point Agreement has been at risk of being superseded", the NSCN (IM) said. It went on to state that he also started attacking the Framework Agreement in various forms and outrageously misinterpreted it to suit his way.

It added that former interlocutor RN Ravi's appointment as Nagaland Governor "gave Jamir the best opportunity to divert and dilute the Framework Agreement."

"Much to the fulfillment of his scheming political agenda, in 2017, a third party/force was created known as the NNPGs and agreement was signed which is called 'Agreed Position,' targeted against the Framework Agreement," it stated.

Meghalaya govt to meet Shillong's Punjabi Lane residents on relocation plans

SHILLONG, April 6 (PTI): Meghalaya deputy chief minister Prestone Tynsong has said the state government will hold a meeting with residents of Punjabi Lane here, which hit the headlines following group clashes in 2018, to discuss the proposed relocation of 'illegal settlers' of the locality.

The move has been initiated after the Meghalaya High Court had recently asked the government and Harijan Panchayat Committee (HPC), an organisation working for welfare of the residents of the area, to settle the matter.

"In all likelihood, we will meet with residents of Punjabi Lane and Harijan Panchayat Committee members next week to discuss the matter of their relocation," Tynsong said on Tuesday.

The state government had in October last year taken over the land of Punjabi Lane locality and decided that 'illegal settlers' would be relocated from there.

The decision was taken based on a recommendation by a high-level committee (HLC) headed by Tynsong.

However, the Harijan Panchayat Committee had rejected the HLC's recommendation submitted to the state government for relocating the people from there, claiming that it was 'illegal' and filed a petition in the high court.

A division bench of the high court, comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice W Di-



engdoh, had on March 9 said, "Since the private appellant submits that it is seeking to negotiate an alternative site for relocation and the matter is under consideration of the State, both the private appellant's appeal and the State's appeal should be adjourned to allow an attempt at settlement."

Punjabi Lane in Them lew Mawlong area of the Meghalaya capital is inhabited by people from Punjab, who were brought to Shillong around 200 years ago by the British to engage them in sanitary works.

"They have pleaded through the high court that the government should provide a place for relocation but right now I will not be able to tell you in details... let us meet first and once the meeting is over we will understand where and how we go about it," the deputy CM told reporters on Tuesday.

Notably, an incident of assault in the area in May 2018 had resulted in the group clashes following which it was put under curfew for over a month.

Following the clashes, the Shillong Municipal Board had started an exercise to determine the legal residents of Punjabi Lane. There was a demand from various quarters to relocate the ethnic Punjabis from the area.

The HLC was set up by the NPP-led government in June 2018 to solve the decades-old issue regarding the relocation of the residents after the clashes.

According to a report submitted by the Shillong Municipal Board, a total of 184 families have been identified as legal settlers.

They included families of 128 employees of the civic body and 56 others who are working in various government departments.

Rio calls for preserving rich Naga culture

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 6: Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio called for promoting and preserving the rich culture and heritage of the Nagas by documenting them.

Addressing the Phom Monyu Tribal Festival celebration at Longleng local ground on Tuesday, Rio said in order to promote and preserve this rich culture and traditions of the Naga people, mini hornbill festivals and tribal festivals are organised in every district of the state.

He urged the people to preserve and promote their rich unique culture and attire without imitation to attract tourists.

Asserting that Nagaland is a tribal state with every tribe having its own unique tradition, culture and festivals, he said the government has named the state the "Land of Festivals".

Saying that the festival is a time of celebration to renew friendship and social bonds with love and forgiveness, Rio called upon the people to celebrate it with their hard-earned money without depending on others. He termed the Monyu festival a unique festival because it shows more love and respect for the womenfolk.

He also called for promoting and protecting the rich biodiversity and scenic beauty of the state while cultivating their fields.

Appealing to the people to live with peace and harmony, he said development takes place only in a peaceful environment.

In his Monyu greetings, health and family welfare minister S Pangnyu Phom urged the people to observe the festival for a bountiful harvest in every walk of life. "Celebrate the festival to be an agent of change and torchbearer," he said.

Pulling of log drum, a special song by Eastern Blind Care Home, beating of log drum and various songs and dances marked the occasion.

Heavy rains, landslides wreak havoc in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, April 6 (PTI): Heavy rainfalls triggered a series of landslides in Meghalaya, affecting normal lives, officials said on Wednesday.

At least 25 students missed their board examinations due to the rains on Tuesday, they said.

Of them, 22 students were appearing for the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) examination and three students for the Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) exam, they said. The Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) is yet to decide on conducting a reexamination for such students, they said.

On Monday, at least two persons were killed in Mawlat area in Mawknrew Block of East Khasi Hills district in a massive landslide caused by the rains.

The Shillong-Dawki highway was one of the worst-affected roads with landslides being reported from five areas along it - Khohiar, Mawkhong, Rngai, Lyncrdem and near Siatbakon.

The PWD and National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) have been instructed to keep their teams on standby in case of further adverse weather conditions, officials said.

Conrad Sangma distributes M-Tabs to students

'Around 35,000 students will benefit from this initiative'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 6: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K. Sangma on Wednesday said that around 35,000 students will receive M-Tabs (PC tablet), a programme that aims to empower higher secondary students with digital learning aid.

Speaking to students from different schools of East Khasi Hills at U Soso Tham Auditorium here, the chief minister said that the Government is aware of the importance of digital learning and has made its endeavour to reach out to the students. Reminding the gathering on his interaction with a student in a rural school, wherein a student was spending time in a 'smart classroom', he said that the minister was sitting in the classroom with the hope he will get smart, without using the technology and the interface that was available for learning.

"So, my message is very simple. You have to actually use the technology, sitting idly in a classroom will not make you smart," he said while urging the students to utilise the M-Tabs for learning.



"Technology is as good as you use it. If you simply think that you will be able to take this tablet and hold it, and put it in your bag and you will get smarter and automatically you can learn. This is not happening, so you have to learn to use and take advantage of the device," he added.

Terming that digital learning is very important, he said, "Technology is going to help you in many ways that you can't imagine. So, therefore, please do use it in the best way possible, to ensure that

you are able to really get the best out of it."

He told the gathering that to ensure better internet connectivity in the State, the Government will soon launch the State wide area network wherein academic institutions across the State will be able to access better connectivity.

The chief minister along with IT & Communication minister Hamletson Dohling distributed M-Tabs to students from various schools of East Khasi Hills during the occasion.

Manipur: Congress seeks parity between hill and valley districts over removal of AFSPA

IMPHAL, April 6 (NNN): Congress party in Manipur has asked the reasons behind non-lifting of Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act, 1958 from any part of the hill areas of Manipur.

Addressing a press conference at Congress Bhavan in Imphal, Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) working president, Kh Devabrata demanded that the BJP-led government should lift the draconian Act from parts of the hill areas. He asked as to why not a single police station in the hill districts was included when the Centre reduced the areas of coverage by the Act by lifting it from nine more police stations of Manipur.

All the nine police stations where the Act

was lifted are in the valley districts. Earlier, during Congress' rule, the Act was lifted from areas covered by Imphal Municipal Corporation (IMC) spread over five police stations. Now, the draconian law has been withdrawn from 15 police stations spread across six valley districts.

"The incumbent BJP-led government has been claiming mark improvement of law and order situation in the whole of the state. But, when the Act was lifted from certain selected areas, not a single police station of the hill districts was included," Kh Devabrata pointed out.

The working president of MPCC then stated that it is the bounden duty of the government to bring development in both the

hills and the valley and the incumbent state government is also repeatedly claiming taking up works for a balanced development in the hills and the valley. "However, at the time of lifting the Act, not a single police station from the hill districts was included," he also said. At the same time, the Congress leader said that people have started expressing unhappiness when not a single police station in hill district was included while lifting the draconian Act.

Kh Devabrata then urged the political parties making alliance with the BJP in the state and supporting the BJP-led government to press the government for lifting the Act from parts of the hill districts or from the whole of the state at the earliest.

Manipur filmmaker Banka Sharma to receive lifetime achievement award

IMPHAL, April 6 (NNN): The 14th Manipur State Film Development Society (MSFDS) Lifetime Achievement Award, 2022 will be conferred to renowned filmmaker and lyricist Laimayum Banka Sharma.

Banka has been nominated for the Lifetime Achievement Award in honour of his immensely valuable contributions towards the growth of Manipuri cinema, according to MSFDS. The award carries a Maibi memento, citation, shawl and a cash prize of Rs 1,00,000.

Hailing from Uripok Machin Khwai Brahmapur, Banka was born on December 11, 1945 to the late L. Rajbapu Sharma and Laimayum Ongbi Ibempishak.

Banka, 76, has been associated with Manipuri films since the first Manipuri feature film 'Matangi Manipur', though he was not a part of the film crew. He even assisted director Deb Kumar Bose through



suggestions for particular scenes of the film to capture the right emotions, especially in the classic number 'Eigi Punshi Nangga'.

Banka was at his peak of popularity after he took on board 'Nightingale of Bollywood/India' Lata Mangeshkar, as a playback singer for his 'Meichak' and later 'Madhabee'.

