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M'laya govt constitutes regional committees to initiate talks with stakeholders Assam-Meghalaya border talks next month: Conrad

SHILLONG, March 22 (NNN): Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma informed on Wednesday that the second round of border talks for resolving the remaining six areas of difference with Assam will be held next month.

Sangma told the Assembly that the regional committees have been reconstituted three days ago.

The two deputy chief ministers – Prestone Tynsong and Sniawbhalang Dhar – will head the regional committees for Ri Bhoi district and West Jaintia Hills district respectively while cabinet minister Paul Lyngdoh will be the chairman of the regional committee for West Khasi Hills district.

"In April, we will initiate the first round of talks," the chief minister said while replying to a special motion moved by opposition Congress legislator Charles Marngar on the need to discuss the second phase of interstate boundary settlement and the need of reviewing the MoU signed between the two chief ministers.



He also said that the government will ask the regional committees to have a detailed discussion with all stakeholders to really understand the points and concerns of the people living in the border areas.

"We will have a deep consultation and we will take all stakeholders (including autonomous district councils, different heads and others) into confidence before we decide on how to move forward on this," Sangma assured. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Government to renovate all anganwadi centres: Himanta CM distributes terminal benefits to anganwadi workers and helpers

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 22: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma distributed terminal benefits to altogether 793 anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers of the state in a programme organised by the Women and Child Development Department at Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati on Wednesday.

It is to be mentioned that the government of Assam has taken steps to provide one-time financial assistance to the anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers who retire at the age of 60 with effect from April 1, 2022 in recognition of their invaluable services rendered in anganwadi centres.

Under this initiative, one-time assistance of ₹ 4 lakh each for anganwadi workers, ₹ 3 lakh each for mini anganwadi center workers and ₹ 2 lakh each for anganwadi helpers will be provided in phases.

In addition, the state government has



decided to provide 50 percent terminal benefit to anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers who have voluntarily retired after 10 years of continuous service.

Similarly the financial assistance will be provided to the families of deceased anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers who have rendered 10 years of

continuous service.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said that Assam is the first state in the country to provide such terminal benefits to anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers and the financial assistance would immensely help them.

The chief minister while underlining various steps taken by Prime Minister

Narendra Modi for retired personnel said that the anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers of the state would be immensely benefitted if they could be enrolled in Atal Pension Scheme in future and some of the premiums are paid by the state government.

The chief minister urged the anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers to continue visiting their respective centres from time to time after retirement.

He further said that the state government has decided to allow retired teachers to resume teaching in school if they desire to do so. The decision was taken to ensure that the teachers' relationship with the institute and the students continues and the students can benefit from the long experience of these teachers, he added.

The chief minister further said that the importance of the Women and Child Development Department has increased manifold due to various government schemes for (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

HT BRIEFS

New Catfish species

KOLKATA: A new Catfish species has been discovered by scientists of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in Arunachal Pradesh, a statement said. The new species has been named 'Exostoma Dhritiae' after Dhriti Banerjee, the first woman director of the ZSI, as a mark of honour for her contributions to research on the fauna of the country, it stated. The new species was found in Siking stream, a tributary of Siang River in Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is a small fish found in streams in these hills and locally called 'Ngorang' by local tribals, it added.

Timber seized

KHERONI: Based on secret information, the forest officials from Southern Range, Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong launched an operation in Kheroni. Led by range officer Harsing Kramsa, a pickup truck, bearing registration number AS01 PC 8063, loaded with illegal timber was seized in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong while it was on its way to Lanka. The seized timber is worth ₹ 40,000 and no one has been arrested in the operation so far.

Solar lights installed

DIPHU: As part of its Civic Action Programme 2022-23, the 20 Bn CRPF has installed 10 solar street lights in the village of Rongmirdan here in Karbi Anglong. The solar street lights were inaugurated by the deputy commissioner of Karbi Anglong, Madhumita Bhagwati in a function which was presided over by the Commandant, Tilak Raj (2-1/c). The function was attended by Member of Autonomous Council (MAC), Tilottoma Hasnu; village headman Gandhiram Rongphar and officers and jawans of the 20 Bn CRPF and villagers. The 20 Bn CRPF under the aegis of IG (Ops), Jorhat sector has been carrying out Civic Action Programme for the welfare and essential requirements of the poor and needy people in KA and WKA.

G20 RIIG conference to deliberate on building a sustainable and circular bio-economy

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 22: Delegates from G20 members, guest countries, international organisations and invited participants from the scientific community will deliberate on the ways towards building a sustainable and circular bio-economy at the G20 Research and Innovation Initiative Gathering (RIIG) Conference to be held on March 23-24 at Dibrugarh, Assam.

About 100 delegates from the scientific community will be present on the occasion which will be coordinated by the department of Biotechnology of the Union Ministry of Science and Technology, an official release said on Wednesday.

The department's secretary Dr

Srivari Chandrasekhar, who is the G20 RIIG Chair, will lead the conference proceedings.

The event will bring together key actors, including national authorities and experts from the G20 members responsible for planning, setting up new, and managing existing programmes on the subject.

The area of focus will include challenges and opportunities in agriculture, de-carbonisation of industry as well as bio-energy and bioresource management.

The conference will also deliberate on national and regional programmes and country experiences, regulatory environment and public/private sector collaboration, role of research, development and innovation (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

PM lays stress on Covid-appropriate behaviour Review meet on Covid, influenza situation

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): Amid a spike in influenza and Covid-19 cases in the country in the past two weeks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday chaired a high-level meeting and directed officials to enhance genome sequencing while also emphasizing on Covid-appropriate behaviour.

India has recorded 1,134 new coronavirus cases, while the active cases increased to 7,026, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday. The death toll climbed to 5,30,813 with five deaths. One death each has been reported in Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat and Maharashtra while one fatality was reconciled by Kerala, the data updated at 8 am stated.

Modi chaired the meeting to assess the Covid-19 and influenza



situation in the country in terms of preparedness of health infrastructure and logistics, status of the vaccination campaign, emergence of new Covid-19 variants and influenza types and their public health implications for the country, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

This high-level review meeting comes in the backdrop of a spike in influenza cases in the country and rise of Covid cases in the past two weeks.

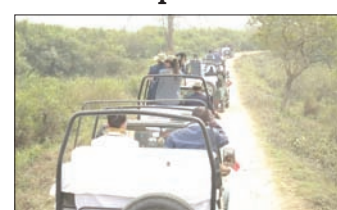
During the meeting, a comprehensive presentation was made

covering the global Covid situation including the rising cases in India by secretary, Health, Rajesh Bhushan.

The Prime Minister was briefed that India has been witnessing a slight rise in new cases with average daily cases reported as 888 and weekly positivity reported as 0.98 percent in the week ending March 22. However, 1.08 lakh daily average cases have been reported globally during the same week.

The action taken on the directions given by Modi during the last Covid review held on December 22, 2022 was also briefed, the statement said. He was informed that availability and prices of 20 main Covid drugs, 12 other drugs, eight buffer drugs and one influenza drug is being monitored. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Safaris in KNP to remain closed on April 6-7



GUWAHATI, March 22 (PTI): The jeep and elephant safaris at the Kaziranga National Park in Assam will remain closed for tourists for two days from April 6 in view of the Elephant Festival, which is likely to be attended by President Droupadi Murmu, an official said. The two-day 'Gaj Utsav-2023' will begin on April 6 and the jeep and elephant safaris will remain closed on April 6-7, Eastern Assam Wildlife divisional forest officer, Ramesh Gogoi, said on Wednesday.

A notice from the divisional forest officer of the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division read, "In view of the celebration of 'Gaj Utsav 2023' organised by the Environment and Forest Department, Govt. of Assam and MoEF & CC, Govt. of India, the Jeep Safari & Elephant Safari in all ranges viz., Kaziranga, Bagori, Burapahar and Agortali shall be closed for tourists from 6th to 8th April, 2023."

The safaris will remain closed in all the ranges of the national park which include Kohora, Bagori, Burapahar and Agortoli, he said.

The President is scheduled to arrive at the park, famed for its one-horned rhinoceros, on April 6 and attend the festival on both days.

The festival is an annual event organised at the national park and this year both the Union and state departments for Environment and Forests are organising it. The event is held to protect and conserve the Asiatic elephant and find ways to resolve the increasing man-elephant conflict in the state. According to the last census in 2017, Assam has 5,719 wild elephants, the second-highest population of the animal in the country after Karnataka.

Two 'corrupt' lat mandals in Vigilance net

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 22: The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption on Wednesday arrested two lat mandals from two different places of the state on corruption charges.

According to a release issued by the directorate, Md Azahar Ali Ahmed, lat mandal of Baghor circle office, Barpeta was arrested by sleuths of the directorate of vigilance and anti-corruption for demanding and accepting bribe for demarcation of the complainant's land. The official was arrested while negotiating payment of a bribe from the complainant. As per the FIR, the lat mandal was arrested with ₹ 20,000.

"In this connection, a case has been registered in ACB Police Station on 22/03/2023 vide ACB P.S. Case No. 18/2023 U/S 7(a) of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018) in this connection, and necessary legal follow up actions are underway," the release added. In another such incident, a lat mandal of the office of the circle



officer, Biswanath Revenue Circle was also arrested while accepting a bribe of ₹ 3,000 for completing the process of mutation of the complainant's land.

Unwilling to pay the bribe, the complainant approached the Directorate for taking necessary legal action against the above-mentioned public servant.

A case has been registered in ACB Police Station on 22/03/2023 vide ACB P.S. Case No. 16/2023 U/S 7(a) of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018) in this connection, the directorate release stated.

Publicity blitzkrieg in Delhi, other metropolitan cities PM Modi to attend biggest Bihu extravaganza

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 22: The Himanta Biswa Sarma-led BJP government is launching a publicity blitzkrieg in the national capital to celebrate the upcoming Rongali Bihu to make it the largest congregation of 11,000 Bihu dancers on April 14.

The government is leaving no stone unturned to make the upcoming Bihu event in Guwahati the greatest spectacle in terms of a congregation of more than 10,000 Bihu dancers and to make an entry into the Guinness Book of World Records.

The event to be held at Sarusajai Indoor Stadium in Guwahati will be graced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Invitations are being extended to the Governors, chief ministers, Union ministers, diplomats of G20 & ASEAN countries and other dignitaries for the



big event.

Chief minister Sarma is closely monitoring the preparations for the upcoming event and to make it a roaring success.

"The Chief Minister has been monitoring the preparations to the minutest details so that Bihu, the lifeline of Assamese culture is known to the whole world," said a senior state government official

privy to the development.

Taking to micro blogging platform, twitter, chief minister Sarma said, "Preparations are in full swing for 14 April, when over 11,000 Bihu dancers will create history by performing together at Sarusajai Stadium in august presence of Hon PM @narendramodi ji. Reviewed arrangements at the venue & asked officials to make

the event truly memorable."

Master trainers have been trained to impart the subtle nuances of the Bihu dance form to the scores of dancers roped in from different districts across the state.

The chief minister himself was present when training of master trainers was underway at Sarusajai Sports Complex, the venue for the biggest Bihu event.

"I am delighted to be present at Sarusajai Stadium, where training of master trainers is underway for the grand Bihu event. Assam is all set to create a World Record with 11,000 dancers participating in the event on April 14 which will be graced by Adaraniya @narendramodi ji."

Hoardings have come up in the waiting sheds of bus stops in prominent places of the national capital welcoming everyone to join in the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Multi-tier security rolled out in Dibrugarh jail after shifting of Amritpal Singh's aides

DIBRUGARH, March 22 (PTI): A multi-tier security arrangement has been made at Dibrugarh Central Jail in Assam, where seven associates of radical preacher Amritpal Singh, including his uncle, are currently lodged, the district's deputy commissioner Biswajit Pegu said on Wednesday.

The Punjab police recently launched a massive crackdown in the northern state, arresting several supporters of Amritpal Singh, the chief of pro-Khalistan outfit 'Waris Punjab De'.

Security has been beefed up in and around the jail since March 19, when initially four members of the outfit were shifted here by the Punjab police, Pegu told reporters here.

On Tuesday, three others, including Amritpal's uncle Harjit Singh, were detained under the National Security Act (NSA), and brought to



Dibrugarh, around 2,500 km away from Punjab.

"Seven members of Waris Punjab De are lodged in Dibrugarh jail as of today. They have been kept in high-security cells. The security system for NSA detainees is different compared to other prisoners," Pegu explained.

According to sources in the jail, a team of elite black panther Assam police commandos have been entrusted with securing the outer perimeter of the jail, while the

CRPF, Assam Police personnel and prison guards have taken up the responsibility of inner security.

The entire outer boundary of the jail has been fitted with CCTVs.

Besides Harjit Singh, the other members of the outfit lodged in the jail are Daljeet Kalsi, Basant Singh, Gurmeet Singh Bhukanwala, Bhagwant Singh alias 'Pradhan Mantri' Bajeka, Kulwant Singh Dhaliwal and Gurinder Pal Singh.

The crackdown on Waris Punjab De began weeks after Amritpal and his supporters stormed the Ajnala police station near Amritsar to secure the release of an arrested associate.

The episode had raised fears over the possibility of the return of Khalistani militancy to the state that borders Pakistan. WPD was formed by actor-activist Deep Sidhu.

Amritpal took over as its chief a month after his death last year.

6G initiative shows India's confidence, nation becoming big telecom tech exporter: PM

'Before 4G, India was only a user of telecom technology, but now India is moving fast to become a big exporter of telecom technology'

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday unveiled the 6G vision document of the country and said initiatives around 6G within six months of the 5G rollout show India's confidence.

He said from being a mere consumer of telecom technology, India is now moving fast to become a big exporter of that technology.

"Within six months of the 5G rollout, today we are talking about 6G. This shows the confidence of India. Today we have brought the vision document to the fore. This will become a big base for the rollout of 6G," Modi said.

The vision document released by Department of Telecom states that while 5G technology promises a speed of 40-1,100 Mbps with the potential to hit maximum speed of 10,000 Mbps, 6G will offer ultra-low latency with speeds up to 1 terabit per second—which is 1,000 times more than the top speed of 5G.