Always with an aura of self-esteem, Banka said that he always wanted to be "The Captain" in pro-

duction of a film, said MSFDS. So far, he has directed several timeless films such as Wangma Wangma, Yairipok Thambalnu, Meichak, Madhabee, Poppy and Laman. He also made short films including 'Carpenter and his wife' and 'Mitsna'.

He was also among the early Manipuris who went to Mumbai to receive professional film schooling. He was trained in editing from Film and Television Institute, Mumbai in 1971 where he had associated with various Bollywood personalities though he did not complete the entire course.

Banka is now living with his wife Veakholing Gangte, 3 sons, 3 daughters-in-law and 4 grandchildren.

The seasoned filmmaker is now eyeing to make the legendary 'Khamba-Thoibi', digitally remake 'Madhabee' and write a book sharing his years long experiences, MSFDS added.

KOHIMA, April 6 (PTI): K G Kenye, who has just completed his term as the lone Rajya Sabha MP from Nagaland, on Wednesday said that the Centre is keen on resolving the Naga political issue at the earliest but the problem is partly with the people as they are divided into many groups with different demands.

Kenye told media persons here that as an MP from the state he had made several attempts in Parliament and outside to press for an early solution to the Naga political issue and for permanent peace in the state and the north east.

"The Centre is interested in resolving the issue at the earliest but partly it is our Naga people who are at fault because we have too many different groups and may be with different purposes (demands)."

"It would have been appropriate if we could settle the different issues among ourselves first and then put before the Centre a single



and concrete proposal/document encompassing all our aspirations," the Naga Peoples Front leader said.

Since the Naga groups did not screen their documents and did not place them before the Centre to decide, it may take time.

To questions on the withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) by the Centre, Kenye said the repeal of the Act has always been on the cards but despite several attempts the Naga MPs could never take the issue to the Parliament for discussion.

The Oting massacre by security forces in December last year gave the Nagaland MPs their first opportunity to register their protest in Parliament against the draconian law and impress upon the Centre that AFSPA has created only animosity among the people and must be done away with, he said.

On the Centre's recent decision to reduce areas under AFSPA in Nagaland and other NE states, Kenye said this was the first time since the enactment of the Act in 1958 that the Centre had shown some response to the long standing demands of the people.

"Though small and little, the Centre has opened a very positive chapter and we are able to see that the Centre is yielding to our genuine demand," he asserted.

On protests by different groups on the partial repeal of AFSPA in Nagaland, Kenye said, "Our people must learn to take one step at a time ... this kind of work is done

in a phased manner and the process has begun."

After having tolerated the Act for so many decades, the Nagas must acknowledge that change has begun. "This is a big achievement and a major step towards building more confidence," he said.

Kenye said that the Naga MPs had made continuous efforts and also requested the Centre for enactment of Inner Line Permit (ILP) especially in Nagaland. Their demand was finally accommodated by the 9th Amendment of the Citizenship Act, granting the safeguard not only to Nagaland but other North Eastern states.

Kenye had been the general secretary of NPF for three terms and was its secretary general till he was suspended from the Party for voting in favour of the Citizenship Amendment Bill in January 2020 in Parliament. His suspension was revoked a few days before he completed his stint as Rajya Sabha MP.

On BJP foundation day, Modi says it stands for 'rashtra bhakti', rivals for 'parivar bhakti'

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): Asserting that the BJP stands for "rashtra bhakti" and its rivals for "parivar bhakti", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday that people are gradually coming to the realisation that dynastic parties are the "biggest enemies" of democracy.

Addressing BJP members on the party's 42nd foundation day, he said dynastic parties are dedicated to further family rule and have little regard for constitutional norms and cover up corruption and misdeeds of each other even though they may be active in different states.

In a reference to geo political developments due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he said India is acting by keeping its national interest supreme when the world is divided into two opposing poles.

Targeting political rivals, he said when these parties active nationally or in states come to power, members of some families dominate from local bodies to Parliament and added that only the BJP has challenged them and made it an electoral issue.

They did not allow the country's young talent to come up and betrayed them, he said, without naming any party.

BJP workers are fighting against the "injustice" and "atrocities" of these parties by sticking to democratic values, he said, adding that some have even sacrificed their lives, a reference to deaths of party members in alleged political violence in opposition-party ruled states like West Bengal and Kerala.

Our struggle will continue till these anti-democratic forces are defeated, he said.

Modi said BJP governments have run welfare schemes without any discrimination and worked to take them to every beneficiary while previous dispensations were driven by vote bank politics in which some sections of society were made promises while larger sections ignored.

The BJP succeeded in convincing people of the dangers of such an approach, he said.

Discrimination and corruption were



"side effects" of vote bank politics, he said, adding the government machinery now works to reach every intended beneficiary as part of its resolve for saturation coverage of welfare programmes.

Any discrimination cannot stay in such

a mechanism, he said, asserting these measures are the biggest instrument of social justice.

For the BJP, he said "rajniti" (politics) and "rashtra niti" (policies for country's welfare) cannot be separate.

People have been voting the BJP to power due to its work without any discrimination, he said and referred to wide support it has received from Dalits and backwards besides other sections of society.

The Prime Minister especially cited the big support to the party from women voters in various elections, and said its policies to empower them and make their lives better with programmes targeted at their health and security have brought them at the forefront in the BJP's support.

The ongoing programmes to mark the 75th anniversary of India's Independence and the "rapidly changing" global order which has presented the country with new opportunities makes the ruling party's foundation day "very important", he said and also cited the BJP's poll success in retaining power in four states as another key marker along with it becoming the first party in three decades to have 100 members in the Rajya Sabha.

A BJP member is representative of the country's dreams and resolve, the Prime

Minister said, adding this is an era of social justice, harmony, self reliance and taking "local (products) to global" stage.

Modi also asserted that BJP governments at the Centre and states have worked to take welfare schemes to every beneficiary without any discrimination and biases, reflecting the motto of "sabka saath, sabka vikas".

Asserting that India is working by keeping its national interest supreme, he said it is unflinching about its welfare. It is globally being seen as a country which speaks firmly about humanity, he said.

India now has convergence of policies, intentions, decisiveness and determination, he said.

He also cited a number of welfare measures, ranging from the Covid vaccination programme to free grain scheme costing over Rs 3.5 lakh crore and housing and cooking gas schemes for the poor, and said "double engine" governments, a reference to the BJP being power at the Centre and many states, are working to make people's lives better.

Pawar meets PM, flags ED action against Sanjay Raut

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): As the Enforcement Directorate stepped up heat on Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut, NCP supremo Sharad Pawar on Wednesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and told him injustice was being done against the senior Parliamentarian and editor. Pawar met Modi at the Prime Minister's Office in Parliament along with NCP Lok Sabha member P P Mohammad Faizal, who raised issues related to his constituency Lakshadweep.

Pawar said he flagged the issues of Central agencies targeting Raut and the alleged inaction of Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari on the Maharashtra government proposal regarding nominations to the state Legislative Council.

"On what basis was action taken against Sanjay Raut? This is injustice. What was the provocation? Just because he is making some statements and criticisms does not mean action should be taken against him. What was the need," Pawar told reporters here.



"It is our duty to bring to the Prime Minister's notice the injustice being done to a journalist and a senior Parliamentarian," Pawar said. On Tuesday, the Enforcement Directorate had attached assets worth more than Rs 11.15 crore of Raut's wife and two of his associates in a money-laundering investigation linked to certain land deals.

Asked whether the central investigation agencies' action against leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi

(MVA), the ruling coalition in the state, affected the stability of the Maharashtra government, Pawar exuded confidence that the government will complete its entire term.

"The MVA will also return to power in the elections in 2024," the NCP chief said. Hours before Pawar's meeting with the Prime Minister, the CBI took custody of former Maharashtra home minister and NCP leader Anil Deshmukh.

Deshmukh was taken into custody by the CBI team from the Arthur Road Prison in Central Mumbai and placed under arrest in connection with corruption allegations raised against him by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh.

Pawar reiterated that he was not interested in the post of UPA chairperson as the largest party in the opposition was the natural choice to lead the Opposition coalition.

Pawar also sought to downplay Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari's presence at a dinner at his residence on Tuesday evening.

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): Al-Qaeda chief Ayman Al-Zawahiri has used the recent Hijab controversy in Karnataka to target democracy in India, saying "we must stop being deceived by the mirage of the pagan Hindu democracy".

In a 8.43-minute video clip released by the terror outfit online, and verified by the American SITE Intelligence Group, Zawahiri also showered praises on Karnataka college student Muskan Khan for confronting a group of students opposing hijab in her college in early February.

In the Arabic video clip, with English subtitles provided by SITE Intelligence Group that tracks online activity of white supremacist and jihadist organisations, Zawahiri also reads out a poem which he says he wrote for "our Mujahid sister" and for her "brave feat".

"May Allah reward her for exposing the reality of Hindu India and the deception of its pagan democracy," the Al-Qaeda chief said in the video, also ending speculations about his death due to natural causes.

The video, the Al-Qaeda chief's second in the past six months, focused mostly on the hijab controversy.

"...we must shake off the delusions that confound us... we must stop being deceived by the mirage of the pagan Hindu democracy of India, which, to begin with, was never more than a



tool to oppress Muslims," said Zawahiri, one of the world's most wanted terrorists.

Addressing the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, he said they must realise that in the real world there is no such thing as 'human rights' or 'respect of the Constitution' or 'law'.

"...It is exactly the same scheme of deception which the West has employed against us, the true nature of which was exposed by France, Holland, and Switzerland when they banned the hijab while allowing public nudity," he said.

"The enemies of Islam are one and the same... who vilify the hijab and assail the Islamic Shariah... It is a war on Islam, its core doctrines, its laws, ethics, and etiquettes."

Calling for the unity of Muslims from China to the Islamic Maghreb, and from the Caucasus to Somalia, Zawahiri said, "We must rely on Allah alone and actively cooperate with one another."

"We must realize that the governments imposed on us, specifically in Pakistan and Bangladesh, do not defend us; rather, they defend the very enemies that they have empowered them to fight against us," he said.

The hijab row began in January from a government PU College in Udipi where six students who attended classes wearing headscarves in violation of the stipulated dress code were sent out. It later spread to a few other colleges in nearby Kundapur and Byndoor.

The Karnataka High Court later dismissed all writ petitions filed by Muslim girl students seeking permission to wear a hijab in colleges, saying Hijab is not a part of essential religious practices of Islam.

Delhi Govt bus catches fire; no casualty reported

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): An air conditioned bus of the Delhi Transport Corporation caught fire which spread and burnt down a few shops in southwest Delhi on Wednesday, officials said.

The fire department received information about the blaze in Mahipalpur area at 2.21 pm following which nine fire tenders were rushed to the spot, they said.

The flames were doused by 3.40 pm. The cooling process is underway, an official said.

According to the police, there were around 20 passengers in the bus when it caught fire but they safely de-boarded the vehicle.

Delhi Fire Service director Atul Garg said, "Initially, three fire tenders were rushed to the spot, but the blaze was massive and it spread across a few shops. "Later, more fire engines were rushed to the spot. No one was injured in the incident." At least three outlets selling air coolers were damaged, officials said.

In a statement, a Tata Motors spokesperson said, "An unfortunate fire incident occurred on one of the CNG buses in New Delhi. Fortunately, there were no injuries to anyone. "While we are unable to comment on specifics pending investigation, we will extend our fullest cooperation to the authorities in identifying the cause.

Bill allowing police to collect biological samples of convicts unconstitutional: Chidambaram

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): Congress leader P Chidambaram on Wednesday termed as 'unconstitutional' the bill that seeks to provide legal sanction to the police to take physical and biological samples of convicts as well as those accused of crimes. Taking part in the discussion on the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill, 2022, which was moved in Rajya Sabha by Home minister Amit Shah, Chidambaram favoured sending the bill to a select committee for further deliberations before it is passed.

The former Union Home minister claimed that the provisions in the bill can be misused as the police can arrest and take fingerprints and DNA samples of even those who are taking part in political rallies.

"Is there anyone in this House who has not violated a law? I ask the honourable Home minister who has had an active political career, have you never violated any law?...even if you are convicted of an offence where the punishment is Rs 100, this law applies," Chidambaram said.

He claimed that the worst sufferers will be the "oppressed and the poor".

"This bill is unconstitutional. This is illegal. We are deceiving ourselves if we are passing a bill. This bill has a huge net, which can embrace anyone in this country. And you know what happens when a law of this (kind) is applied, the worst sufferers will be the disadvantaged, oppressed and the poor," he said.

Opposing the bill, Chidambaram said, "I ask this House to reflect. Since we



won't have time to reflect today, I beg of you to send this to a standing committee or send this to a select committee and let them examine and come back. What has waited for 102 years can wait another 102 days." He said even in Lok Sabha various suggestions were made to amend the bill and to refer it to a select committee but not one suggestion was accepted by the government.

"When a bill like this is moved and passed in this House, we are wittingly or unwittingly breaking the Constitution every day," Chidambaram asserted.

Expressing concern over various sections of the Bill, Chidambaram asked how it would ensure that taking physical and biological samples from convicts and persons accused of crimes would

not violate their liberty and privacy.

Citing Supreme Court judgements, he said, "Since 2010, the law in this country is that narco analysis, polygraph tests and BEAP (brain electrical activation profile) are unlawful, unconstitutional. They violate liberty and privacy."

Asserting that there is ambiguity in the bill on how "measurements" for physical and biological samples are defined, he demanded that the government should make it clear if narco analysis, polygraph tests and BEAP are included in it.

He also expressed apprehension that the proposed law will apply to "any person convicted of an offence punishable under any law" and even those charged with petty crimes.

Sex on promise to marry amounts to rape only if victim's decisional autonomy violated: HC

KOCHI, April 6 (PTI): The Kerala High Court has acquitted a man whom a trial court convicted of raping his lover. The High Court held that sex on promise to marry will amount to rape only if the accused has violated the decisional autonomy of the victim.

Allowing an appeal filed by the 35-year-old man, Justices A Muhammed Mustaque and Kausar Edappagath held that this was not a case of forcible sexual act as against her will but a sexual act on a promise to marry where the consent is implicit. Setting aside the life imprisonment awarded by the trial court, the High Court, in its March 30 order, said the victim and the accused were in a relationship for more than 10 years and the sexual act only occurred just before the preparation for the marriage was made. He had sexual intercourse with the victim on three occasions. "The prosecution evidence itself would show that there was resistance from the parents of the accused to accept the mar-

riage without dowry. That would show that the sexual act committed by the accused was with real intention to marry the victim and he could not hold on to his promise due to resistance from his family," the court said.

It said in the absence of any other evidence on the side of the prosecution, the conduct of the accused can only be treated as a breach of promise. "In light of the discussions, we are of the view that the accused is entitled to benefit of doubt as the prosecution has failed to prove the sexual act was on a false promise to marry or the consent was obtained by non-disclosure of material facts," the court said. Noting that the prosecutrix had not stated anything in evidence to constitute the foundational facts for attracting the presumption under Section 114-A of the Evidence Act, the High Court said, "Merely for the reason that the accused contracted another marriage immediately after the sexual act with the victim cannot give rise to the presumption of lack of consent.

O.O. No. 160

Notice Inviting Quotation

Sealed rate quotations are hereby invited for supply of items and other accessories for Feed and Upkeepment of Deptt. Elephants. The list of items and quantity are given as annexure I. The items are to be supplied on a monthly basis.

The quotation should be addressed to the Divisional Forest Officer, Nagaon Wildlife Division, Nagaon and in a sealed envelope super scribing quotation for "Supply for Feed and Upkeepment of Deptt. Elephant."

SL.No.	Item	Quoted Rate
1	Supply of items for Feeds of elephant for one month (Details attached in Annexue- 1)	

The quotation should reach this office on or before 30-04-2022 at 11.00 a.m. In case the Office remains closed on that day for any unavoidable reason, quotation will be received on next working day up to same time which will be opened on the closing day in presence of intending dealer / supplier who have submitted the quotation. The quotation received after the due date and time will be rejected summarily.

The terms and condition of the quotation are indicated below.

1. Delivery Schedule: Every month after issue of the supply order.
2. Validity: Up to the 31-03-2023 from the date of agreement.
3. Performance security of 10% is to be paid at the time of supply order.
4. Payment: The payment will be made only after complete supply of the items monthly with satisfaction of the Divisional Forest Officer and subject to availability of fund.
5. The items as mentioned in the list are only for feeds and for Upkeepments like medicines, chain, Degi, Doms, Golsi, Gaddi and Gadla etc will be as per requirement from time to time.
6. Rate per unit : Rate per Unit as mentioned by the Divisional Forest Officer, Nagaon Wildlife Division, Nagaon.
7. Taxes and other statutory duties to be shown separately and clearly.
8. A copy of the PAN card, GST number and copy of Trade License to be submitted along with the quotation.
9. The D.F.O. reserves the right to accept or reject any or all quotations without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Sd/-

Divisional Forest Officer,
Nagaon Wildlife Division cum
Deputy Director, Kaziranga Tiger Reserve

Janasanyog/C/17222

Around 7 per cent children in country malnourished: Govt

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): Around seven per cent children in the country are malnourished, including around two per cent in the Severe Acute Malnourished category, according to the government's Poshan tracker methodology, minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani informed Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. She said that this number is much less than the figures cited in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data which says around 19 percent of children in the country were malnourished. "We have reached out to a third party, namely, the Indian Academy of Paediatrics, to ensure that these numbers are validated," she said.

She said that under the Poshan tracker methodology of digitally tracking the performances of Anganwadis, including measuring children as per WHO standards, for the month of February, the number of children found to be Severe Acute Malnourished is close to 2 per cent which is much less than the number that has been enunciated in the NFHS data.

She said that under the Poshan tracker methodology one crore children were weighed as per the World Health Organisation standards.

"Only 2 per cent children are SAM (severely acute malnourished). I would like to add that MAM (Mod-



erate Acute Malnutrition) children have come up to 5 per cent. "So, if you look cumulatively, the number of children in the malnourished category between SAM and MAM is now 7 per cent. Sir, if you look at the last NFHS data, the percentage of such children is positioned at 19 per cent," she told the House.