The prime minister at the event inaugurated the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Area Office and Innovation Centre, which has been set up in the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT) campus. It will be fully funded by India.

He said the ITU office in India will help create the right environment for 6G in the country.

"Before 4G, India was only a user of telecom technology, but now India is moving fast to become a big exporter of telecom technology," he said. The prime minister said that technology that has been successfully developed indigenously is getting attention from across the world.

He said India has two main powers— "Trust and Scale".

"Without trust and scale we cannot take technology to every nook and corner. I will say that trust is a prefix to present day technology. With 100 crore mobile phones, India is the most connected democracy of the world. Cheap smart-



phones and cheap data has transmogrified India," Modi said.

He said digital inclusion has taken place at a large scale in India with digital payments, direct benefit transfer, JanDhan, Aadhaar, rapid rollout of broadband services etc.

"Telecom technology is not just a mode of power in India but it is a mission to empower," Modi said.

Talking about India's telecom success story, Modi said the number of internet users has increased from 25 crore in 2014 to 85 crore.

He said internet connections in rural areas have overtaken that of urban centres, which shows the way digital power is reaching every nook and corner of the country.

The prime minister said the government and private sector have jointly laid out 25 lakh kilometers of optical fibre in the country which includes connectivity to about 2 lakh gram panchayats.

"The effect of all this is that our digital economy is growing 2.5 times faster than the overall economy of the country," Modi said.

He said India will set up 100 new 5G labs in the coming days.

"These labs will help in developing 5G applications as per the unique needs of India," he said.

Modi said India is one of the countries to have rolled out 5G mobile technology at the fastest pace. He said the services have been expanded to 125 cities within 120 days of the launch of 5G.

Stressing that India's telecom and digital model is smooth, secure, transparent and trusted, the prime minister said this decade is 'tech-ade'.

He said the 5G standard developed in India is now part of the global 5G system.

"We will also work with ITU in standardisation of future technologies," Modi said.

He announced that the World Telecommunications Standardization Assembly of ITU will be held in October next year in Delhi wherein representatives from all over the world will visit India. "I am giving a challenge to intellectuals in this area that we do something before October that should be most relevant for the poorest of the poor country. This decade is India's 'tech-ade'.

India's telecom and digital model is smooth, secure and transparent and all the friendly countries of South Asia can take advantage of this," Modi said.

ITU is the United Nations' specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs) which coordinates with all the member countries to create global standards for telecom technologies.

India was a founding member of ITU when it was formed in 1865 as the International Telegraph Union but this is the first time that ITU is opening in the South Asian region with India as the host country.

International Telegraph Union was renamed as International Telecommunication Union in 1932 and became a specialised agency of the United Nations in 1947. India signed a Host Country Agreement in March 2022 with ITU for establishment of an area office.

Ukraine, IMF agree on USD 15.6 billion loan package

FRANKFURT, March 22 (AP): Ukraine and the International Monetary Fund have agreed on a USD 15.6 billion loan package aimed at shoring up government finances severely strained by Russia's invasion and leveraging even more support by reassuring allies that Ukraine is pursuing strong economic policies and fighting corruption.

Ukraine's finance ministry said on Wednesday that the programme will "help to mobilise financing from Ukraine's international partners, as well as to maintain macrofinancial stability and ensure the path to post-war reconstruction after Ukrainian victory in the war against the aggressor".

The loan programme will run for four years, with the first 12 to 18 months focusing on helping Ukraine close its massive budget deficit and easing the pressure to print money to use for spending, the IMF said in a statement on Tuesday.

Printing money to fund people's pensions, state salaries and basic services can make things worse by fuelling inflation and destabilising the currency.

The remainder of the programme will focus on supporting Ukraine's bid for European Union membership and post-war reconstruction.

The IMF deal is expected to leverage even more money for Ukraine because it provides evidence to potential donor governments, including in the Group of Seven major democracies and the European Union, that Ukraine's government is following sound economic policies.

The agreement, which still needs approval from the IMF's executive board, "is expected to help mobilise large-scale concessional financing from Ukraine's international donors and partners over the duration of the programme," Gavin Gray, the IMF's mission chief for Ukraine, said in a statement.

The Washington-based IMF said Ukrainian authorities demonstrated their commitment to healthy economic policy and met all agreed-upon goals during a preliminary consultation. The loan programme goes beyond previous IMF practice by lending to a country at war, under new rules that allowed assistance due to circumstances of "exceptionally high uncertainty".



Ukraine massively increased military spending while the economy shrank by around 30 per cent in 2022, hitting tax revenue.

The result was a huge budget deficit that has been covered by outside financing from the US, the EU and other allies. The aid has helped the country end its excessive reliance on money printed by the central bank and loaned to the government, an emergency step considered necessary early in the war but that could fuel inflation and send the currency plunging if prolonged.

Before the war, Ukraine had made progress in reforming its banking system and making government contracts more transparent. But it still ranked 122 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's corruption perceptions index.

Its pre-war economy was characterised by political involvement from wealthy individuals known as oligarchs and by slow progress on improving the legal system perceived as too open to political influence.

The IMF, however, said that after the preliminary consultations, the government has "made progress in reforms to strengthen governance, anti-corruption and rule of law, and lay the foundations for post-war growth, although the agenda of reforms in these areas remains significant."

Several senior officials, including deputy ministers and governors of front-line regions, were fired in January after allegations of corruption, some related to military spending, embarrassed the government. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected in 2019 on an anti-establishment, anti-corruption platform.

ICAR & World Bank host International Conference under NAHEP

GUWAHATI, March 22: The International Conference on Blended Learning Ecosystem for Higher Education in Agriculture 2023 was hosted jointly by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the World Bank from March 21-23 as part of the National Agricultural Higher Education Project's (NAHEP) Resilient Agricultural Education System (RAES) development initiative.

More than 900 experiential learning units where students can get hands-on experience for six months and become proficient in subjects as diverse as genomics and tea processing have been set up at various universities. The digital content repository has more than 160 digitized courses and faculty members have uploaded more than 10000 videos.

Addressing the Conference, Chief Guest and Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar stated, "Since the past five years, the ICAR has reached a new height. When we launched Krishi Megh nobody knew it would act as a game-changer during the pandemic as it did not let India's education system be as adversely affected as other countries. I believe even in the future; it will help us in achieving many new accolades. Blended learning and the agricultural sector will help India in becoming a developed nation status by 2047. Agriculture, which is the backbone of India's economy, can thrive with limited funding due to technology and knowledge."

Dr. Himanshu Pathak, Secretary Department of Agriculture Research and Education (DARE) and Director General (ICAR) said, "I would like to thank the World Bank for being a committed partner to the Government of India. I believe it will further promote research and education. By 2047, India will become a developed nation as per our PM Narendra Modi's vision. To address the challenges of climate change and low productivity, education will play a crucial role. Our young students and scientists need to be equipped to combat all problems and experiment to learn new things which can be done through a blended learning ecosystem."

About 1,000 students and 450 faculty members from 20 agricultural universities have completed



international training at 89 institutes in 27 countries in 160 subjects under NAHEP to date. More than 900 experiential learning units where students can get hands-on experience for six months and become proficient in subjects as diverse as genomics and tea processing have been set up at various universities. The digital content repository has more than 160 digitized courses and faculty members have uploaded more than 10000 videos.

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Gold tumbles ₹ 480; silver declines ₹ 345

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): Gold price tumbled ₹ 480 to ₹ 58,770 per 10 gram in the national capital on Wednesday amid a fall in rates of the precious metal internationally, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at ₹ 59,250 per 10 gram in the previous trade. Silver also declined ₹ 345 to ₹ 68,850 per kilogram.

"Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at ₹ 58,770 per 10 gram, down ₹ 480 per 10 gram," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas market, both gold and silver were quoting lower at USD 1,939 per ounce and USD 22.34 per ounce, respectively. Comex gold prices traded lower in Asian trading hours on Wednesday after prices corrected by almost 1.80 per cent in the previous session. In the last two sessions, comex gold price fell more than 3 per cent from its recent peak of USD 2,010 per ounce as fear of banking crisis eased and investors trimmed their position before the Federal Reserve policy outcome later on Wednesday, Gandhi said.

Ratan Kumar Kesh appointed ED of Bandhan Bank

KOLKATA, March 22 (PTI): Private lender Bandhan Bank on Wednesday announced the appointment of Ratan Kumar Kesh as its executive director.

The bank said in a statement that pursuant to the recommendation of the board, RBI has granted approval of Kesh as ED.

The appointment will be effective from March 31, 2023, for a period of three years subject to approval of the shareholders of the bank.

Realme unveils C55 with 64MP camera, 33W charging

GUWAHATI, March 22: Realme unveiled its new C-Series that delivers exceptional performance and reflects the young generation's personality and style. The new range of C Series smartphones will lead the segment with its unparalleled tech upgrades in four critical areas including camera, storage, charging, and design. Democratizing large storage in this segment, Realme C55 offers up to 8+128 GB of storage with up to 16GB of dynamic RAM. Powered by MediaTek Helio G88 Chipset, 33W Supervooc charging, and 90Hz FHD+ display, Realme C55 is equipped with a 64MP camera, the highest resolution in the segment.

Realme C55 will be available in two stunning colors - Sunshower and Rainy Night at ₹ 10999 for 4GB+64GB, ₹ 11999 for 6GB+64GB, and ₹ 13999 for 8GB+128GB. Pre-orders on realme.com and Flipkart will start from March 21 - 27, with bank offers of up to ₹ 1000 on realme.com and exchange offers of ₹ 1000 on Flipkart.

Commenting on the occasion of the launch, Madhav Sheth, CEO Realme India, VP, Realme, and President, Realme International Business Group said, "As a brand, Realme is committed to empowering their users with the latest technology that fits their lifestyle. With brand new strategic upgrades, the new range of C Series smartphones will lead the segment with leap-

forward technology and will democratize the technology in four key areas: camera, storage, charging, and design. With its sleek design, impressive performance, and outstanding features, the Realme C55 is the perfect choice for those who demand more from their smartphones. We believe that the Realme C55 will set a new benchmark and be worth buying smartphones in the segment. We are confident that Realme C55 will also inspire and enable the youth to confidently express themselves and encourage them to chase and enjoy their champion moments in life."

Realme C55 sports a 90Hz FHD+ display, the largest display in the price segment for a smooth experience, and is also the slimmest smartphone in the segment with a thickness of just 7.89mm. It also boasts impressive performance, owing to its MediaTek Helio G88 chipset and 12nm process technology, earning it a remarkable Anutu benchmark score of 273,364. In a bid to enhance user convenience, the realme C55 introduced the first Mini Capsule in Android, bringing the best flagship-like experience to the entry-level segment. The mini capsule incorporates three critical features, including Charge Notification, Data Usage Notification, and Step Notification, all of which are designed to make life easier for users by providing them with useful information at a glance.

Karkinos Healthcare brings better cancer treatment to Manipur

GUWAHATI, March 22: Oncology centers offer hope to patients locked in a life-and-death situation. Yet, countless patients in Manipur often have to travel thousands of kilometers to meet a medical oncologist or a surgical oncologist. That the key to solving patient movement is to decentralize cancer care to the district level where public-private partnership models can be explored.

Addressing the same, Karkinos Healthcare in Imphal has partnered with the Government of Manipur to fill the gap in affordable and accessible cancer care in the state. Dr. Y Indibor Singh, Head-Radiation Oncology, Karkinos Manipur Cancer Care Institute and Research Centre informed that there had been a rapid stride in the field of cancer treatment during the last 2 to 3 decades. This has resulted in better cure prospects, early detection, and prevention as well. We can stop cancer cells from getting blood supply or kill them by enhancing the body's immune system. This we call molecular targeted therapy. It is a high-precision and personalized form of therapy since the drugs can specifically target cancer cells and kill them without damaging normal cells.

"With the advent of this modern radiation equipment and techniques, we can give high dose precision radiation therapy and increase the chance of cure and at the same time decrease the radiation-induced toxicity," added Dr. Y Indibor Singh.

Airbus partners with BITS Pilani WILP to upskill professionals in DA

MUMBAI, March 22 (PTI): Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) on Wednesday said Airbus in India has collaborated with its Work Integrated Learning Programmes (WILP) division to help upskill some of their professionals in Data Analytics (DA). "These are eventful times for the Indian aerospace sector, in the growth and development of which Airbus has played an important role for over five decades as an aircraft supplier," BITS Pilani Off-Campus Programmes and Industry Engagement Director G Sundar said in a statement.



NTPC, Axis Bank, Nestle, HCL Technologies and HDFC Bank were the major laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge gained 0.54 per cent and the midcap climbed 0.18 per cent.

Healthcare, commodities, FMCG, utilities, financial services and oil & gas were among the gainers.

On the other hand, telecommunication, consumer durables, metal and realty ended lower.

"Nifty rose for the second consecutive session on March 22 after a range-bound session. Asian stocks rose on Wednesday while European stocks struggled for momentum after a tentative recovery in the past two sessions, with investors looking ahead to a crucial monetary policy decision from the Federal Reserve amid turmoil in the banking sector," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

In Asia, Seoul, Japan, Hong Kong and Shanghai markets ended in the green. Equity markets in Europe were trading in positive territory during the afternoon trade. The US markets ended significantly higher on Tuesday.

Markets climb for 2nd day amid firm global trend

Healthcare, commodities, FMCG, utilities, financial services and oil & gas are among the gainers

MUMBAI, March 22 (PTI): Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty extended their gains for the second straight session on Wednesday, mainly due to buying in healthcare, financial and commodity stocks amid a firm trend in global equities.

However, sustained foreign fund outflows from the domestic equity markets capped the rise, traders said.

In a largely range-bound session, the 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 139.91 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at 58,214.59, with 18 of its constituents posting gains. During the day, the index witnessed a high of 58,418.78 and a low of 58,063.50.

The broader NSE Nifty climbed 44.40 points or 0.26 per cent to end at 17,151.90, with 33 of its scrips ending in the green.

"Staying afloat in a volatile trade, the domestic market managed to remain positive, with the optimism that the global banking system issue is behind us. Additionally, the volatility brought in from western markets ahead of the announcement of Fed policy and release of high UK inflation, tested market sentiments.

"The market has factored a 25 bps rate hike by Fed, and an in-line and less hawkish policy stance will attract bulls," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Among the Sensex stocks, Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv, Sun Pharma, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors, ICICI Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Hindustan Unilever and Power Grid were the major gainers.

Bosch appoints Guruprasad Mudlapur as its Managing Director

He will succeed Soumitra Bhattacharya who will be retiring from Bosch India after 28 years of service

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): Auto components major Bosch Ltd on Wednesday announced leadership changes with Guruprasad Mudlapur appointed as its Managing Director, and President of the Bosch Group in India with effect from July 1, 2023.

He will succeed Soumitra Bhattacharya who will be retiring from Bosch India effective June 30, 2023, after 28 years of service in various capacities, the company said in a regulatory filing.

Further, Bosch said from July 1, 2023, Sandeep Nelamangala, currently, Executive Director at Bosch Ltd and Executive Vice-President, Mobility Solutions at Bosch India, will be appointed as Joint Managing Director of Bosch Ltd.

Mudlapur will be responsible for the strategic growth and overall



performance of the business in the region. At the same time, he will continue to be chief technology officer for Bosch Ltd, it added.

He has more than 15 years of experience in the Bosch Group and has held various positions in engineering and business management. Most recently, he was joint managing director and chief technology officer of Bosch Ltd, the company said.

Previously, he was regional president and managing director of Bosch Automotive Electronics Pvt Ltd. The company said Bhattacharya will retire as president of the Bosch Group in India and from the board of management of Bosch Ltd. He took over the role of president of the Bosch Group in India and managing director for Bosch Ltd in 2017. Prior to that, he was joint managing director and chief financial officer for Bosch Ltd.

E-AUCTION FOR LEASING OF SLR				
E-Auction contract for leasing of SLR. Description: Parcel Space in SLR Coach (Single Compartment). Rate Unit: Per Trip Licensing Fee.				
Auction Catalogue No.: SLR-Leasing-026				
Seq No.	Lot No./Category			Trips/Days
AA/1	15967-SLR-F1-RNY-LEDO-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			313
AA/2	15908-SLR-F1-NHLN-TSK-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			522
AA/3	15818-SLR-F1-NHLN-SKHV-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/4	22411-SLR-F1-NHLN-ANVT-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			209
AA/5	15927-SLR-F1-RNY-NTSK-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			418
AA/6	15927-SLR-F2-RNY-NTSK-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			418
AA/7	05821-SLR-F1-RNY-DKGN-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/8	15614-SLR-F2-MZS-GHY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/9	15895-SLR-F2-RNY-MZS-22-3 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/10	05821-SLR-F1-RNY-DKGN-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/11	05801-SLR-F1-NBQ-GHY-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/12	15967-SLR-F1-RNY-LEDO-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			313
AA/13	15614-SLR-F1-MZS-GHY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/14	15895-SLR-F1-RNY-MZS-22-3 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/15	05801-SLR-F1-NBQ-GHY-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/16	15614-SLR-F1-MZS-GHY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/17	05801-SLR-F2-NBQ-GHY-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/18	15895-SLR-F1-RNY-MZS-22-3 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/19	05821-SLR-F2-RNY-DKGN-22-3 (Parcel-SLR)			731
AA/20	15927-SLR-F1-RNY-NTSK-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			418
AA/21	15967-SLR-F2-RNY-LEDO-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)			313
Auction Start Date & Time (All Lots) : 11:30 hrs. on 10-04-2023;				
Auction Close Date & Time : 15:20 hrs. on 10-04-2023. The press notification has already published in the IREPS web through e-Auction portal www.ireps.gov.in on 17-03-2023.				
DRM (C), Rangiya				
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY				
"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"				

Thousands protest against 'proposed airstrip' in Hojai

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, March 22: Thousands of locals gathered at the office of the sub-divisional magistrate of Hojai sub-division in Hojai recently to protest against the "proposed site of construction of an airstrip".

As per information, the people of the villages in Hojai sub-division are worried about the commencement of what they have described as "the initial work of acquiring land in about five villages on the right side of the national highway".

Thousands of men and women, holding banners and placards, marched on the national highway 54 while opposing the "proposed airstrip". "Our land, our rights, blood, we will give blood but not land, people who have been living here for hundreds of years



cannot not be evicted, the temples, mosques, cremation grounds, graveyards cannot be destroyed, the central government will make us landless," the protesters vehemently raised slogans. It is to be noted that in the year 1960,

the Hajong refugees settled on government land in Hojai's Tengripara area. Locals said that in addition to establishing various government institutions including schools, playgrounds, in these areas, temples, mosques, madras-

as, cemeteries etc. were established in the pre-independence period.

"Many commercial sites have come up on both sides of the four-lane national highway in these areas," said a local.

The protesters fear that if the land is acquired in these areas, the greater region will be "economically affected". The protesters rather suggested construction of an airstrip on government land in other parts of Hojai sub-division in Assam. Through the sub-divisional magistrate, the protesters forwarded a memorandum to PM Narendra Modi, minister of defence Rajnath Singh, minister of road transport and highways of India Nitin Gadkari, and Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to oppose the alleged proposal for airstrip in the area.

Tezpur celebrates World Water Day

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 22: "Next world war will be due to a water crisis, and hence we should use water like a precious diamond." Manjurani Bora, assistant professor Department of Geography Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Girls' College said in a brief lecture on the importance of water to the students in the meeting held on Wednesday in Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Girls' College to commemorate the World Water and Sanitation Day. The Department of Geography of the college observed the day in collaboration with IQAC which was presided over by Dr Tapan Kumar Kalita, Principal, Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Girls' College here. "Millions of people throughout the world are impacted by the urgent global water problem. According to the United Nations, it is very pathetic that 2.2 billion people lack access to clean drinking water and 4.2 billion lack access to sanitation facilities that are properly maintained."

NAME CORRECTION

I, TAYEBUR RAHMAN do hereby declared that my actual and correct name is TAYEBUR RAHMAN as per PAN CARD, Elector Photo Identity Card, and Adhar card. But my name has been recorded in my Passport vide No - KO613498 as Mohammed TAYEBUR RAHMAN. That TAYEBUR RAHMAN and Mohammed TAYEBUR RAHMAN are the same and one person. It is corrected by Notary Public, Darrang, Mangaldai on 01/03/23

Sd/-

TAYEBUR RAHMAN
S/O Makbul Hussain, R/O ward No- 2 Kharupetia Town., PO. Kharupetia, PS. Kharupetia, Dist. Darrang, Assam.

KSA condemns APHLC statement

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March. 22: President of Karbi Students Association (KSA- Thangsing Timung), Thangsing Timung came down heavily on the organising secretary of All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC), Kursing Timung for his remark on Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills State Demand Committee (KANCHASDCOM) and its allied organisations concerning the demonstration to be held in New Delhi Jantar Mantar on March 23 for implementation of Autonomous state of Article 244 (A) of the Indian constitution by KANCHASDCOM.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday at KSA office, Rongminghang, KSA president Timung said, "APHLC party man Kursing Timung on his Facebook post wrote that "KSA and KANCHASDCOM are going to Delhi for a picnic party; KSA and KANCHASDCOM are the agents of RSS and BJP and KSA is an anti autonomous state demand committee". The statement of Kursing Timung is condemned and he should tender an apology otherwise there will be misunderstanding between the KSA and APHLC."

Timung further said, "It has been four decades that KANCHASDCOM has struggled for autonomous state. The central government has been towards the demand of the people of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao for implementation of Article-244(A) (Autonomous State) of the Indian Constitution. So, we are holding a sit-in demonstration in New Delhi on March 24."

Timung clarified that KSA is a neutral student body and is not in favour of any political party. When there arises any issue of the community KSA is always there and stands by it.

Sunil Kumar Jha new NFR (construction) GM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 22: Sunil Kumar Jha, an officer of Indian Railway Service of Engineers from UPSC's 1986 batch, has taken over as the general manager of NF Railway (Construction) on March 17. He was a graduate in civil engineering from Institute of Technology, Banaras Hindu University/Varanasi (Now IIT/Varanasi). As general manager/construction he will be the overall in-charge of all railway construction activities within the jurisdiction of NF Railway i.e. all north-eastern states including Sikkim and parts of West Bengal and Bihar. Jha joined Indian Railways in the year 1988 as probationary officer. At the early stage of his career he has worked as assistant engineer of Kalyan in central railway. He had also worked as the senior divisional engineer (coordination) of Howrah Division and chief planning & design engineer of eastern railway.

HSOA and MDKS organise felicitation programme

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, March 22: Hapkido Sports' Organisation, Assam and Morigaon district Karate Santha on Wednesday jointly organised a felicitation programme at Morigaon Karate Santha here. Hapkido Sports' Organisation, Assam felicitated 39 awardees who brought laurels by receiving medals in the Hapkido championship held in Delhi -2022. Deputy commissioner Devashis Sarma felicitated the 39 awardees in presence of the president of BJP Prabir Medhi, Morigaon, president of HSOA Dolphin Majumder, coach of Hapkido and Karate Manash Kr. Nath, Morigaon. A meeting in keeping with the felicitation ceremony held here which was presided over by Birinchi Sarma, president of MDJA, Deputy commissioner Devashis Sarma and superintendent of police Hemanta Kr. Das also presented belt and certificate to 403 students' of the district who passed colour belt exam.

12th Rangina Sarpo Film Award and Rangina Sarpo Folk Artist Award Serdihun receives Best Feature Film award

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 22: In the 12th Rangina Sarpo Film Award and Rangina Sarpo Folk Artist Award organised by department of cultural affairs, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) the Best Feature Film was awarded to Serdihun.

The award ceremony was held at Langkung Habe Auditorium, Matipung on Tuesday evening which was attended by Karbi film actors and artistes.

Altogether 23 awards were given to various artistes of Karbi Anglong among them are best male Rangina Sarpo Folk Artist Award to Mohindra Engti of Den Arong and female Rangina Sarpo Folk Artist Award to Kanam Beypri (77) of Borpung. The prizes have been handed over by executive member of KAAC, Surya Rongphar. The prizes consisted of ₹ 10,000 and a citation.

The list of winners of the 12th Rangina Sarpo Cultural Award-2023 is 1. Best Feature (Film; Serdihun) 2. Best Playback Singer (Male & Female) Jiten Terang and Sewali Terangpi respectively; 3. Best choreographer Bhaskar Doley, Song "Non Malom" (Film; Artu) 4. Best Cinematographer-Bhaskar Jyoti Doley "Non Malom" (Film; Artu) 5. Best Music Director - Bijoy Lekthe (Film; Artu) 6. Best Custom Director Langphar KCS zone (Film; Artu) 7. Best supporting Actor (Male) Dilip Bey (Film; Serdihun) 8. Best supporting Actor (Female) Rengka Engtipi (Film;

Hojai Sahitya Sabha prepares for golden jubilee

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, March 22: Hojai Sahitya Sabha is going to celebrate its golden jubilee with day-long special activities on upcoming March 26 with great fervour. As per the information received from Hargovind Kalita, secretary, Hojai Sahitya Sabha and Anup Kumar Barthakur, secretary, Golden Jubilee Organising Committee the programme will be organised at Sahityarathi Bezbaruwa Bhavan at new market in Hojai on Sunday.

The programme will mark attendance of all the founder and former members of the Sabha. Dr Basant Kumar Goswami, former chief secretary of Assam Sahitya Sabha, will

be present as the chief guest on this occasion.

Apart from this, Ramakrishna Ghosh, MLA of the Hojai assembly constituency, as the speaker and founder member of the Sabha Karuna Kant Kalita will be grace as a special guest.

As per information, the programme will be inaugurated on Sunday morning at 8:45 am by Hojai Sahitya Sabha president Dayal Chandra by hoisting the flag of Assam Sahitya Sabha.

After that, Smriti Tarpan will be done at 9:00 in which Baba Tumvi Singh, former president of Hojai Sahitya Sabha, will be present as the main tarpak.

Workshop on making GPs TB and tobacco free

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 22: As part of the 'Morumor Jorhat' initiative of the district administration, a workshop on making gaon panchayats (GPs) TB and tobacco-free, was organised by the Jorhat District Health Society at the zilla parishad auditorium here

on Tuesday.

A district administration official informed that the workshop, presided over by the Jorhat Zilla Parishad president Ranjan Saikia, and attended by GP presidents, was addressed by the Jorhat deputy commissioner Pulak Mahanta.



Serdihun) 9. Best Actor (Male)- Bijoy Lekthe (Film; Artu)10. Best Actor (Female) Kiran Engtipi (Film; Artu)11. Best script/ screenplay - Bhaity Engti (Film; Artu) 12. Best Art Director - Borsing Teron & Longki Teron (Film; Serdihun)13. Best comedian- Sodar Engti (Film; Klir Ningve) 14. Best Film Editor - Bapuram Ronghang (Film;Klir Ningve) 15. Best make-up - Jitu Saikia (Film; Serdihun) 16.Best Actor Negative Role (Male) Nigam Ronghang - (Film; Artu) 17 Best Actor Negative Role (Female) Malin Tissopi - (Film; Harchi Keprai)18.Best Director - Bhaity Engti (Film; Artu)19. Best Documentary Film - (Chojun BK Film production) and 20.Special Jury Award 2022 - Rengmir Hansepi, (Film ; Riro Akanghon).

EM Surya Rongphar, art and culture who attended the event as the guest of honour said, "This is the 12th edition of the

Rangina Sarpo Film Award, every year the art and culture department has organised the event to promote emerging artists." He also appeals to all the film enthusiasts who make feature and short films and documentary films and song composers to write songs which are linked with the root of the community.

The screening committee members of Rangina Sarpo Film Award, 2023 are Rajib Kro (Chairman) Sarthe Terang (Member) Jibon Teron (Member) Chandrosing Dera (Member) Sashikala Hansepi (Member) Bindu Terangpi (Member) and Dipali , Amphi Chetia (Member).