In her written reply to a question, Irani also said that as per the Sample Registration System (SRS) of Registrar General of India, the infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in the country has reduced from 33 per 1,000 live births

in 2017 to 30 in 2019 at national level. During the same period, the under-five mortality rate has reduced from 37 to 35. Maternal Mortality has been reduced from 122 per lakh live births in 2015-17 to 103 in 2017-19 at national level, she said.

She added that as per the SRS reports (2015-17) of Registrar General of India, major causes of child mortality (0-4 years) in India are - prematurity & low birth weight (31.2%), pneumonia (16.2%), other non-communicable diseases (9.8%), birth asphyxia & birth trauma (8.7%), diarrheal diseases (6.4%), and injuries (5.6%). Congenital anomalies (5.0%), fever of unknown origin (4.4%), acute bacterial sepsis and severe infections (4.1%), ill-defined or cause unknown (4.7%), are among other major causes, she added.

"As per the SRS reports (2015-17) report of Registrar General of India, major causes of infant mortality in India are - prematurity & low birth weight (37%), Pneumonia (15.5%), Birth asphyxia & birth trauma (10.4%), Other Non-Communicable Diseases (9.1%), Congenital Anomalies (4.9%), Diarrheal Diseases (4.9%), Acute Bacterial Sepsis and severe infections (4.7%), Fever of unknown origin (3.1%), Injuries (2.9%), Ill-defined or cause unknown (5%), and all other causes of deaths (2.5%)." she said.

If India has chosen side, it is side of peace: Jaishankar on Ukraine

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): Asserting that India is strongly against the Russia-Ukraine conflict as no solution can be arrived at by shedding blood, External Affairs minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday said that if New Delhi has chosen a side, it is the side of peace and an immediate end to violence.

Replying to the discussion in Lok Sabha on the situation in Ukraine, Jaishankar said India encourages talks between Ukraine and Russia, including at the level of their presidents, and asserted that if New Delhi can be of any assistance in this matter, it would be "glad to contribute".

Jaishankar also said that attributing a political colour to India's actions in the wake of the Ukraine situation was uncalled for and unfair. All members would agree that India's approach should be guided by its national beliefs and values, national interest and by its national strategy, he said.

The remarks by the Foreign minister came amid increasing disquiet in the West over India's indication to buy larger volumes of discounted crude oil from Russia.

On Monday, the White House reiterated the US view that it is not in India's interest to "accelerate or increase" imports of Russian energy and other commodities, while offering to work with New Delhi to help it reduce its reliance on imports from Moscow. Jaishankar said India's approach will be to promote dialogue to end the conflict, mitigate economic distress for itself and the world, and to work with its partners to these ends.

Talking about the civilian killings in the Ukrainian city of Bucha, Jaishankar said India is "deeply disturbed" by the reports.



"We strongly condemn the killings which have taken place there. This is an extremely serious matter and we support the call for an independent investigation," he said.

Elaborating on what India is advocating in Ukraine, he said, "we are, first and foremost, strongly against the conflict, we believe that no solution can be arrived at by shedding blood and at the cost of innocent lives. In this day and age, dialogue and diplomacy are the right answers to any disputes."

One should bear in mind that the contemporary global order has been built on the UN Charter, on respect for international law and for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, he asserted.

"If India has chosen a side, it is a side of peace and it is for an immediate end to violence. This is our

principled stand and it has consistently guided our position in international forums and debates, including in the UN," Jaishankar said. On India's national strategy vis-a-vis the Ukraine situation, he said that in terms of diplomacy, India continues to press forcefully for an immediate cessation of hostilities and an end to violence.

"We encourage talks between Ukraine and Russia, including at the level of their presidents. Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) himself has spoken to them both in this regard. This was precisely the message that was conveyed to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov when he was in Delhi. If India can be of any assistance in this matter, we will be glad to contribute," Jaishankar said.

Noting that the ground situation calls for urgent humanitarian relief, he said India has already provided 90 tonnes of relief material, and did

so even while we were in the middle of an evacuation.

"Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko called me a few days ago to request a supply of more medicines, the House would be glad to know that this is underway and delivery should start very soon," he said. "We will work with the international community and partner countries to mitigate the economic hardships that are resulting from this conflict. Obviously, our focus is to soften its impact on our own economy but equally there are partners who are going through very tough times. Coordinating on lowering energy prices is one collective initiative," he said, adding that in the case of a neighbour like Sri Lanka "we are even supplying fuel and food on credit".

On the concern of the supply of products of commodities such as edible oil, Jaishankar said commercial diplomacy has to find additional sources to address this disruption.

Asserting that food security is another major concern, he said India has been approached for the supply of wheat and sugar by many countries and it is responding positively.

"At a time when energy costs have spiked, clearly we need to ensure that the common person in India is not subject to an additional and unavoidable burden."

"Similarly, fertilizer prices have a direct implication on the livelihood of the majority of our population and indeed for food prices for all of us. Even the security of the nation is at stake as we maintain our defence posture in the manner that the current security challenges warrant," he said.

BSNL to install 1.12 lakh towers for rolling out 4G across India

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): The indigenous 4G telecom network will soon be rolled out across India with the BSNL planning to install about 1.12 lakh towers throughout the country, Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

The minister also said the internet connection inside trains can be available only when the 5G network will be rolled out as communications get disrupted with 4G technology in trains running with the speed of 100 km per hour.

"I am happy to inform you that the 4G telecom network is ready for roll out soon and it is developed in India by Indian engineers and scientists. Our development of 4G network is being appreciated worldwide and it has a core network, radio network with full telecom equipment," he said during Question Hour.

The minister said the BSNL is in the process of ordering 6,000 towers immediately and then 6,000 more and finally 1 lakh to be installed all over the country for the 4G network.

He said the development of 5G technology is going on in parallel and will be ready in a few months.

found at 88 locations in the world, across 51 academic disciplines and five broad faculty areas.

They are a part of the annual QS World University Rankings portfolio, which was consulted over 147 million times in 2021, and covered 96,000 times by media and institutions.

Among the four IoEs achieving top 50 ranks, IIT Madras (30th for petroleum engineering), is India's highest-ranking public IoE.

Apart from breaking into top 100 in physics, astronomy and mechanical engineering, IISc also retained top 100 ranks for materials science (76) and chemistry (81).

The University of Delhi ranks 41 for development studies.

IIT Delhi is ranked in 14 subject tables, which include in top 100 positions in civil and structural engineering, electrical and electronic engineering, computer science and mechanical engineering.

Two Indian universities also achieved top 100 ranks in business and management -- IIM Bangalore and IIM Ahmedabad -- while India's most-improved entry is in pharmacy and pharmacology, with the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER), Mohali rising over a hundred places year on year.

Public IoE remains significantly better-represented in the rankings than private ones. Of the four private universities already declared as IoE, one does not appear in the subject rankings - Shiv Nadar University.

'Complicated' 2nd phase of border

in the first phase will start dialogue for the second phase and I have confident that at some point of time we will have resolution on the six also but how and when it will end it is difficult to predict right now," the Assam CM added.

Case registration rate in police

sub-inspector Mritunjoy Singha. Sarma claimed that the case registration rate in police stations of Assam has decreased by 30-35 per cent in the first three months of the current year as compared to the same period in the previous year. He urged police personnel to sincerely work for ensuring a 'crime-free society' and instill a sense of security and confidence among people. Sarma recalled his appeal to the police personnel to adopt zero tolerance towards criminals, economic offenders, drug mafia and middlemen soon after assuming power on May 10, 2021. "The Assam Police has stood up to the test and it is reflected in the decreased rate in case registration as well as crime," the chief minister said. The chief minister said as the police personnel work to control crime, the government is also chipping in by providing necessary support, whether in terms of recruitment, housing facilities, use of technology, and improved infrastructure. As many as 16,000 people will be recruited into the force between May 10 to June 10 this year. Sarma, who also holds the Home portfolio, emphasised that it was not enough for the police only to fight crime, but also aspire for the highest level of professional excellence and personal integrity. "The police force has an important role to play in ensuring that Assam becomes one of the most developed states in the country and I urge the new officers to contribute wholeheartedly towards it," Sarma added.

First case of Omicron's new sub

The woman, who is a costume designer, was a member of a film shooting crew. She arrived from South Africa on February 10, 2022. "She did not have any travel history prior to that. She had been vaccinated with both doses of the COMIRNATY vaccine," the official said, adding that she suffered from no co-morbidities. On arrival in India she tested negative for Covid-19, but on March 2, she tested positive during routine testing. In the subsequent test, she tested negative. She had been quarantined in a hotel room during this period. As to whether it was the first case of the XE variant detected in India, BMC officials said they could not confirm this.

Mirbeen wins best Karbi film

awarded a cash prize of ₹ 8000, a trophy and certificate, Best Cinematography by Pradip Diamary and was awarded a cash prize of ₹10,000 including trophy and certificate and Best Custom Designer went to Longki Teron and was awarded a cash prize of ₹ 8,000 including trophy and certificate. The film also bagged the Best Music Director award by Pansing Kro receiving a cash prize of ₹10,000 including a trophy and certificate and best make-up by Achauba Laishram and awarded with a cash prize of ₹ 8,000 including a trophy and certificate. The Best Actor in male went to Borlongki Timung for the film 'Khamkhe'. He was given a consolation prize of cash ₹ 5,000 including a trophy and certificate. The film also bagged the Best Actor in the negative role by Crosswell Timung and received a cash prize of ₹ 7,000 including a trophy and certificate and Best Child Artist by Sardili Terang and received a cash prize of ₹ 5,000 including trophy and certificate. The Best Lyricist went to On Teron for the song sintuben in the film 'Alar'. He was awarded a cash prize of ₹ 8,000 along with a trophy and certificate. The film also bagged the Best Playback Singer in the male by Prem Terang and in female category to Nitu Timung for the song sintuben. Both received a cash prize of ₹ 10,000 along with a trophy and certificate respectively. It also bagged the Best Comedian award by Bidyasing Teron and was awarded a cash prize of ₹ 10,000 and Best Choreographer by Ruplin Teronpi and was awarded a cash prize of ₹ 7,000 including a trophy and certificate. This year the Special Jury Award went to the film 'Rongpharpi Rongbe' and received a cash award of ₹ 5,000 including a trophy and certificate. Besides film personalities there were dignitaries including chairman of KAAC Longki Timung; MLA Rupsing Teron, executive members of KAAC, member of Autonomous Council and Padmashree Dhaneswar Engti and deputy director, Cultural Affairs Rani Terangpi witnessed the award-giving function.

BJP's 42nd foundation day celebrated

to power at KAAC has witnessed change. Diphu has turned into a smart town with street lights and improved roads. People have benefited from various welfare schemes and set up a medical college. More development will come under the BJP government. He also said during the lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic the BJP government has tried to help each and every individual by providing free rice and other essentials. Teron informed that in Karbi Anglong there are already 55,000 members in BJP. More and more people are coming forward to enrol for party membership. He also informed that notification for conduct of KAAC election is yet to be declared and the party is prepared for it. Teron also gave a detailed party programme to be taken up from April 7 to 20. Later, the CEM along with district party president Teron and party workers attended the online Sthapana Diwas on party foundation day by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Meanwhile, the BJP also observed its 42nd foundation day in various parts of West Karbi Anglong district. The BJP, Chingthong Mandal Committee observed the day at the residence of the Mandal President's residence at Amterang in presence of executive member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Pradeep Rongpi, Chairman of Village Defence Committee, Chingthong, Khorsing Senar, Mandal President of the BJP, Joy Sing Bongrur, president of ST Morcha, Robinson Teron and party workers. In Bokajan LA, the party observed the day at Bokajan, Borjan, Sarupathar, Deopani, Nilip, Duarbagori and Socheng Dhenta. The BJP, West Karbi Anglong District Committee (BJP-WKADC) observed the day at its District Committee Office at Mouzard Gaon, West Karbi Anglong. The president of BJP, WKADC, Radip Ronghang in his speech appreciated the worker's discipline. He also thanked the high command for building the District Office in an open clean environment. He directed the party members to attend the office once a day to know the latest party program. Earlier, president Ronghang unfurled the BJP flag followed and paid floral tributes to former PM Lt Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The program was attended by member of Autonomous Council of KAAC, Chandra Br Chetry, Prabhat Ch Taro, Pawan Kr Ray, chairman of the Veterinary Development Board, Ditolal Hasnu and others.

3 IPL bookies arrested

IPL gambling going on in Tinsukia. We conducted a raid and arrested three persons in connection with IPL gambling. We arrested them while they were engaged in betting through online mode," said a police officer of Tinsukia police station. He said, "We have unlawful documents and their mobile phones which were used for IPL gambling. We have started our investigation against the IPL gambling racket in Tinsukia."

Six NLFB militants surrender

Alson Basumatary, Ghanawat said that the militants were trying to move to Myanmar for training and planning to recruit more cadres from Sonitpur and Chirang districts. Noting that some more cadres are hiding in Sonitpur district, the SP urged them to return to the mainstream at the earliest. Following the signing of the Bodo Accord in January 2020, a large number of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) militants surrendered while some went on to form the NLFB.

Deshmukh sent to CBI custody

probe agency had sought the court's permission to take the accused to its head office in New Delhi for interrogation via "scientific techniques". The judge, in his order, said, "Permission to take the accused to Delhi shall be subject to the opinion of an orthopedist from JJ Hospital." Deshmukh's lawyer claimed his client dislocated his shoulder after he slipped in the jail bathroom and hence he was admitted to the hospital last week for treatment. Pressing for the senior NCP leader's remand, special public prosecutor (SPP) Raj Mohan Chand, appearing for the CBI, said when the investigating officer went to jail for taking his custody (on Monday), it was found the accused had been shifted to the hospital without informing the court. "This was done to avoid custody... this is not proper conduct on part of the accused," he said. Giving a brief history of the case, the SPP told court that when the accused was state home minister, he exercised "undue influence" over police postings and transfers. The CBI has alleged the accused had set a target of collecting Rs one crore per month from bars and orchestra owners in Mumbai through Waze. An amount of Rs 4.60 crore had been collected from them between December 2019 and February 2021, the probe agency said. The probe agency sought Deshmukh's custody for 10 days, saying he is required to be confronted with other accused persons as well as some witnesses in order to "unearth the truth and to root out contradictions on vital facts in their explanations". The investigation is at a crucial stage and Deshmukh's remand is very essential to unearth the deep-rooted conspiracy, it said. Deshmukh's advocate Aniket Nikam opposed the probe agency's plea, saying it is "absolutely not tenable" in the eyes of law as it has been filed without following procedures laid down under the CrPC.

Parliament passes criminal

Shah said the bill has been brought to ensure that police and investigators remain two steps ahead of criminals. "I want to assure you that this is not going to violate the privacy of anyone," Shah said, seeking to assuage the concerns of Opposition MPs. The data collected will be completely secure, he said. "No provision of this bill permits performing narco analysis, polygraph test and brain mapping of any prisoner," the Home minister said. Shah said police will send fingerprint impressions to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), which will share the name of the person with the investigators only if it matches with the records present in the database. Police will not have access to fingerprint data of others, he said. "We will notify it after making a complete system. We will have to understand next generation crime and break their cycle as well. We want police, law enforcement agencies to be two steps ahead of criminals. This effort is to empower police," he said. Shah said the government intends to amend the Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and Evidence Act, and has invited suggestions from public. He said the government has created the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS), which has been adopted by 100 per cent police stations across the country.

The Home minister asserted he had no apprehensions about the proposed law being abused. "There has been misuse. We have fought and come out of it," Shah said. Responding to AAP member Sanjay Singh, who spoke about a false case allegedly filed against a party worker in Gujarat, Shah said he was not aware of that, but if you go to Bengal, you will lose your life, provoking a protest by TMC MPs. Shah also accused the Left of killing 100 BJP members for political reasons. Undeterred by the TMC protest, the Home minister continued to attack its government in West Bengal, saying its acts had "changed even the harshest definition of the word Fascism". Participating in the discussion, Sukhendu Sekhar Roy (TMC) opposed the bill calling it "draconian".

Abhayakhuti murder case: Three

rape and murder case of Abhayakhuti in Kokrajhar district was given in a Special Court, Kokrajhar by special judge Chaturvedi and three were found guilty. He also informed that the court has fixed the punishment hearing and final judgement is on 8th April into rape and murder case. It may be mentioned here that two minor girls of Abhayakhuti were raped and later murder by perpetrators in Kokrajhar. Bodies of the two girls were found hanging from a tree at a nearby jungle at Abhayakhuti. The incident took place on 11th June, 2021

J&K HC gives six weeks to Govt for identification of illegal foreign immigrants



JAMMU, April 6 (PTI): The Jammu and Kashmir High Court has given six weeks to the government to identify immigrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh who are illegally staying in the Union Territory.

A bench comprising chief justice Pankaj Mithal and justice Moksha Khajuria Kazmi passed the order on a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by advocate Hunar Gupta seeking deportation of such illegal immigrants.

"We direct the secretary home, UT of J&K to consider the matter and to evolve a mechanism for the identification of all illegal immigrants and to prepare a list after identifying them."

"The said exercise may be carried out, most promptly, within a

period of six weeks," the bench said in its order last week.

According to government data, over 13,700 foreigners, including Rohingya and Bangladeshi nationals, are settled in Jammu and Samba districts of Jammu and Kashmir, where their population has increased by over 6,000 between 2008 and 2016.

Over 200 Rohingyas, a Bengali-dialect speaking Muslim minority from Myanmar, are lodged in a holding centre at Kathua after they were found living illegally in Jammu city during a verification drive in March last year.

Earlier, senior counsel Sunil Sethi, appearing for the petitioner, said though it is very easy to identify such illegal migrants, the government should come up with a

complete mechanism for identifying them and submit a list of all such immigrants to the court.

The court noted that one of the orders dated May 24, 2017 passed in the PIL indicates that at that time the government had constituted a group of ministers to examine the various issues relating to illegal migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh.