The programme was attended by EM. KAAC, Prabhat Chandra Taro; MACs Johny Timung and Avijit Kro; president of KCS, Chandrasing Kro; president of Karbi Lammet Amei, Barim Engti; Padmashree Dhaneswar Engti and others.

NABARD CGM takes stock of ongoing projects

HT Correspondent

DONGKAMUKAM, March 22: Chief general manager (CGM), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) Assam, Navin Dingra visited Amri Development Block, West Karbi Anglong on March 21 to take stock of the projects being funded by NABARD and implemented by Amri Helping Hands Society (AHHS).

The CGM visited the ongoing skill upgradation of weavers sanctioned under Livelihood and Enterprise Development Programme (LEDP) in Umswai Model Village. He interacted with the beneficiaries of the project and took an understanding of the training module. During the interaction he advised AHHS to develop banking plan and credit linkages for the beneficiaries. He also advised AHHS for exploring ways for value addition and product diversification and also suggested to include design training and punching machine for the beneficiaries in the current project and apply for sanction to NABARD.

The project is sanctioned for 90 participants out of which 60 participants have completed the training in two batch of 30 each.

He congratulated the beneficiaries of Micro Enterprise Development Programme (MEDP) on ginger processing which is already completed. The beneficiaries informed CGM that the training was very informative for them and currently they are working on the credit proposal to be submitted to the bank. AHHS also informed that the details of the SHG members have already been forwarded and submitted to NRLM for the bank linkage.

CGM also interacted with the beneficiaries of the Model Millet Project (MMP). AHHS presented an update of the current status of the project and also informed him about the cultivation cycle being followed traditionally by the farmers.

CGM interacted with the beneficiaries of the upcoming eco-tourism project to be implemented in Umpanai village. The beneficiaries of the project will take ownership of the development that will be undertaken.

Section 144 in Morigaon

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, March 22: Morigaon district magistrate Devashish Sharma on Wednesday promulgated Section 144 of the Penal Code applicable to the entire district.

This is done on account of the forthcoming APSC examination to be conducted on March 26 next. As per the directive unau-

thorised persons shall not enter and make unnecessary noise within a radius of 50 meters of the examination centre in the district. Candidates shall not carry unauthorised suspicious objects, mobile phones, electronic equipment etc. to the examination centre. The order came into force immediately and will remain in force until the examination process is completed.

BUREAU OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY
(A Statutory body under Ministry of Power, Government of India)
 4th Floor, Sewa Bhawan, R. K. Puram, New Delhi - 110066
 Website: www.beeindia.gov.in, Ph: 011-26766700

KIND ATTENTION : ENERGY USERS IN 14 NOTIFIED SECTORS

Submission of Report on the Status of Energy Consumption under Energy Conservation Act 2001 (52 of 2001)

All users/class of users of energy in the following energy intensive sectors having Annual Energy Consumption of and above the specified limit shown against the following energy intensive sectors are notified as designated consumers vide S.O. 394 (E) dated the 12th March, 2007, S.O. 3542 (E) dated 29th Dec. 2015, S.O. 1388(E) dated 02nd May, 2017 and S.O. 2147 (E) Dated 17th June, 2020, S.O. 3445 (E) dated 28th September, 2020, S.O. 4165(E) dated 07th September, 2022 under clause (e) of section 14 of the Energy Conservation Act (52 of 2001).

S. No.	Notified Sector	Threshold Energy Consumption in metric tonne of oil equivalent (mtoe) per year
1.	Aluminium	7,500
2.	Cement	
	(a) Integrated Cement Unit	30,000
	(b) Cement Grinding Unit	10,000
3.	Commercial Buildings or Establishments	
	(a) Hotels	500
	(b) Airports	500
4.	Chlor-Alkali	12,000
5.	Electricity Distribution Companies (DISCOMs)	All licensed distribution companies by SERC/JERC
6.	Fertilizer	30,000
7.	Iron & Steel	20,000
8.	Pulp & Paper	20,000
9.	Petroleum Refineries	90,000
10.	Petrochemical units having gas crackers or naphtha crackers or both	1,00,000
11.	Railways	
	(a) All Zonal Railways (Traction)	70,000
	(b) Workshops	750
	(C) 8 Production Factories of Railways namely ICF, RCF, CLW, BLW, PLW, RWF, MCF & RWP	-
12.	Textile	3,000
13.	Thermal Power Stations	30,000
14.	Petrochemical Manufacturing units.	
	(1) Fibre Intermediates	50,000
	(2) Polymers	10,000
	(3) Detergent Intermediates	9,000
	(4) Performance Plastics	3,000
	(5) Other Petrochemical products	6,000
	(6) Synthetic Rubbers	15,000
	(7) Aromatics	20,000

All units/establishment consuming more than the listed threshold energy consumption under respective sectors, notified by the Central Government under S.O. 1409(E) dated 28th March, 2018, S.O. 1473(E) dated 29th March, 2019, S.O. 1254(E) dated 13th April, 2020, S.O. 4491 (E) dated 26th October, 2021, S.O. 4552 (E) dated 26th September, 2022, are requested to submit to the concerned designated authority, with a copy to the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, a report on the status of Annual Energy Consumption, together with their annual production, for the last two years, namely, 2021-22 and 2022-23 in Form 1 notified under clause (I) of Section 14 of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001 (52 of 2001), duly authenticated by the Energy Manager/Chief Executive Officer.

A copy of the required sector applicable Pro-forma or Form-I could be downloaded from BEE website: <https://beeindia.gov.in/content/pat-performa>.

If any person fails to submit a report on the status of annual consumption etc by 30th June, 2023, he shall be liable to a penalty under clause 26 of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

For more information/query please contact us on 011-26766700 or send mail on newdc@beeindia.gov.in.

Mission Director, NMEEE

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Success is the sum of small efforts - repeated day in and day out. - Robert Collier

Assam buckles up as tea production goes down

Expert opinion in Assam remains somewhat divided regarding a recent declining trend in the state's annual tea production. While the state government and researchers have warned of a further drop in production in the short term, eminent planters and industry circles feel such fears are exaggerated. This is not to suggest that the industry is well-placed. Both camps are in broad agreement that production could very well see a decline during the next few years unless corrective steps are initiated in time. An official report on the state of the tea industry circulated along with the annual budget proposals sounded the strongest alarm, a few days ago. Presenting a doomsday scenario for planters in the years ahead in considerable detail, analysts warned that a major crisis could hit output in the none-too-distant future. This analysis predicated its concern over the fall in output in recent years. A section of planters maintained that the output in 2022 might see an actual reduction of around 20% on a y-to-y basis. Others point out that recent years have not been normal, not merely in terms of tea production levels, but life as a whole was badly affected all over the world because of the massive Corona pandemic.

Nevertheless, Assam's production has gone through its ups and downs in the years following, too. The overall situation might have improved at present over what was seen in 2020, but conditions remained largely unfavorable. The January to Nov period in 2021 ended with a state output of 641 million kilos, a substantial improvement over the 2020 figure of 593 million kgs only yet producers were not satisfied, as overall output was still well below normal level production by about 9%. Tea Board as well as industry circles were not yet convinced that the fluctuations in the size of the final harvest in recent years signified a definite trend. While conceding the possibility of a drop in the output during the next few years, they insisted that the situation had somewhat improved of late and conditions were gradually becoming normal. The most cited familiar reasons for the decline in the industry are an increasing shortage of workers, fluctuating climatic conditions triggered by global warming, and rising production costs.

Analysts said that going by available indications, there was a general feeling that it was only a question of time before a crisis would develop. They pointed to the steady decline in yield per hectare for tea in Assam, which still accounted for more than 50% of the national production, claiming the greatest share for the exports earned annually. According to one report, over the past two decades, the average production of leaves from a hectare of soil had dropped from 2,120 kilos to only 1,130, in 2022! This trend was too ominous to be dismissed casually. Plantation owners eagerly await the relief package that the state government has promised to help them run the industry better. By way of concrete suggestions, there has come a proposal from an eminent planter to the government: there should be a carefully planned afforestation in the areas close to Assam/Arunachal border, to ensure that relentlessly rising temperatures in spring and summer could be kept under check, accompanied by a general cooling of the environment in general and bringing in cleaner, more breathable air for all.

Kisan Mahapanchayat signals bigger farmers movement

By: Dr Gyan Pathak

Kisan Mahapanchayat, the Grand Assembly of Farmers held on March 20 in Delhi, has signalled a bigger farmers' movement on the cards. It was held after about four months of their beginning the second leg of farmers' movement on November 26, 2022, when farmers marched to submit memorandums to governors across the country demanding fulfilment of unfulfilled promises made by the PM Narendra Modi and his government at the Centre.

Farmers have decided in their grand assembly to launch even stiffer and bigger movement if the Centre does not concede to their demands now. A delegation of farmers under the leadership of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) met the Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar and submitted two memorandums - the first on their pending demands and the second on the new crises faced this year by potato, tomato, onion and mustard farmers due to sudden crash of market prices.

The grand assembly, in which thousands of farmers across the country have participated, was organised by the SKM. It reminded the Centre, how PM Narendra Modi had unilaterally withdrawn the three controversial farm laws on the occasion of Guru Parb on November 19, 2021 against which the farmers were agitating in sit-in protests since November 26, 2020 on the borders of Delhi. That historic farmers agitation was called off on December 2021 only after the agitators were given written assurance by the Centre to fulfil all the justified demands of the agitating farmers. By that time over 750 farmers have already lost their lives during the year-long agitation.

Though the three controversial farm laws allegedly seeking to bring corporate to farm were repealed on November 29 in both the Houses of the Parliament by voice vote, and only two days later it was given assent by the President of India, no enough steps were taken to mitigate the crises the Indian farmers find themselves in.

Now, in the first memorandum submitted by the SKM, they have not only repeated their older demands and the demand for fulfilment of the promises made, but also included the some new demands that have cropped up due to new crises they have been facing since the end of their first leg of agitation in December 2021.

In the memorandum the SKM has said that they had suspended the agitations in 2021 relying on the Centre's letter assuring that it would take effective steps to mitigate the crises faced by farmers. However, "Today, over 15 months later, the Union Government has not fulfilled the promises made to the farmers. We request you once again, to urge the Union Government to take immediate concrete steps to resolve the pending issues, and pay heed to the problems of the farmers by fulfilling their demand."

Their major is a legislative guarantee of MSP for all crops based on the recommendation of Swaminathan Commission. Apart from a law for this purpose they also demanded a new committee on MSP because the present system is not enough to compensate the farmers in terms of their remuneration and rising input costs. Reduction in input prices has also become a demand. Rising indebtedness of farmers has made their life even more miserable and hence they have demanded waiver of all farm loans to all farmers. Withdrawal of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill; comprehensive and effective crop insurance scheme; farmers pension scheme of Rs5000 per month are among the other important demands.

Demand for dismissal of Union Minister of State for Home Ajay Mishra "Teni" for his alleged role in the Lakhimpur Kheri incident where four farmers and a journalist were killed; compensation and rehabilitation to the families of Lakhimpur Kheri victims; withdrawal of all cases registered against farmers in the BJP-ruled states; land allocation to construct a memorial for "martyred farmers", and repealing of the Forest Conservation Rules, 2022 are also part of the first memorandum.

Their second memorandum are concerned with the present crises faced by farmers due to crash in market prices for several crops such as potato, tomato, onion and mustard. The crisis had recently triggered a long march of farmers in Maharashtra from Nashik to Mumbai on foot.

The memorandum pointed out that the current price support schemes such as "Bhavantar" has become useless as they have not been implemented even during such a crisis. On the one hand the government has been depending on export and import restrictions to regulate the crisis, and on the other no steps are taken to help farmers achieve better prices under the pretext of inflation control. (IPA Service)

Fake news and disinformation new challenges in Indian society



Fake news is false or misleading information presented as news and often intended to damage the reputation of a person or entity or to make money through advertising revenue. Data from the National Crime Records Bureau shows that 2020 saw an almost three-fold increase in incidents of fake news and rumor-mongering as compared to 2019. A total of 1,527 cases of fake news were registered in 2020, as against 486 cases in 2019 and 280 in 2018. Fake news and misinformation are a growing menace in India. False news and propaganda spreading continuously in India are becoming a serious social challenge for the country. In a country like India, this problem is becoming more serious and due to this, incidents of street riots and mob lynching are often seen. In India, which has over 750 million internet users, social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have become major sources of 'fake news' transmission. Many such examples can be seen in India, where an innocent person has lost his life due to 'fake news' or false news. WhatsApp is considered to be the most vulnerable medium for 'fake news' in India, as its users often forward the news to many people without knowing its veracity, due to which misinformation reaches many people at once. She goes.

Propaganda, misinformation, and fake news have the potential to polarize public opinion to fuel violent extremism and hate speech. For example, the recent migrant crisis in Tamil Nadu was caused by the spread of fake news. Fake news articles are used intentionally and verifiably to influence politics and promote advertising, to manipulate people's perceptions of reality to manipulate elections. During and after the 2016 election, Russian agents created social media accounts to spread fake news that incited protests and supported presidential candidate Donald Trump while discrediting candidate Hillary Clinton and her allies. Media companies promote sensational news and false headlines for high TRPs and viewership. For example: Circulation of false videos showing shocking attacks on the Army in Kashmir Valley.

Many times, fake news is used to mislead people who are not digitally literate. For example, after demonetization, the fake news of electronic chips in Rs 2000 notes created a lot of confusion among the people. The multilingual population is a problem in combating fake news in India, there are 22 official languages and only 10.67% of the population speak English. Existing fake news detection measures are most effective for English, which can lead to failure to recognize and process information in other languages.