"The group of ministers was supposed to take up the matter, examine it and furnish a report thereof. But till date, nothing has come on record. In the meantime, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated and the UT of J&K has been created," the order said.

Advocate General D C Raina and Additional Advocate General Raman Sharma appeared for the UT and the case was listed for hearing on July 15.

In his PIL, Gupta has demanded the deportation of illegal immigrants and also prayed for the withdrawal of all benefits given to them from the state exchequer and from the scheme and benefits meant for the residents of J&K.

The PIL claimed that the actual figures of these illegal immigrants are much more than the official figures.

Six programmes from India's Institutes of Eminence in top 100 in world: QS Ranking

NEW DELHI, April 6 (PTI): Six programmes at India's Institutes of Eminence (IoEs) have managed to break into the top 100 in the world in the latest 'QS Rankings by Subject' released on Wednesday.

India's highest-ranked university overall is the Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences for Dentistry which debuts at the 18th position while the Indian School of Mines (ISM) University, Dhanbad, also a new entrant, is the second-highest ranked varsity.

Four-and-a-half-years after the inception of the IoE scheme, its varsities have gained moderate ground on the global stage, London based QS said.

Counting only the eight declared public IoEs, four have increased their representation among the global top 100, while two programmes have fallen out of the top 100 for their academic discipline over the last year.

In total, 35 Indian programmes achieved top 100 positions - 10 more than the 2021 edition of the tables.

Five public IoEs which have figured in the top 100 include the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) which has jumped from 113 to 98 in mechanical engineering while IIT Madras now ranks in the 51-100 band for civil and structural engineering (previously 101-150), IIT Delhi ranks 92 for chemical engineering (previously 101-150 band), IIT Bombay is at the 99th spot in materials science (101-150 band previously) and IISc for



physics and astronomy ranks 91, up from 112.

The O P Jindal Global University, also an IoE, has been placed at the 70th position for Law.

Top institutes in India, both from the public and private sectors, were declared as IoEs by the education ministry in 2018.

Under the IoE scheme, public institutes received funds from the government to develop their research infrastructure and faculty and private ones were given freedom from regulators, so as to catapult these institutes to world rankings.

The 2022 QS World University Rankings by subject provides independent data on the performance of 274 programmes at 61 Indian higher education institutions, across 37 of the 51 academic disciplines ranked in this edition.

"One of the biggest challenges faced by India is educational - providing high-quality tertiary education in the face of exploding

demand: this much was recognised by 2020's NEP, which set the ambitious target of a 50 per cent gross enrolment ratio by 2035," said Ben Sower, QS research director.

"It should therefore provide some reassurance that the number of Indian programmes featuring across our 51 subject rankings has increased this year - from 233 to 274 - where it had been decreasing previously," Sower said.

"However, QS also notes that several programmes at India's privately-run IoE have made progress this year, demonstrating the positive role that well-regulated private provision can have in enhancing India's higher education sector," he added.

The rankings, compiled by global higher education analysts QS Quacquarelli Symonds, provide an independent comparative analysis of the performance of 15,200 individual university programmes, taken by students at 1,543 universities which can be

Arooj Aftab's journey to Grammys all about grit and constant learning

MUMBAI, April 6 (IANS): Brooklyn-based Pakistani vocalist Arooj Aftab, who became the first Pakistani woman to bag the coveted Grammy Award in the Best Global Performance category for her song 'Mohabbat', has faced quite a few challenges to achieve the feat.

Arooj was born to Pakistani parents in Saudi Arabia. She spent her teenage years in Lahore. Her parents often held musical evenings at their home in Lahore, but Aftab was not allowed to take music lessons, which they believed would impact her studies.

The 37-year old is a self-taught musician as she learnt the basics of music by listening to artistes such as Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Ustad Zakir Hussain, and the American jazz diva Billie Holiday, among others. In addition, she took an online music course. However, finding her calling, she soon relocated to Boston's prestigious Berklee School of Music to study musical production and engineering. Aftab



has worked on scoring for films and editing them including filmmaker Cary McClelland's 'Without Shepherds', which tells the story of six people in Pakistan in the wake of Benazir Bhutto's assassination.

She also composed the score for 'Bittu' by director Karishma Dev Dube, which was shortlisted for the Best Live Action Short Film at the 93rd Academy Awards. In addition, she has also worked with MTV and Vice supervising their music and video departments.

Interestingly, Arooj's award-winning song is a 'neo Sufi' version of a ghazal by Punjab-based poet Hafeez Hoshiyarpuri. 'Mohabbat karne wale kam na honge, teri mehfil mein lekin hum na honge', has been sung earlier by luminaries such as Mehdi Hassan, Farida Khanum, Ghulam Ali, and Indian legend Jagjit Singh.

Her third studio album 'Vulture Prince' which came after 'Bird Under Water' (2014)

and 'Siren Islands' (2018), was released to a wide critical acclaim, and attracted more attention after former US president Barack Obama included the track 'Mohabbat' on his 2021 summer favourites list.

TEAM DOWNEY TO ROLL OUT TWO 'SHERLOCK HOLMES' WEB SERIES



LOS ANGELES, April 6 (IANS): The 'Sherlock Holmes' film universe is all set to bleed into the medium of series. HBO Max is currently housing the early development on two shows tied to the films, sources told 'Variety'.

The potential shows would be set in the world of 2009's 'Sherlock Holmes' and 2011's 'Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows' starring Robert Downey Jr. as the master detective and Jude Law as Dr John Watson, which were inspired by the books of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Accord-

ing to the sources of 'Variety', the two shows would each focus on a new character that would be introduced in 'Sherlock Holmes 3'.

Robert Downey Jr. and Susan Downey will serve as executive producers on the shows along with Amanda Burrell of Team Downey. Lionel Wigram of Wigram productions will also executive produce, with Warner Bros. Television taking the onus of production. As per 'Variety', the Downeys first discussed creating "Sherlock Holmes" spinoff shows in 2020, though

no details about the characters the projects would focus on has come to light.

'Sherlock Holmes' has proven to be a massive hit for Warner Bros, with the film grossing over \$524 million worldwide against a reported budget of \$90 million. 'A Game of Shadows' went on to gross over \$543 million worldwide two years later. The third film was originally intended to be released in December 2020 but, due to unforeseen circumstances, it is not currently in production and does not have a specific release date.



Mrunal Thakur ready for 'Jersey' release, doesn't fear being typecast

MUMBAI, April 6 (IANS): Actress Mrunal Thakur, who will be soon seen in cricket drama 'Jersey' opposite Shahid Kapoor, believes that getting typecast in the industry should be the least of worries for an actor. For her, script selection rests on how relatable or interesting the role that's being offered is, the strengths of that character and most importantly the

story being told. Mrunal said: "For an actor to be cast in films with a great script and a great team backing it is of utmost importance. I don't fear being typecast because I know as an actor what and how I can differentiate the roles I'm essaying."

She explained: "I personally think that to play a similar character can actually pose a good challenge for me, because then it's my

calibre as an actor to bring something fresh to the screen."

And she concluded: "I personally feel very blessed and fortunate to get all kinds of roles that come my way. It is about giving your 100 per cent on screen and leaving the rest for the audience -- and that is exactly what I do."

'Jersey', directed by Gowtam Tinnur, is set to debut in theatres on April 14.

AJAY DEVGN REVEALS HOW 'RUNWAY 34' TOOK FLIGHT

MUMBAI, April 6 (IANS): Ajay Devgn, who is gearing up for his next film 'Runway 34', recently shared how the idea behind the film came into being.

The script of 'Runway 34', which will see Ajay doubling up as a director in addition to his portrayal of the lead character, was conceived during the first nationwide lockdown following the first wave of the pandemic in India. Talking about how the special journey of 'Runway 34' began, Ajay Devgn shared, "Two years ago, barely a month into the pandemic, when things seemed to be going slow, the writer-duo Sandeep Kewlani and Aamil Keeyan Khan narrated the script of 'Runway 34' to me. I liked the script but I wanted certain changes. As promised, they worked on it during the lockdown and came back to me with a refreshed version." Keeping the essence of the thriller intact, the actor-director further mentioned that the film is inspired by true events, "What I heard, I liked. The script is inspired by true events and they had made some changes for the big-screen adaptation. The first half has an element of thrill which the audience must experience. "In fact, each and every one of us will identify with the turbulence and that hollow feeling in the stomach when a flight hits an air pocket. I can't tell you more because it's a thriller and must be experienced."

"Coming back to the script, Sandeep and Aamil had



brought in the excitement and the drama. Then we worked on the script for another four months with my regular inputs. I was happy with the end result and also absolutely drawn to it. I decided this would be my third directorial. In December, 2020, we launched the film and started to shoot it as soon as the lockdown was partially withdrawn. Here we are today with a film that I am truly proud to represent," he added.

MUMBAI, April 6 (IANS): 'Lock Upp' contestant Mandana Karimi got upset with Payal Rohatgi as she misbehaved with Mandana and told her that "You are bitc**** behind your own mother."