Instant messaging platforms Since Internet messaging applications are end-to-end encrypted, identifying and debunking fake news is only possible with the support of users. Internet penetration in India has increased from 137 million internet users in 2012 to over 600 million in 2019. An increase in internet access coupled with digital illiteracy has resulted in a rise in fake news online. The European Union

has implemented a 2022 Code of Conduct on Disinformation and the United Kingdom has proposed an online safety bill that will seek to proactively monitor controversial content from social media platforms. India too must put in place a robust framework to tackle the root causes of misinformation. All sections of the population should be made aware of the realities of fake news and propaganda by creating awareness and education. Fake news is often propagated by using ads focused on polarizing issues to exacerbate existing social divisions and partisan strife by imposing disclosure requirements for targeted ads. Therefore, there is a need to extend the advertising disclosure provisions to all issue-based advertising and advertisements for political candidates or campaigns.

The issue of inauthentic accounts and pages can be a significant motivator for the propagation of fake news. Verification can help deal

with this problem. If a cyber ombudsman is created, it can deal with the credibility of sources of news and can also handle complaints related to misinformation. To take the help of technology, technology firms should invest in technology to find fake news and identify it for users through algorithms and crowdsourcing. Today, every day many types of content are being made available around us through various mediums on the internet, but no one knows what is its truth. It has reached many people before going into its depth. The government should make strict laws regarding spreading such information so that the right news can reach the public. Even today, the cyber law of our country is very weak, from which anyone can easily escape, the government needs to think about it. Regarding this matter, the Supreme Court said that we need such a guideline so that those who commit online crimes and those who post misleading information on social media can be tracked. The government cannot escape by saying that it does not have any technology to stop the misuse of social media.

Fake news harms every section of society. Therefore, it is the responsibility of everyone to fight the menace of fake news and misinformation. It covers all dimensions from reducing financial incentives for fake news to improving digital literacy among the general public. Today, many agencies in the country are working to bring the truth of fake news to the people, but this is not enough because their reach is not yet widespread, due to which fake news can be curbed or the truth can reach the people immediately. At the same time, due to increasing fake news, social media platforms are also working on it, because many times their credibility has also been questioned, WhatsApp and Facebook have also made many changes in their feature to stop fake news, but on this yet And there is a need to work so that a clean environment can be created. (The writer is a research scholar in Political Science, poetess, freelance journalist, and columnist)

The bloodbath in Iraq shows the US can never be a global policeman

By: Nadine Talaat

The idea that over 100,000 forces would invade another country since World War II, nothing like that has happened," said US president Joe Biden last month, referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Twenty years after the United States sent hundreds of thousands of troops to launch a full-scale, unwarranted invasion of Iraq, Biden's assertion suggests that the United States has erased the unwanted memories of the war. Biden's failure to see the hypocrisy in his statement is a testament to the enduring dominance of American exceptionalism: the belief that the United States is fundamentally different from other nations and has a unique mandate to dominate and impose its values across the world. It holds that America is synonymous with freedom, and that the liberal world order is structured around its hegemony.

Today the nature and scale of US military engagements across the globe has certainly changed since it first invaded Iraq, but the underpinning ideology that the United States is not bound by the same rules that govern others remains fundamentally unchanged.

Every anniversary regurgitates "fresh" articles reflecting on tactical and operational mistakes. The recurring question is whether Iraq is better off today because of American intervention. Those defending the war may point out that many more Iraqis now have a cell phone plan, and that life expectancy increased from sixty-seven in 2001 to seventy-two today, conveniently omitting that this increase still lags behind the global average increase. Self-justificatory pieces, like one by former George W. Bush speechwriter David Frum, often argue that the United States saved Iraq from a Syria-style civil war by establishing some form of democratic governance. "They [Iraqis] gained a chance," Frum writes.

It would be hard to overstate the devastation wrought by the Iraq War. Brown University's Cost of War project estimates that roughly three hundred thousand innocent Iraqi civilians were killed as a result of direct fighting. Millions more died indirectly from its consequences, such as malnutrition, disease, and poverty. More than nine million were displaced from their homes. Today much of the political instability, corruption, and sectarian violence in Iraq can be traced back to the devastation of the war. Domestically, the invasion of Iraq cost US taxpayers \$2.4 trillion and fuelled the military-industrial complex. Regionally, it birthed an Islamist insurgency that would become the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), destabilizing the region from Syria to Yemen and Libya.

Despite this, the invasion of Iraq continues to be held in American consciousness and the mainstream political establishment as a mistake, yes, but one that had good intentions and that was based on sound logic - namely, that Saddam Hussein represented a threat to the US-led world order and needed to be removed. Despite a track record of disastrous wars and interventions like Vietnam, Libya, and Afghanistan, Iraq is seen as an aberration in American foreign policy rather than a symptom of American hubris.

Iraq bore no responsibility for or links to those responsible for 9/11, but then president George W. Bush and vice president

Dick Cheney began arranging plans for its invasion just days after the planes struck. Not a single hijacker was Iraqi, and claims that Iraq had links to al-Qaeda were shaky at best. But that didn't matter. In the aftermath of the attacks, America needed to reassert its hegemony. Saddam's Iraq provided the perfect opportunity for it to showcase what would happen to those that threatened its power, and the disposability of the lives that happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

With the help of mainstream media, the Bush administration spun a narrative of Iraqi WMDs. They found the few Iraqis, most who had been living in exile, who would support their war and cherry-picked evidence to support their claims. In the two years after 9/11, Bush and top officials in his administration repeated lies about the threat Iraq posed to the US public nearly a thousand times. Mainstream media largely failed to challenge these claims, silencing any dissenting voices. In the two weeks before and after Colin Powell's United Nations speech, just 17 percent of commentators on major networks expressed skepticism at the war. These efforts to shape public opinion worked: By September 2003, seven in ten Americans believed that Saddam was in some way responsible for 9/11.

Officials and media would later claim that they were misled, that the intelligence was faulty, and that they did the best they could with the evidence they had at the time. But even in 2003, at the height of the propaganda campaign, not everyone believed the official narrative. In the lead-up to the war, an estimated 36 million people across the world took to the streets to oppose the invasion in what is now considered the world's biggest coordinated protest. These protesters did not take to the street that day just because they did not believe the claim of WMDs, but because they fundamentally rejected the notion that the United States had any moral justification to launch a war. They rejected the role America had designated itself as the global police and defender of the liberal world order.

President Obama presented a flickering hope of confronting American exceptionalism and the hold it had on the political establishment. In a speech he gave on the campaign trail in 2008 in which he discussed the failures of the war in Iraq, he told voters, "I don't want to just end the war, but I want to end the mindset that got us into war in the first place." He used the failures of Iraq and his opposition to it as a major talking point of his campaign to set himself apart from Hillary Clinton and John McCain, both of whom were outspoken supporters of the invasion. He preached the need for diplomacy and international cooperation over military engagement.

By the end of his presidency, Obama had implemented a set of practices and norms that sanctioned a system of extrajudicial killings with very little oversight or transparency. Like his predecessor, Obama took for granted that the United States had the legal right and moral duty to bomb targets that it perceived as threats to its interpretation of global order.

When Donald Trump took office, preaching the need for "America First", he revoked what limited oversight existed under Obama and ended the requirement to report on casualties. He continued to ramp up extrajudicial killings unchecked. In his first



ten days in office, President Trump authorized three drone strikes and a US military raid in Yemen, reportedly killing up to thirty civilians. In just two years, Trump authorized 2,243 strikes.

Biden's presidency has so far marked a significant decrease in drone strikes. The disastrous withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the Taliban's swift return to power despite two decades of American fighting has defined Biden's foreign policy in the Middle East. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has certainly diverted attention away from the war on terror.

"I stand here today, for the first time in twenty years, with the United States not at war," said Biden speaking at the UN in September 2021. "We've turned the page." It was a brazen and misleading statement. In fact, the war on terror has never been declared to be over. The legislation that the United States has relied on to conduct its military operations for the past twenty years, particularly the Authorization for the Use of Military Force Act, is still in place. Today America has more than 750 military bases spread across 80 countries with more than 40,000 troops in the Middle East, including 2,500 in Iraq. The drone program continues. And President Biden just requested a record-breaking defence budget of \$886 billion.

On September 20, 2001, nine days after the terrorist attacks on US soil, George W. Bush announced the start of the "global war on terror." He told Americans: "Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated." He issued the United States a blank check for a war not bound by temporal or geographical boundaries, and a mandate to attack anyone anywhere deemed a threat.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the US invoked its right to self-defence, enshrined by international law. But as the years passed, the right to self-defence from an imminent attack became harder to claim. Instead, America has shifted to a policy of preemptive and preventive self-defence to defend itself against threats that have not yet materialized, a practice that violates international law.

The war on terror's impact on the principle of sovereignty and legitimacy of the international order and are most evident today in Ukraine. In this case, Russia also justified its unilateral invasion with a weak

claim to preventive self-defence against growing NATO influence. Today, as the world watches another illegal occupation go unchecked, the United States is repeating the mistakes of Iraq in its response to the Ukraine war. The reductive narrative of "good versus evil" is repeated over and over, while dissenting voices are silenced. International law has become an empty slogan.

Today, when the US and its allies condemn Putin's actions, the rest of the world's memories of Iraq diminish any principled stance they may claim to have. Major allies of the United States, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and India, have refused to join the Western sanctions bloc. Across Africa and Asia, from South Africa to Indonesia, Uganda to Pakistan, politicians and leaders have called out America's selective concern for human rights and international law. Even Bush himself, when he accidentally called his Iraq War "wholly unjustified" instead of the invasion of Ukraine, can't hide the hypocrisy.

Perhaps what is most detrimental to the authority of international law is the complete lack of accountability that the United States has faced for the invasion of Iraq and larger war on terror. It refuses to subject itself to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or abide by any international systems of law. No formal apology has ever been issued. The architects of the war have never been tried, and many of those responsible for carrying out war crimes have evaded justice. There has been no meaningful conversation about reparations for the Iraqi people or the nearly one million victims of the war on terror, from Fallujah to Guantanamo Bay.

The United States is not exceptional in its violation of international law, or even in lying about it. In fact, this is one of the most constant realities of the international world order. But what is exceptional is the underpinning belief in its own moral superiority, and the double standards it allows itself as the defender of freedom and democracy while simultaneously acting as the world's main aggressor, with a global empire that answers to no one.

For now, the US continues to behave as the judge, jury, and executioner of world order. Until the ideology of American exceptionalism is reckoned with, the true lessons of the Iraq War will remain unlearned. (IPA Service)

How climate change helped spread a disease that killed more than 1.5 lakh cows in India

From previous issue

By: Vaishnavi Rathore

This left her family with a poor harvest in the beginning of 2022, after which they had to grapple with the problem of lumpy skin disease. "Some family members started working as labour to bring money home," she said. "It's becoming more difficult to predict when rain will happen and how much, as it has become erratic compared to its previous patterns." She noted that during these difficult times, she relied on income from a workshop that she had set up with the support of an NGO, where she trained women in the village in Sindhi embroidery, an art passed down in her family over generations.

The village of Nok, which falls on the Jodhpur-Bikaner border, had more rain than earlier years, but suffered economic losses because the rain was erratic. "In the beginning of monsoon, it rained well," said Ashok Kumar, a resident of the village. But, he added, towards late September, when one spell of rain was needed to ripen guar, or cluster bean, it did not rain. "The majority of the crop failed," he said.

Nok falls in a part of Bikaner district that still largely practises rain-dependent agriculture just once each year, during the monsoon. Other parts of Bikaner rely on the Indira Gandhi Canal – Bikaner began receiving water from the canal in 1977, after which much of the district, which lies in the drought-prone Thar desert, moved to cultivating a two-crop cycle in the year.

But even those parts that receive water from the canal struggled, owing to restrictions on the water supply. Like Paro Bai in Dandkalan, Phulasar's Om Prakash also suffered from the impact of a warmer winter, finding that his mustard crop's ripening was delayed as a result. "What should have finished harvesting by late March and early April was only ready by the end of April," he said.

But the canal administration based its plans on earlier years and, assuming that the harvest was completed by late March, stopped the water supply for 90 days of maintenance work. "With this, we missed the one last cycle of irrigation for mustard, leading to a lot of damaged crops," Prakash said. "And then came lumpy's losses."

Lumpy skin disease is not the only animal disease being impacted by the changing climate. Thakur pointed out others that their clinic had been witnessing. On the busy January day that I met her at the clinic, a goat rearer approached Thakur, describing the symptoms of his sick goats. While writing the prescription, she remarked to him that the illness was "bemausam" or "unseasonal."

His goats had enterotoxaemia, a disease that usually occurs in August and the following months, after monsoon rains. It is caused by bacteria commonly found in the soil that enters the goats' digestive systems through the fodder they eat – when the bacteria reproduces quickly, it releases toxins into the animal's body.

Thakur explained that last year, the monsoons were heavier than usual and had lasted till September, as a result of which the animals had a supply of healthy fodder up to December. Thus, the

region saw cases even in January.

"Usually, we give the preventive vaccine for this after Holi, around March," Thakur said. But the appearance of cases in January forced them to start vaccinating the animals at the beginning of the year, she added.

Camels, too, are affected by unseasonal diseases. In Nok, Ashok Kumar called out to Rinku, one of his camels, from a herd of 50. Rinku obediently followed the call, after which Ashok pointed towards the camel's skin, which was infested with rashes and scabs. "In the last two years, we have lost at least 100 camels due to khujli," Ashok said. Khujli, or itching, in this region refers to sarcoptic mange, a highly contagious, vector-borne disease amongst camels, which spreads by mites. The intense itching causes the camels to rub against harsh surfaces, often leading to deep wounds that become difficult to treat. It also weakens the camel and causes anaemia.

In a 2014 submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the International Livestock Research Institute noted that arthropod vectors, such as mites, tend to be more active in higher temperatures, and therefore feed more regularly to sustain the increase in their activities. This then enhances the chances of infections being transmitted between hosts.

Rajasthan has seen an increase in temperature over the years – according to one study, western Rajasthan, which included Bikaner district, saw an increase of average temperature from 32.2°C in 1971 to 34.6°C in 2010. "Climate change, like the increasing temperatures, could have played a role in spread of such vector-borne diseases," Rajith R said. "But, since there is limited diagnosis in the field about these connections, it is difficult to attribute it to only climate."