Mandana also revealed that her parents have disowned her earlier but now things are fine in her family. Mandana feels that Payal is unnecessarily creating a hype about her relationship with her parents when everything is sorted in the family now.

Mandana told Paayal that: "I told you the details of what happened. I told her that my mom did not talk to me for six years. Now she is ok, all is well with my family. She is not here but now she is okay with the work I do."

Mandana explained the reason behind her argument with Paayal and shared: "I have been disowned by my own father and mother's families."

Further, Mandana said what Paayal had told her: "She (Payal) is that kind of person that she told me 'You are bitc**** behind your own mother.' Later, Mandana was seen crying on the show."

'Lock Upp' streams on ALTBalaji and MX Player.



Rishi Kapoor, Paresh Rawal 'made our lives easier', says Taaruk Raina



NEW DELHI, April 6 (IANS): From gorging on lip-smacking samosas to heart-shaped cutlets among many other mouth-watering delicacies, 'Sharmaji Namkeen' is a film that makes one hungrier, agrees promising young actor and food impresario Sanjay Raina's son, Taaruk Raina, who got a chance to share screen space with late veteran actor and a "complete foodie" Rishi Kapoor.

Going back in time and recalling the days of shooting for the film, Taaruk, who made his mark in Lionsgate Play's col-

lege life drama 'Jugaadistan' and the coming-of-age romantic comedy 'Mismatched' (Netflix), fondly reminisced about how the food spread out on the table helped him to connect with the two acclaimed stars of the film - Rishi Kapoor and Paresh Rawal. "Rishi Kapoorji was a massive foodie. You could talk to him about food for hours. So, I think it helped. Food was the central topic all the time. It made us blend easily," Taaruk, who plays Vincy Sharma, the Rishi Kapoor character's son, said. Rishi Kapoor played Brij Mohan Sharma, a widower laid

off from his job who discovers (and so does an admiring world) his talent for cooking. Other veteran actors

Food runs in Taaruk's DNA. His father, who first gained prominence in the 1990s as an Indipopper, is regarded as one of the finest exponents of Kashmiri cuisine, which he serves at his restaurant Mealability in the heart of Lutyens's Delhi.

"The film makes you hungrier," Taaruk recalled about 'Sharmaji Namkeen' in his conversation with IANS. "Everything that was shot was so beautifully done. Everything

looked so appetising. Food was at the centre of the film. There was a lot of eating on sets. We were eating in almost every scene and there was a lot of food involved."

For a young and talented actor, though, it was not only the experience of eating a lot of good food that made 'Sharmaji Namkeen', which is streaming on Prime Video, so special.

The actor still has to pinch himself to believe that he really got to share screen space with Rishi Kapoor and Paresh Rawal, who completed Kapoor's role after his death in 2020.

SABLE CRACKS 5000M MEET RECORD ON DEBUT ASSAM'S AMLAN BORGHOAIN SETS NATIONAL MARK

KOZHIKODE, April 6 (PTI): Assam's Amlan Borgohain scorched the track to set a new men's 200m national record by clocking 20.52 seconds on a rain-hit final day of the 25th National Federation Cup Senior Athletics Championships here on Wednesday. Avinash Sable, known for excelling in the steeplechase, rewrote the men's 5000m meet record with a fine effort over 13:39.43 that raised expectation that he could soon be claiming the national record standing in the name of Bahadur Prasad since 1992. Kartik Kumar's bid for the distance double came unstuck in the face of Sable's run.

The 23-year-old Borgohain sank Mohammed Anas Yahya's existing mark of 20.63 seconds in a race that saw the top three finish inside 21 seconds.

However, it was only Borgohain who matched the Asian Games qualifying standard set by the Athletics Federation of India. Having run successive sub-21-second races in September and March, he gave proof of his progress. The 23-year-old Borgohain, hailing from Meleng village in Assam's Jorhat district, has won a gold with the fifth fastest time ever by an Indian in only his second 200m competition at senior level last year. A fan of Cristiano Ronaldo and Sunil Chhetri, football was Borgohain's first love but he took up athletics once his armyman father was posted in Hyderabad, where they shifted from Assam. His father BC Borgohain retired as Subedar Major in 2009.

Running his maiden competitive race over the distance at the national level, Sable became the



fourth fastest Indian in the 12-1/2-lap race. In fact, it was the fastest 5000m by an Indian on home soil.

The top three finishers, including Uttar Pradesh's Abhishek Pal, met the Asian Games qualification criteria set by AFI.

The triple jump saw a pulsating contest with Eldhose Paul of Kerala breaking a 10-year-old meet mark when he leapt 16.99m to claim gold. On a day when Praveen Chithravel (Tamil Nadu) and Karthik Unnikrishnan (Kerala) also secured qualification marks for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games, Eldhose Paul won by a comfortable margin. Two 31-year-old hammer throwers, Sarita Romit Singh

(Uttar Pradesh) and Manju Bala Singh (Rajasthan), produced a riveting contest. Having traded the national record over the last so many years, they fought tooth and nail on Wednesday.

Manju Bala Singh led with 63.12m on her third try but Sarita Romit Singh won gold with 64.16m on her fifth attempt.

Manju Bala Singh also came up with a 64m throw on her last try but had to settle for silver. They pushed one another so competitively that it was the first time that both breached the 64m mark in the same competition.

They also earned qualification marks for the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games. In

the thrilling women's 200m final, Hima Das (Assam) held back a challenge from Aishwarya Kailash Mishra (Maharashtra) and Priya H Mohan (Karnataka). Hima Das stopped the clock in 23.63 seconds to win by one-hundredth of a second from 400m champion Aishwarya.

Priya H Mohan, who did not compete in the 400m, settled for third place with a personal best time. There was a similar contest in the men's 400m hurdles final, MP Jabir (Kerala) and T Santhosh Kumar (Tamil Nadu) coming home inside 51 seconds while Dhaval Mahesh Utekar (Gujarat) beat the fancied Ayyasamy Dharun (Tamil Nadu) to the bronze medal.

GLTA felicitates Riniki Bhuyan Sarma



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 6: A delegation of Guwahati Lawn Tennis Association (GLTA), led by its president Kalyan Kumar Das and general secretary Bhaskar Sarma felicitated noted social worker, chairperson and managing director of M/s Pride-East Entertainment Private Limited and a former tennis player who had represented the state in various national level tennis tournaments Riniki Bhuyan Sarma at her residence on Wednesday. The felicitation was offered as a humble recognition to Riniki Bhuyan Sarma for her invaluable help and support to GLTA's overall development activities since its inception. The GLTA's delegations presented Riniki Bhuyan Sarma a Cheleng Chadar, a bouquet among other gift items. Riniki Bhuyan Sarma, on accepting the felicitation, expressed her happiness and assured to extend all possible help and cooperation to the GLTA for its growth in the future.



contest that saw heavy exchange of punches but the Indian took the charge of the match in time and tilted the result in his favour by a split 4-1 decision.

In the men's 60kg semifinals, Varinder Singh was given a walkover against Palestine's Abdel Rahman Abunab.

Meanwhile in the men's quarterfinals bouts played earlier in the day, Amit Panghal emerged victorious while Rohit Mor

(57kg) made exit with a 0-5 loss to Thailand's Rujakran Juntong. Panghal, the silver medallists of the 2019 World Championships, won comfortably against Thanakon Aonyam of Thailand by unanimous decision in the men's 52kg contest.

Bhagyabati kachari also made her way into the women's 75kg semi-finals after outperforming another Thai opponent Ponnipa Chuttee in 5-0 win.

Thailand Open: Ashish, Monika, two other Indian boxers enter finals

NEW DELHI, April 6 (IANS): Indian boxer Ashish Kumar continued his brilliant form at the 2022 Thailand Open International Boxing tournament and entered the finals alongside country's three other pugilists in Phuket on Wednesday.

Monika, Govind Sahani and Varinder Singh were the other Indians to progress into the finals.

Ashish, who won gold medal in the last edition in the 75kg, lived up to the expectations and produced a flawless show to register an easy 5-0 win over Maikhel Roberdd Muskita of Indonesia in the men's 81kg semifinal. The 26-year-old Monika, who upstaged the two-time World Championships medallist Josie Gabuco in the previous round, also looked solid against her opponent Tran Thi Diem Kieu from Vietnam in the women's 48kg Last-4 bout as she notched up an equally dominating win by unanimous decision without breaking a sweat.

On the other hand, Govind had to work hard against Vietnam's Nguyen Linh Phung in the instantly fought men's 48kg last-4



NEW DELHI, April 6 (IANS): World Cup-winning player and the fifth highest run-getter in the Indian Premier League, David Warner expressed that he is excited to join the Delhi camp once again. The Australian started his IPL career with the Delhi franchise in 2009. "It's exciting to be back in the franchise which played a big part at the beginning of my IPL career. There are some familiar faces around and there are some new faces, so I'm excited to get into it," said the Australian.

Asked about his thoughts on Delhi Capitals' captain Rishabh Pant, Warner said, "I want to learn how to play the one-handed shots from Rishabh. He's a young guy learning the ropes of leadership and he has been an integral part of the Indian team as well. I am excited and I can't wait to bat with him in the middle."