He added, "Other factors need to be also noted. For instance, in case of mange, livestock management, like keeping the infected animal away from the herd, is crucial as well."

Some of Ashok Kumar's camels also suffer from tibsara, or trypanosomiasis, a disease spread by blood-sucking flies, which causes listlessness, anaemia, and in many cases, death. "We have noticed that if it rains more, like last year, the flies that spread this also increase," he said. These diseases, shrinking grazing lands, and a falling economic viability of camels have all contributed to a drastic 37% fall in camel population in the country between 2012 and 2019.

Kumar also rears cows, 25 of which died from lumpy skin disease last year. I asked him if he plans to buy more cows to substitute for the losses, to which he said, "I have plans, but the money situation does not allow it!"

Apart from the changing climate, some shifts in land-use patterns – many of which have benefited the district's people and economy – are also having an adverse effect on the health of animals in the region. The most significant problem in this regard is the loss of grazing lands for a variety of reasons, which, in combination with erratic rainfall is dramatically affecting the availability of food for animals.

In Grandhi village, Genaram Raika, a member of the traditionally pastoral Raika community to

which Ashok Kumar also belongs, observed that while khujli was a major concern for his camels, the availability of fodder was an even bigger problem. "Over last few years, at least a hundred of my camels have died due to starvation," he said.

On a large tract of land around his house, he rears about 100 Bikaneri camels, a few sheep, goats, and cows. He lost 15 cows to lumpy skin disease last year, and like Ashok Kumar, his camel herd is also constantly under threat. "Cows and camels are our lives," Raika said.

One of the most significant reasons that he and other residents of Grandhi and nearby villages have lost access to pasture land are the many large solar parks, which acquired and now function on orans, or sacred grazing grounds.

About the oran that he used to rely on, Raika said, "The oran used to provide the quantity of fodder that our camels needed." But, with establishment of the solar park, he added, "we cannot access it anymore."

Raika's home is adorned with family heirlooms – carpets, ropes, bottle holders and bags, all made of camel hair by him and his ancestors. He has also received multiple citations and trophies presented to him for conserving the Bikaneri breed. "These awards do not mean much if they cannot satisfy the hunger of my animals," he said, as he absent-mindedly hugged a one-day-old camel that was nuzzling Raika's hair.

The other factor responsible for the declining fodder, Genaram said, was the introduction of the canal. Across the district, several farmers agreed. "Our grazing process changed a lot after the canal came in," said Gulab Singh, a farmer and camel milk cheesemaker, who also oversees operations at Bahula Natural's dairy in Bajju.

Since 1977, when the canal began supplying irrigation water in the Thar region, farmers have increasingly shifted from growing one cycle of moth, bajra, and guar, timed with the monsoon, to growing two cycles, of more lucrative crops – typically groundnut and wheat before the monsoon, and mustard and chana in the winter months. As agriculture began to provide strong economic returns, farmers bought and acquired more land for agricultural use.

The area of land under agricultural also increased significantly after the 1971 India-Pakistan war, when the Centre and state granted refugee families 25 bighas of land each in the canal area in Rajasthan as part of a rehabilitation package. Singh's was also one such family, he told me on a foggy January morning, while collecting, weighing, and storing milk that had come in from various farmers in Bajju.

Data from a 2018 paper confirms that Bikaner's landscape has undergone dramatic changes. The paper analysed the change in the region's barren land: specifically, hilly terrain, ravines and "waste-lands", a revenue category that includes grazing land and other commons. It found that barren land covered almost 50% of all land in Bikaner district in 1977, the year that the canal began supplying water to the region. By 2008, this had dropped to 27%, "at the cost of increase in agricultural land". The share of agricultural land, meanwhile, had steadily increased, from 43% of the district's land in 1997 to 57% by 2008.

Because grazing lands have reduced, all the farmers I spoke with explained that they now largely stall-fed their livestock, either with stubble from their fields, or fodder bought from the market at the rate of around Rs 1,000 per quintal.

While all the farmers I met had benefited from the change in land use patterns, specifically, through acquiring and farming more land, they also believed that this stall feeding had had a deleterious effect on the animals and reduced their "sahan shakti", or immunity, to fight diseases, including lumpy skin disease.

"When we used to take the cows out to graze, they would eat whatever they like – sem, seval, dhudhel, and also some medicinal plants," said Singh, referring to several species of grass. "This provided a lot of health benefits to the cow – their hooves would get naturally trimmed with the walking around, and the variety of plants they consumed would keep their immunity up."

Anshul Ojha, chief executive of the Bajju-based Desert Resource Centre, a collective that works on pastoralism, desert ecology, and microenterprises, agreed with this assessment. "Now the cattle are mostly dependent on a limited variety of feed in the form of stubble, disabling the diverse feed in the grazing grounds," he said. "This is affecting the natural coping mechanism that animals had, as well as their immunity to fight diseases like lumpy and others."

Farmers pointed out that another crucial disadvantage of stall-feeding animals with the stubble of crops was that they ended up ingesting chemical fertilisers and pesticides that had been used on those crops. "Nahar ek nasha ban gayi hai," the canal is like an intoxication, Singh said. "Now that there is more water, people want more urea, more pesticides, to bring crop productivity to the optimum."

In Phulasar, Om Prakash, a young farmer, also noted that this was impacting cows' milk quality. "Gaay ek prayogshala hai," the cow is a laboratory, he said. "It will produce what it is fed. We observe that when we take our cows to graze out during the monsoons in the limited grazing ground left, their milk has much higher 'solids not fat' content," referring to the protein, carbohydrate and mineral portion of milk. He added, "The variety of grasses they consume also increases fat in the milk." These two components of milk are high in nutrition and also determine the price that the milk will be sold at – higher milk fats and SNF bring a higher price to the seller.

A hundred and thirty kilometres away from Om Prakash's home, residents of 507 Head said that open grazing saved their cows during the lumpy skin disease outbreak. Every monsoon, Ram Kumar Jhakad takes his 50 cows to their erstwhile grazing grounds, which the army acquired to create a firing range, but which locals are occasionally allowed to use for grazing animals. "We leave them there for two-three months and keep only the ones that are producing milk back at home," Jhakad said.

When lumpy skin disease hit, the majority of his cows were in the firing range. Jhakad and his family treated the cows there with a combination of home remedies and antibiotics. "They all recovered," he said. "But seven of the ones we had at

home died. Perhaps the close space in the sheds we have for them was a factor for quick transmission of lumpy, while in the range, the cows had more space between each other."

Since the inhabitants of 507 Head are not always assured entry to the firing range, they, and those of at least five other villages have relied on an invaluable alternate grazing ground. Adjoining the Indira Gandhi Canal, a lake – known locally as a jheel – spans across 800 hectares of land, and shrinks and grows depending upon the availability of water. In effect, the lake has served as a perennial source of water for cattle and migratory birds in the winter, while the grass around it has provided a rich supply of food for animals. "In this drought-prone area, the jheel always provided water security for our cattle," said Roshni Jhakad, a resident of the village.

But since 2021, under the Jal Jeevan Mission, the state and Centre have been considering a plan to convert the lake to one of four "escape reservoirs" along the canal, which will store excess water from the canal, and from which villages will be supplied. "A boundary wall with guarded entries will be made, and no grazing would be allowed once the reservoir is constructed," said Shokat Singh, assistant forester at 507 Head. "Moreover, about 25,000 indigenous trees here will be cut. So far, the forest department has not given the no-objection certificate, but once that happens, the project will move with full speed." Shokat also noted that this is a wildlife hotspot that attracts hyenas, blue bulls, deer, and wild boar, and that the plan could adversely impact their access to the jheel.

Residents of the village, and surrounding villages, noted that the administration had not yet made clear which villages would benefit from the supply from the escape reservoir. Last year, they staged protests and submitted memorandums to the district collector against the proposal – in response, the district collector announced that the administration would choose a different site for the reservoir. At the time of my visit, however, work was underway for the construction of temporary residential areas for labourers and officials involved in the reservoir construction.

"This might be the last time you see the jheel like this," Roshni told me in January, as we sat on the ground close to what was left of the lake – it had shrunk because water flowing in from the canal had been stopped to prepare for the construction of the reservoir.

A few migratory pelicans swam across the water, and some distance away, a young boy tried to lead his flock of sheep back from the grazing area to his home.

During my visit, Roshni's family told me that they were expecting a good harvest of mustard this winter. About a week after my return in mid-January, Ram Swaroop, her relative, told me over a phone call that most of the harvest had rotted, because of frost that accompanied an intense cold wave. "I have not seen such a cold spell in the last ten years," he told me. "But it's okay, we are like the Rathi cows – we will learn to deal with the extreme heat and cold both!" (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Concluded

How Balipara Foundation is empowering communities and biodiversity

By: Abhishek Lohia

The Eastern Himalayas, known for their biodiversity and culturally rich heritage, are now facing significant threats due to rampant deforestation and ecological degradation. This is posing a severe risk to the livelihoods of the indigenous communities and endangering rare species exacerbating the impacts of climate change. In 2016, the Balipara Foundation embarked on an ambitious journey to restore forests across Assam's "Elephant Country," a belt stretching from Udalguri district to Sonitpur, along the Arunachal Pradesh – Assam – Bhutan border.

The Rural Futures program launched by Balipara has encouraged the active involvement of the indigenous populace in agroforestry, organic fishing, and more. Through habitat-mediated incomes, communities have been able to achieve greater socioeconomic mobility, thus generating a self-sustaining loop of sustainable incomes and businesses for forest-fringe communities.

Naturenomics: A Civilization That Reconciles People and Biodiversity

The Balipara Foundation takes a community-based approach to conservation through the proprietary concepts of Naturenomics™ (Nature + Economics) and Rural Futures. Naturenomics™ envisions a civilization that reconciles people and biodiversity through restorative natural capital economics. The idea is to create a world where people can pursue their well-being aspirations while also shouldering the responsibility for the preservation and protection of the environment.

Rural Futures: Localized Action Framework for Natural Capital Regeneration

Rural Futures is a scalable, localized action framework for natural capital regeneration that visualizes communities as the key custodians of habitat restoration and management. Initial payment for restoration and rewilding programs creates sustainable incomes and businesses for forest-fringe communities, incentivizing them towards natural capital regeneration. Sustainable businesses through agroforestry, bamboo, mushrooms and mindful tourism enhance the value of natural

capital, empowering communities to become self-reliant and providing them access to essential services and assets such as healthcare, education, renewable energy, and access to water.

The Impact of Rural Futures: Managing Over 7 Million Natural Assets and Impacting 16,000 People

As of 2022, the Balipara Foundation manages over 7,000 hectares of restored forest land, with over 7 million trees positively impacting 16,000+ people through direct implementation and capacity building for managing and monitoring restored forest lands. The organization has established robust partnerships with local governments, forest departments, national, and international businesses keen on furthering the cause of sustainability and emissions reduction nationally and globally.

Ecology is Economy

The economy's foundation is rooted in nature, and unsustainable practices that destroy ecological systems have driven the climate crisis. Through Rural Futures, the Balipara Foundation strengthens local natural capital economies that are backed by sustainable businesses, providing an alternative to exploitative and environmentally harmful growth. This approach enables the promotion of sustainable development that prioritizes the balance between lives, livelihoods, and land, thereby building resilience among communities and biodiversity that are on the frontlines of climate change.

The Man Behind the Foundation

Ranjit Barhakur, a social entrepreneur committed to pursuing social change through innovative cutting-edge concepts, ecological neutrality, and impactful action, pioneered the concepts of Naturenomics™ and Rural Futures at Balipara Foundation. Through his mentorship as Trustee and President of the Balipara Foundation, the social enterprise, the Eastern Himalayan Botanic Ark in residence at Wild Mahseer, has become a hub for mindful tourism in Balipara County, Assam, and has been instrumental in catalyzing the natural history and cultural heritage of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam. Additionally, he has developed the multi-disciplinary platform, the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics™ Forum, as a way. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Should fashion industry switch to sustainability to fight climate change?

By: Niroj Mohanty

For the last few years, discussions about fast fashion and its effect on the climate have been making the rounds in various industry forums. Research shows that 25% of people in developed countries are aware of how the clothes they buy affect the climate. This has led to a rise in the concept of thrift shopping, conscious clothing, and industry realignment.

The global consumption of clothes is expected to increase from 62 million metric tonnes in 2019 to 102 million tonnes in 10 years, with the assumption that demographic and lifestyle trends remain the same. Considering the consumption growth, global organizations such as UNEP and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation released a few numbers recently, to establish a clear understanding of the environmental impact of the fashion industry:

- Fashion is responsible for 10% of the world's carbon emissions, which is more than international flights and shipping put together. By 2030, the fashion industry's greenhouse gas emissions are expected to rise by over 50%.

- The 93 billion cubic meters of water used annually by the fashion industry is enough to supply five million people with all their needs.

- Around 20% of all the wastewater in the world comes from treating and dyeing fabrics.

- 87% of all the fiber that goes into making clothes is burned or dumped in landfills.

- Plastic microfibers, worth 50 billion plastic bottles, are dumped into the ocean annually. Microfibers cannot be removed from the water and can spread through the food chain.

Greenwashing in sustainable fashion Exploiting consumer sentiments worsens the situation. Greenwashing is the prevailing fashion issue. Research suggests that nearly 4 out of 5 shoppers don't trust sustainability claims made by apparel brands.

Greenwashing in sustainable fashion often involves false labelling. Brands sometimes use misleading terms such as "eco-friendly" or "organic" without adhering to any official standards or certifications, making it difficult for consumers to distinguish between genuinely sustainable products and those that are just using greenwashing tactics.

Another common form of "greenwashing" in the sustainable fashion industry is the focus on only one aspect of sustainability, such as the use of recycled materials, while ignoring other critical areas, such as the working conditions of the employees and the environmental impact of the production process.

Need for fashion industry re-invention The apparel and fashion market is essential to economic growth since it directly employs over 75 million people across its value chain and has a global market value of over USD 2.4 trillion. After the auto and IT sectors, it is the third-largest manufacturing sector in the world.

The apparel manufacturers face a formidable challenge in trying to grow their businesses without worsening the environment, while also enhancing the working conditions of the industry's workforce and becoming climate champions. The UNFCCC Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action brought together garment industry stakeholders in 2018. The Charter pledges 30% greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions by 2030 (from a 2015 baseline) and net-zero emissions by 2050. To achieve the 2030 emission reduction goals, more than half a billion tonnes of carbon dioxide must be reduced annually. Such an ambitious goal requires structural changes in textile and garment production, consumption, and employment.

To assess the carbon emissions and make informed decisions, two standard approaches have been evolved – Life cycle assessment (LCA) and Greenhouse Gas Protocol accounting. A life cycle assessment (LCA) calculates the carbon footprint, energy consumption, and other environmental impacts in the "cradle to grave" lifecycle of a garment and aids decision-making in the design process to use materials and processes with lower environmental impact. Companies and organizations measure their corporate-level emissions, including value chains and operations, using the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol.

LCA is used by researchers and global fashion brands to quantify the textile and garment industry's environmental impacts and help choose eco-friendly materials and processes. A garment's cradle-to-grave lifecycle includes fiber cultivation, yarn production, textile manufacturing (spinning, knitting, and dyeing), garment assembly (cutting, sewing, and packaging), use frequency, washing, drying, and ironing, and waste disposal in landfills or recycling.

As per the studies carried out, the majority of the environmental impact is from fiber production (19%), followed by wet treatment – dyeing and finishing (16%), use-phase laundry, fabric production, etc. Unlocking the potential of sustainable fashion

Sustainable fashion is the process of designing, making, and selling clothes



and accessories that are good for the environment and people. One of the primary ways sustainable fashion helps lower carbon footprints is by reducing energy consumption during production. By using renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, sustainable fashion brands can significantly reduce their reliance on fossil fuels and decrease the number of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere.

Waste reduction is another way sustainable fashion lowers carbon footprints. Fast fashion wastes a lot of clothes and fabric, however, sustainable fashion emphasizes using recycled materials and minimizing water and chemical use in production. Brands may promote circularity – refurbish, repair, and resell used clothing, reducing the need for new clothing production and extending garment life.

Animal leather, silk, synthetic materials and chemicals, which can be harmful to the environment and human health, are widely used in traditional textile manufacturing processes. The textile industry has a significant opportunity to improve its sustainability and lower its carbon footprint by increasing the use of sustainable fabrics. The chart below shares the cradle-to-grave environmental impact of the various materials used in the garment industry.

Use of eco-friendly processes Environmentally friendly materials and fibers, such as organic cotton, industrial hemp, and bamboo, are grown without harmful chemicals and pesticides, leading to a decrease in air and water pollution, and with the use of eco-friendly manufacturing processes, such as water conservation and renewable energy sources can lower the carbon emissions of the fashion industry further.

CoreCarbonX has partnered with AlakandaGhati Shilpi Federation (AAGAS Federation) on the Industrial Hemp Cultivation project in the Central Himalayas

for carbon sequestration and economic sustainability.

Hemp is a highly sustainable fabric option that has gained popularity in recent years due to numerous benefits it offers to both consumers and the environment. Hemp plants are naturally resistant to pests and do not require the use of pesticides or herbicides, making them environmentally friendly. Additionally, hemp requires less water than other crops and can be grown without the need for irrigation. The fibre produced from the hemp plant is durable and can be used to create a wide range of clothing and textile products. Hemp is also biodegradable, which means that it can easily break down in the environment without causing harm.

Lastly, to offset the residual carbon emissions, the textile industry can invest in high-quality carbon credits generated from nature-based projects like sustainable agriculture, agroforestry, natural farming, etc.

In conclusion, adopting sustainable fashion is an effective way to lower carbon footprint and create a more sustainable future for the fashion industry. By reducing energy and water consumption, lowering waste, using eco-friendly fibres and materials, mitigating carbon emissions during various processes and encouraging circularity, sustainable fashion offers a solution to many of the environmental and social challenges faced by the fashion industry.

Sustainable fashion also needs more awareness so as to encourage consumers to buy high-quality, long-lasting, and eco-friendly clothes. This consumer behavior change could reduce fast fashion demand and the fashion industry's carbon footprint.

Regulations, certifications, industry standards, and technology can also play a huge role in preventing greenwashing and bringing transparency to the entire value chain. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Missiles, drones hit civilian buildings in Ukraine

Russian officials have blamed Ukrainian air defences for some of the deadliest strikes on apartment buildings in the past

KYIV, March 22 (AP): Ukraine's president posted a video on Wednesday showing what he said was a Russian missile slamming into an apartment building in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, after Russia launched exploding drones that killed at least four people at a student dormitory near Kyiv before dawn.

Just hours earlier, Japan's prime minister left the Ukrainian capital following a show of support for the country.

The same day, Chinese leader Xi Jinping left Moscow after discussing his proposal for ending the war, which has been rejected by the West as a non-starter.

The video posted by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Telegram appeared to be CCTV footage that captured the moment a missile hit the nine-story residential block by a busy road.

Ukrainian media carried pictures showing charred apartments on several stories of the affected buildings, and flames billowing from some of them. The number of casualties was unknown.

However, Vladimir Rogov, an official with the Moscow-appointed regional administration for the Russia-occupied part of the Zaporizhzhya region, claimed the building was hit by a Ukrainian air de-

fence missile that was launched to intercept a Russian missile.

He didn't cite any evidence to back up his claim.

Russia has denied targeting residential areas even though artillery and rocket strikes hit apartment buildings and civilian infrastructure on a daily basis.

Russian officials have blamed Ukrainian air defences for some of the deadliest strikes on apartment buildings in the past, charging that the deployment of air defense systems in residential areas puts civilians at risk.

An overnight drone attack partially destroyed a high school and two dormitories in the city of Rzhyschiv, south of the Ukrainian capital, local officials said. It wasn't clear how many people were in the dormitories at the time.

The body of a 40-year-old man was pulled from the rubble on a dormitory's fifth floor, according to regional police chief Andrii Nebytov.

More than 20 people were hospitalized, Nebytov said, and a few others were unaccounted for.

Ukrainian air defences downed 16 of the 21 drones launched by Russia, the Ukraine General Staff said.



Eight of them were shot down near the capital, according to the city's military administration. Other drone attacks struck central-western Khmelnytskyi province.

The drone barrage and other Russian overnight attacks that struck civilian infrastructure drew a scathing response from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a day after Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed China's proposals for negotiating an end to the war.

"Over 20 Iranian murderous drones, plus missiles, numerous shelling occasions, and that's just

in one last night of Russian terror," Zelenskyy wrote in English on Twitter.

"Every time someone tries to hear the word peace" in Moscow, another order is given there for such criminal strikes," he wrote.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who is the current chair of the Group of Seven countries, made a surprise visit to Kyiv on Tuesday, throwing his support behind Zelenskyy's government as his Asian rival Xi sided with Putin.

After returning to Poland Wednesday morning, Kishida said he had expressed the "unwavering determination of solidarity" of Japan and G-7 to Ukraine during his talks with Zelenskyy.

Kishida's visit to Ukraine was "very meaningful" for Japan's future support for that country, Japan's top government spokesman said on Wednesday.

"Through Prime Minister Kishida's visit to Ukraine, Japan was able to show not only to other members of the G-7 but also the international society including the Global South (nations) its determination to defend the rules-based international society," Hirokazu Matsuno said.

Kishida's visit snatched away some of the attention from Xi's trip to Moscow where he pro-

moted Beijing's peace proposal for Ukraine, which Western nations had already dismissed as a way to consolidate Moscow's gains.

Xi left Moscow early Wednesday. The visits by Xi and Kishida, about 800 kilometres (500 miles) apart, highlighted how countries are lining up behind Moscow or Kyiv during the nearly 13-month-old war.

In a joint statement, Russia and China emphasized the need to "respect legitimate security concerns of all countries" to settle the conflict, echoing Moscow's argument that it sent in troops to prevent the US and its NATO allies from turning the country into an anti-Russian bulwark.

Kishida, by contrast, called Russia's invasion a "disgrace that undermines the foundations of the international legal order" and pledged to "continue to support Ukraine until peace is back on the beautiful Ukrainian lands."

Ukraine's finance ministry said on Wednesday it has agreed with the International Monetary Fund on a USD 15.6 billion loan package aimed at shoring up Kyiv's finances.

Russia's invasion has crippled the economy, and Ukrainian officials hope the IMF deal will encourage their allies to provide financial support, too.

12 dead as powerful 6.8 magnitude earthquake jolts Pakistan, Afghanistan



ISLAMABAD, March 22 (PTI):

A strong 6.8 magnitude earthquake with the epicentre in Afghanistan shook Pakistan, killing at least 12 people and injuring nearly 250 others in both the countries, authorities said on Wednesday.

The earthquake's epicentre was Afghanistan's Hindu Kush region, while its depth was 180 kilometres, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department. Tremors were also felt in many parts of north India, including the Delhi-National Capital Region. In Pakistan, earthquakes tremors were felt in Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Quetta, Peshawar, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Sialkot, Kot Momin, Madh Ranyha, Chakwal, Kohat and Gilgit-Baltistan areas.

Television footage showed panic-stricken citizens out on the

streets.

The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) in Peshawar in a tweet said that nine persons, including five men, two women and two children were killed in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, bordering Afghanistan.

Two persons - a man in Islamabad and a 13-year-old girl in Abbottabad - lost their lives due to sudden cardiac arrest after the quake, Dawn newspaper reported.

At the time of the earthquake, a stampede was reported in the markets of Rawalpindi, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Nearly 200 people were injured in Swat, where hospitals had declared a state of emergency.

The earthquake also jolted the mountainous region of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), where the resultant

landslides created fear. However, no loss of life was immediately reported.

Rescue officials said landslides damaged a cattle farm in Yasin Ghizer, resulting in the death of livestock.

Sources said landslides blocked the Karakoram Highway in the Harban area of Kohistan near the border with GB's Diamir district, stranding several people on both sides.

In Islamabad and the neighbouring city of Rawalpindi, cracks appeared in various buildings.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has asked disaster management officials to remain vigilant to handle any situation.

An emergency was declared in the hospitals of the federal capital on the instructions of Federal health minister Abdul Qadir Patel, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

According to the Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan, at least three people were killed and 44 others were injured in the quake.

"There could be more casualties," The Khaama Press - an online Afghan news agency, quoted a spokesperson for the public health ministry as saying.

Sharafat Zaman Amerkhail, another spokesperson for Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health, said that the heads of all medical centres had been instructed to prepare staff for possible casualties from the earthquake.

North Korea fires cruise missiles as allies stage drills

SEOUL, March 22 (AP): North Korea launched cruise missiles toward the sea on Wednesday, South Korea's military said, three days after the North carried out what it called a simulated nuclear attack on South Korea to protest its military drills with the United States.

North Korea has stepped up its weapons testing activities, saying they are in response to the ongoing South Korean-US military training that it sees as an invasion rehearsal.

Analysts say North Korean leader Kim Jong Un likely intends to enlarge his arsenal to win greater outside concessions, while trying to boost an image of a strong leader amid domestic economic hardships.

The 11-day South Korean-US drills are to end on Thursday. But North Korea is expected to continue its weapons tests as the United States reportedly plans to send an aircraft carrier in coming days for another round of joint drills with South Korea.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected "several" cruise missile launches from the North's northeastern coastal town of Hamhung.

It said the missiles flew into the North's eastern waters and that South Korean and US intelligence authorities were analysing further details.

The launches are the North's



sixth round of missile tests this month and the fourth since the US and South Korean militaries early last week began large-scale military drills, which include field exercises and computer simulations. The field training is the largest of its kind since 2018.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said the South Korean military will maintain a firm readiness and successfully complete the rest of the drills with the United States.

North Korea keeps a huge stockpile of ballistic missile systems whose tests are banned by multiple UN Security Council resolutions. Eleven rounds of U.N. sanctions imposed on North Korea since 2006 were approved because of North Korea's previous ballistic missile and nuclear test explosions.

Cruise missile tests by North Korea aren't prohibited by the UN council. But experts say they still pose a serious threat to its neighbors because they are designed to fly at a lower altitude to avoid radar detection.

North Korea has called some of its cruise and ballistic missiles "strategic" weapons, a suggestion that it wants to arm them with nuclear warheads. Foreign experts debate whether the North has overcome the remaining technological hurdles to possess functioning nuclear missiles.

After more than 70 missile tests last year — the largest number for a year — North Korea has extended its provocative run in weapons demonstrations in 2023, launching around 20 missiles in 10

separate events.

The weapons that were tested included short-range nuclear-capable ballistic missiles capable of striking South Korea and intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to attack the mainland US.

Wednesday's launches were the North's first tests of cruise missiles since March 21, when it said it fired two cruise missiles from a submarine. Last month, North Korea launched what it called four long-range cruise missiles that demonstrated potential to strike targets 2,000 kilometres (1,240 miles) away.

On Sunday, Kim supervised a test-firing of a short-range ballistic missile launched from what was possibly a silo dug into the ground.

State media called it a simulated nuclear attack on unspecified South Korean targets that was meant to send a "stronger warning" to the United States and South Korea over their drills.

The North's media said a mock nuclear warhead placed on the missile detonated 800 metres (2,600 feet) above water, an altitude that some experts say was aimed at maximising damage.

It was the first time for North Korea to publicize such an altitude for detonating a nuclear weapon though it has previously claimed to have conducted simulated nuclear strikes on its rivals.

Macron to defend French pension plan on national television

PARIS, March 22 (AP): French President Emmanuel Macron will explain how he will seek to overcome tensions prompted by his plan to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64, as he speaks on national television for the first time since his government forced through the bill amid mass protests.

Macron is expected to back his government on Wednesday, two days after it survived two no-confidence votes at the lower chamber of parliament. The 45-year-old French president repeatedly said that he was convinced the retirement system needed to be modified to keep it financed.

His decision last week to use a special constitutional power to push the bill through the legislative process without a vote infuriated many at parliament and across the country.