Warner also spoke about the opportunity to work with head coach Ricky Ponting, "Ricky has had a

fair bit of success with DC. He was a great leader for Australia and now he has a lot of respect as a coach. I am looking forward to working with him."

Speaking about Delhi Capitals' next match against Lucknow Super Giants, the opening batter said, "We just need to put our best foot forward and play a complete game. Fielding is the biggest component of the game and if we can hold our catches and field as well as we can, then we can go a long way in this tournament."

RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA), April 6 (IANS): Mumbai City FC are set to make their debut in Asia's biggest club football competition, the 2022 AFC Champions League, when they take on Saudi Arabia's Al Shabab FC in their opening match on April 8 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The Islanders are placed in Group B in the West Region alongside Al Jazira (UAE), Al Shabab (Saudi Arabia), and Air Force Club (Iraq).

Ahead of their match, Mumbai City FC head coach Des Buckingham and vice-captain Mandar Rao Dessai spoke about a variety of topics including the team's ambition of creating history by becoming the first Indian club to win a game in the AFC Champions League. "This is only the second time a club from India has competed at this level after FC Goa last year. They picked up



three draws, so three points across the period, and they showed what Indian players and what Indian teams can do at this level. So for me, we want to try and do something no other Indian club has done before, which is to win a game at this competition and we

Babar Azam retains top spot, Imam-ul-Haq rises to No. 3

DUBAI, April 6 (IANS): Pakistan skipper Babar Azam has retained his top spot, while opener Imam-ul-Haq has risen to No.3 in the latest ICC Men's ODI Player Rankings for batting, following dominating performances in the three-match series against the Aaron Finch-led Australia at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. Pakistan rallied from 0-1 deficit to win the ODI series 2-1.

South African captain Dean Elgar, after scoring two half centuries in the first Test against Bangladesh is one of the players to gain a few spots in the latest ICC Men's Test Player Rankings. Elgar's scores of 67 and 64 in the opening Test have seen him move up three spots, up to No.13.

The Proteas won the Test by 220 runs after dismissing Bangladesh for just 53 in the second innings at Durban. Another star performer from the match was Mahmudul Hasan Joy, who became the first Bangladesh batter to score a Test ton against South Africa. His maiden century in just his third Test helped him jump 37 spots to No.66.

Meanwhile, there aren't any changes in the list of the top-10 batters, with Australian Marcus Labuschagne still sitting at the top, followed by fellow countryman Steve Smith and New Zealand captain Kane Williamson in the third position. In the bowling charts, Australia Test captain Pat Cum-



mins still tops the list followed by the India duo of Ravichandran Ashwin in the second spot and Jasprit Bumrah in the third. South Africa's Kagiso Rabada, who is unavailable for their home Test series against Bangladesh, slipped one spot and now stands at No.4, along with Shaheen Afridi who made a one-spot jump. South Africa spinner Keshav Maharaj, after his heroics in the first Test against Bangladesh, has moved up two spots to No.28, after registering figures of 7/32 in the second innings. Bangladesh

spinner Mehidy Hasan also gained four spots to join England's Chris Woakes at No.31 after figures of 3/94 and 3/85 in the Durban Test.

The all-rounders' chart remained unchanged with no significant gains. India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja maintains his top spot, followed by Ashwin at No.2 and West Indies' Jason Holder at No.3.

In the ODI rankings, Pakistani skipper Babar Azam further consolidated his No.1 ODI batter status. Babar smashed back-to-back centuries against Australia and made 276 runs during the three-match series at an average of 138.

Pakistani left-hander batter Imam-ul-Haq is the biggest mover in the ODI rankings. His top form against Australia in the recently concluded ODI series has helped him move up seven spots to No.3. Imam remained the highest run-getter of the series, scoring 298 runs in three matches at a stellar average of 149.

Meanwhile, Australia skipper Aaron Finch, who has recently struggled to find his rhythm, has slipped three spots to No.10. Travis Head who made full use of the opportunity to open innings for Australia, managed to gain five spots to No.34. In the bowling charts, Shaheen Afridi after his recent performance against Pakistan has made huge gains to make it into the top 10 in the ODI Rankings.

Priyanka scores as India women defeat Egypt in friendly

AMMAN (JORDAN), April 6 (IANS): Young Priyanka Devi netted a goal in the 30th minute as the India women's senior football team defeated Egypt by a solitary goal in the first friendly match played at the Prince Mohammed Stadium in Zarqa. In a late-evening match on Tuesday, the first half began with the Indian side pressing hard to seize the initiative. Captain Ashalata Devi tried to earn an early lead in the 18th minute via her shot from distance but Anju, who latched on to the ball, missed the opportunity.

A couple of minutes later, Manisha almost scored the opener through Dalima's pass from the right, but the ball was collected by the Egyptian custodian.

Before the opposition could settle into the game, a sudden strike by Priyanka in the 30th minute gave India the lead. Dalima managed to pass the ball to Priyanka through Manisha's brilliant cross from the left and eventually, the young midfielder found the back of the net.



The second half was played out on similar lines with India creating more opportunities, as head coach Thomas Dennerby made his first change at the restart, replacing forward Renu with Pyari Xaxa.

Ten minutes after the resumption, Pyari came close to scoring in the 53rd minute as she got on the end of a cross from Manisha with an excellent run, but the shot was saved by the keeper. A couple of more substitutions followed as

Sandhya came in place of Anju Tamang, and Soumya and Ratanbala were introduced in place of Grace and Priyanka Devi, respectively.

Egypt captain Engy Ahmed Sayed tried her luck from close range before the hour mark, but Sowmya stood tall to deny her. Hayam Abdellatif had the final effort for Egypt in the dying minutes but her effort landed safely into Sowmya's gloves.

Ecclestone, Haynes, Wolvaardt nominated for ICC Women's Player-of-the-Month award

DUBAI, April 6 (IANS): England left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone, Australia opener Rachael Haynes and South Africa opening batter Laura Wolvaardt on Wednesday were nominated for the ICC Women's Player-of-the-Month award, said the cricket's global governing body.

Ecclestone, currently the top-ranked bowler in ODIs and T20s, produced some brilliant bowling performances in the recently-finished ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in New Zealand to become the tournament's leading wicket-taker with 21 wickets in nine matches.

It also includes a career-best 6/36 in

the semifinal against South Africa at Christchurch. Her outstanding bowling throughout the tournament helped England reach another World Cup final, where they were defeated by Australia by 71 runs.

Australia had plenty of heroes in their side who helped them clinch their seventh World Cup title on Sunday. But Haynes' contribution at the top of the order was one of the biggest positives for the Meg Lanning-led side throughout the tournament.

Haynes scored 497 runs in nine matches, averaging 62.12, to finish as the tournament's second-highest run-getter. Her three half centuries and a

brilliant century in their opening match of the tournament against England helped Australia get solid opening starts alongside Alyssa Healy throughout the tournament.

It ultimately propelled Australia to lift the trophy for the seventh time. Talking about good performances, Wolvaardt batted with supreme consistency in the World Cup. She led South Africa's batting order and made some fine contributions at the top.

With five half centuries in eight matches, Wolvaardt scored 433 runs at an average of 54.12, becoming the fourth-highest run-getter of the tournament.

IPL 2022: David Warner 'excited' to return to Delhi Capitals

NEW DELHI, April 6 (IANS): World Cup-winning player and the fifth highest run-getter in the Indian Premier League, David Warner expressed that he is excited to join the Delhi camp once again. The Australian started his IPL career with the Delhi franchise in 2009. "It's exciting to be back in the franchise which played a big part at the beginning of my IPL career. There are some familiar faces around and there are some new faces, so I'm excited to get into it," said the Australian.



Asked about his thoughts on Delhi Capitals' captain Rishabh Pant, Warner said, "I want to learn how to play the one-handed shots from Rishabh. He's a young guy learning the ropes of leadership and he has been an integral part of the Indian team as well. I am excited and I can't wait to bat with him in the middle."

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Want to win a game at AFC Champions League, says Mumbai City's coach

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three draws, so three points across the period, and they showed what Indian players and what Indian teams can do at this level. So for me, we want to try and do something no other Indian club has done before, which is to win a game at this competition and we

take it from there," head coach Buckingham stated. "We've got a very important game against an excellent team in two days. But for me, it would be trying to create our own relative success and history. And, that would be for me, trying to win a game at this

level," he said.

Ahead of the AFC Champions League, Mumbai City FC have had a successful preparatory camp in Al Forsan in Abu Dhabi, UAE. They also played two friendly games against UAE Pro League side Al Ain FC and Sec-

ond Division club Al Hilal United FC.

Speaking about the team's preparedness, Buckingham said, "Both the friendly games are going to serve a great purpose for us going into not just our first game, but for the six across the Champions League because as I said, we will be up against very good players and teams."

Meanwhile, vice-captain Mandar Rao Dessai expressed his excitement for the team's historic participation in the 2022 AFC Champions League.

"I think all the players are excited for this moment. We just want to start the campaign in a positive way, so that we can have good results in the competition," said Mandar. "We know how the level will be, and the moment we reached Abu Dhabi, it was a fresh start for us. We only took positives from the ISL season."



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