Since then, mostly small, scattered protests are being held every day in cities around France, some degenerating into violence, including in Paris.

Dock workers in Marseille on Wednesday blocked access to the city's commercial port — France's biggest — preventing trucks and cars from entering amid a heavy police presence.

Garbage was still piling up on some Paris streets as sanitation workers entered their 17th day of the strike. Authorities issued an order in recent days requiring some garbage employees to ensure a "minimum service" for health reasons.

Oil shipments in the country were partially disrupted amid strikes at several refineries in western and southern France. Gas stations in the country's southeast region are currently the most affected by shortages.

Unions have called for new nationwide protests and strikes on Thursday to demand that the government simply withdraw the retirement bill. High-speed and regional trains, Paris metro and other public transportation in major cities were expected to be disrupted.

IMF facility debunks SL's bankrupt status: Prez Wickremesinghe

COLOMBO, March 22 (PTI): President Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament on Wednesday that the IMF bailout had restored Sri Lanka's international recognition, ending the image of bankruptcy and helping the local banks regain foreign investors' confidence. The IMF board had on Tuesday approved a USD 3 billion facility over a four-year period to help Sri Lanka emerge from its balance of payment crisis which plagued the island since April last year.

Wickremesinghe said the bailout would "create opportunities for low-interest credit, restore foreign investors' confidence, and lay the foundation for a strong new economy". The receipt of the IMF Facility is a step towards building a better future for the youth and uplifting the country.

Additionally, the country is expecting about USD 7 billion dollars more

in rapid credit support from other parties.

"Amidst numerous hardships, bearing all kinds of pressure, and undergoing suffering with equanimity, the people of this country remained calm and patient. Their commitment was a great strength in achieving the IMF Facility," Wickremesinghe, also the country's finance minister, said.

Wickremesinghe, however, reminded the hard grind ahead of Sri Lanka with having to reform the vital sectors of the economy.

"We are now starting a new journey. We have to introduce many economic reforms throughout the process. The foundation for our success will be through this path. Some of these reforms have already been proposed and implemented through the interim budget of 2022 and the budget for 2023. We will introduce numerous other reforms," he said.

LGBTQ activists in Japan launch engagement group ahead of G7

TOKYO, March 22 (AP): Japanese LGBTQ activists and rights groups have launched a civil "engagement group" to make policy proposals ahead of the Group of Seven summit in Japan and announced plans to hold an inaugural Pride 7 summit in Tokyo later this month, seeking to accelerate their efforts to get the Japanese government to adopt an anti-discrimination law.

Japan is the only member of the Group of Seven advanced industrialised nations that lacks a law protecting the rights of LGBTQ people.

"Other G-7 members are watching to see if Japan enacts an anti-discrimination law," said Natsuo Hayashi, co-director of the Japan Alliance for LGBT Legislation, a local civil group.

His group, joined by two other organisations, on Wednesday announced the launch of Pride 7, which plans to make policy proposals for G-7 organisers in the hopes



of achieving an LGBTQ anti-discrimination law in Japan while also addressing problems in other countries, especially in Asia.

P-7 is joined by rights organizations in 10 other countries, including six other G-7 members, as well as Thailand, Vietnam, Botswana and Mexico, and the EU.

Gon Matsunaka, another member of the group, said a P-7 summit will be held on March 30 with ambassadors from G-7 nations and representatives of economic organisations and labour unions.

Matsunaka said they plan to submit a policy recommendation to Japanese Prime Minister

Fumio Kishida.

LGBTQ activists and their supporters have stepped up their efforts to achieve an anti-discrimination law following discriminatory remarks in February by a former Kishida aide, who said he wouldn't want to live next to LGBTQ people and that citizens would flee Japan if same-sex marriage were allowed.

Amid national outrage over the remarks, Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party and other non-partisan lawmakers have begun preparing legislation to promote awareness of LGBTQ rights, but some conservatives have shown resistance.

The activists noted that Japan signed the communiqué adopted at the G-7 Elmau summit hosted in Germany last year that calls for "full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity as well as LGBTQ+ persons in politics, economics, education and all other spheres of society," and must fulfill its commitment.

Boris Johnson faces high-stakes grilling over 'partygate'

LONDON, March 22 (AP): Boris Johnson is back where he likes to be: at the centre of attention. But he's not so happy about the reason.

Britain's former prime minister faces a grilling Wednesday by a committee of lawmakers over whether he misled Parliament about rule-breaking parties in government buildings during the coronavirus pandemic.

In a statement, a bullish Johnson said "the evidence conclusively shows that I did not knowingly or recklessly mislead Parliament."

"The committee has produced not a shred of evidence to show that I have," he said.

Expected to last several hours, the hearing is a moment of peril for a politician whose career has been a roller coaster of scandals and comebacks. If the House of Commons Committee of Privileges concludes Johnson lied deliberately, he could be suspended or even lose his seat in Parliament.

That would likely end hopes of one more comeback for the 58-year-old politician, who led the Conservative Party to a landslide victory in 2019 but was forced out by his own party in July 2022 after getting mired in scandals over money, ethics and judgment.

In an interim report this month, the committee — made up of Conservative and opposition lawmakers — said evidence strongly suggested that it would have been "obvious" to Johnson that gatherings in his Downing Street offices in 2020 and 2021 broke Covid-19 lockdown rules.

Johnson acknowledged on Tuesday that his repeated reassurances to Parliament that the rules were followed at all times "did not turn out to be correct." But he said he "did not intentionally or recklessly mislead" lawmakers.

In a dossier of written evidence, Johnson said it never occurred to him that the gatherings — which variously included cake, wine, cheese and a "secret Santa" festive gift exchange — broke the restrictions on socialising that his own government had imposed on the country.

UN: 26 percent of world lacks clean drinking water, 46 percent sanitation

UNITED NATIONS, March 22 (AP): A report released on the eve of the first major UN conference on water in over 45 years says 26 per cent of the world's population doesn't have access to safe drinking water and 46 per cent lacks access to basic sanitation.

The UN World Water Development Report 2023, issued Tuesday, painted a stark picture of the huge gap that needs to be filled to meet UN goals to ensure all people have access to clean water and sanitation by 2030. Richard Connor, editor-in-chief of the report, told a news conference that the estimated cost of meeting the goals is between USD 600 billion and USD 1 trillion a year.

But equally important, Connor said, is forging partnerships with investors, financiers, governments and climate change communities to ensure that money is invested in ways to sustain the environment and provide potable water to the 2 billion people who don't have it and sanitation

to the 3.6 million in need.

According to the report, water use has been increasing globally by roughly 1 per cent per year over the last 40 years "and is expected to grow at a similar rate through to 2050, driven by a combination of population growth, socio-economic development and changing consumption patterns".

Connor said that actual increase in demand is happening in developing countries and emerging economies where it is driven by industrial growth and especially the rapid increase in the population of cities. It is in these urban areas "that you're having a real big increase in demand," he said.

With agriculture using 70 per cent of all water globally, Connor said, irrigation for crops has to be more efficient — as it is in some countries that now use drip irrigation, which saves water. "That allows water to be available to cities," he said. As a result of



climate change, the report said, "seasonal water scarcity will increase in regions where it is currently abundant — such as Central Africa, East Asia and parts of South America — and worsen in regions where water is already in short supply, such as the Middle East and the Sahara in Africa". On average, "10 percent of the global population lives in countries with high or critical water stress" — and up to 3.5 billion people live under conditions of water stress at least one month a year, said the report issued by UNESCO, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Since 2000, floods in the tropics have quadrupled while floods in the north mid-latitudes have increased

2.5-fold, the report said. Trends in droughts are more difficult to establish, it said, "although an increase in intensity or frequency of droughts and 'heat extremes' can be expected in most regions as a direct result of climate change".

As for water pollution, Connor said, the biggest source of pollution is untreated wastewater.

"Globally, 80 percent of wastewater is released to the environment without any treatment," he said, "and in many developing countries it's pretty much 99 percent."

These and other issues including protecting aquatic ecosystems, improving management of water resources, increasing water reuse and promoting cooperation across borders on water use will be discussed during the three-day UN Water Conference co-chaired by King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands and Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon opening on Wednesday.

Meghalaya govt serious about checking illegal transportation of charcoal: CM

Under the new rules, the producers and stockists of charcoal are required to apply for registration to the Divisional Forest Officer concerned

SHILLONG, March 22 (PTI): The Meghalaya government is serious about checking the illegal transportation of charcoal in the state, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said in the assembly on Wednesday.

For this, the Meghalaya Charcoal (Control of Production, Storage, Trade and Transport) Rules, 2008 has been amended in 2019, he said.

Under the new rules, the producers and stockists of charcoal are required to apply for registration to the Divisional Forest Officer concerned and renewal of such registration can be done after a period of one year with the prior approval of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests.

Sangma was replying to a call atten-



tion motion moved by United Democratic Party MLA Mayralborn Syiem

who referred to a media report on the forest department unable to check the

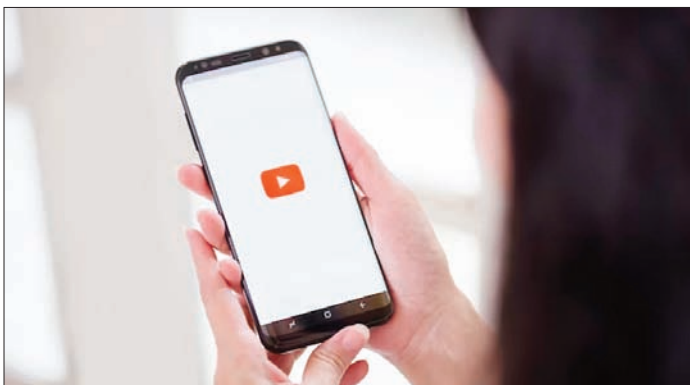
illegal transportation of charcoal in the northeastern state. The chief minister said 95 metric tonnes of charcoal has been seized in the past five years and 23 cases have been registered for its illegal production, transport and storage, Sangma said.

Ferro alloys sector is one of the main consumers of charcoal.

A sum of Rs 2.60 lakh has been realised as compounding fees besides the registration of 23 cases in Ri-Bhoi and West Khasi Hills districts in the past five years, Sangma said.

However, no case relating to illegal production of charcoal has been detected in either Reserved Forests or Protected Forests in the two districts, he said.

Meghalaya govt spent ₹ 29 lakh on promotional videos on YouTube: Minister



SHILLONG, March 22 (PTI): The Meghalaya government spent ₹ 29.44 lakh on promotional videos on YouTube in the last quarter of the 2022-23 fiscal, state minister Ampareen Lyngdoh told the assembly on Wednesday.

The fund was spent from the planning department and the payment was made directly to YouTube Google Ad Account, the

Information and Public Relations minister said.

No fund was spent on newspaper and outdoor hoarding advertisements in the same period, she said.

There was no specific budget under publicity spending or diversion of funds or fund overdrawn from some other head of accounts for this purpose, the minister said.

UNLF cadre nabbed in Imphal

IMPHAL, March 22 (NNN): An active cadre of rebel outfit, United National Liberation Front (UNLF), was arrested by a team of Imphal West district police commandos on Tuesday, police said. The arrested cadre has been identified as Saikhom Shanta Meetei (39) of Thoubal district. The police commando team arrested the cadre near LIC office in Imphal's Khoyathong today. The police alleged that he has been working for the UNLF for around four months under the command of one self-styled captain Chingacha @ Angamba presently based in Myanmar. He is deeply involved in extortion of money from different schools and he handed over the extortion money to one UNLF cadre for their party activities. The arrested person and the seized articles were handed over to city police station for further investigation, the police added.

Water conservation need of the hour: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, March 22 (PTI): Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday called for conservation of water to address the water scarcity problem of the state. The northeastern state has been reeling under acute water shortage with multiple rivers drying up due to lack of rain.

Speaking at a state-level awareness campaign on World Water Day 2023, the chief minister said "the government is working hard to provide water for the people to mitigate the water scarcity problem in the state."

"We have already started delivering water through a special pipeline from Chingkhei Ching water supply reservoir", Singh said. The government is also prepared to lift water from Loktak Lake, the chief minister said. Appealing to people to harvest rainwater and learn ways to save water, Singh said "the scale of deforestation for poppy plantation is immense. "The protection of reserved and protected forests is not for me but for the welfare of the people and for the future generation".

CUET should remain optional, says Association of Indian Universities

BARIDUA (Meghalaya), March 22 (PTI): The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) on Wednesday said it prefers the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) for admission to undergraduate programmes to remain an option for colleges and varsities of the country.

Addressing a press conference here, AIU Secretary General Pankaj Mittal said CUET has not been made mandatory yet and AIU's stand is that it should remain voluntary for the universities or colleges willing to opt for the new system.

"In our opinion, it is a good system. This was introduced to ease the problems of students, who will now appear only in one exam that is CUET. But I heard that the Government of India has recently said it is optional for a university," she said.

Mittal acknowledged the opposition to the new system for studying degree courses in the Northeast despite a large number of institutions across the nation going for the CUET.

Altogether 206 universities, including

44 central and 33 state varsities, have opted for the CUET so far, up from 90 institutes last year.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) in March last year announced that undergraduate admissions would be conducted in all central universities through a common entrance test and not on the basis of Class 12 marks.

The debut edition of the CUET-UG was conducted in July last year and was marred by glitches, prompting the National Testing Agency to cancel the exam at multiple centres. While several students were informed of cancellation a night before the test, many of them were turned away from centres.

Mittal said the three-day National Conference of Vice Chancellors on 'Transformative Higher Education for Atmanirbhar Bharat' will begin at the University of Science & Technology Meghalaya (USTM) here from Thursday.

Around 600 vice-chancellors, including those from foreign varsities, are likely to take part in the conference, which will be inaugurated by former

President Ram Nath Kovind.

The 97th Annual General Meet of AIU and its 97th Foundation Day Lecture, to be delivered by Padma Shri awardee and Chairman of Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister Bibek Debroy, will also take place during the programme.

"A host of VCs from universities like JNU, IGNOU, Symbiosis International, University of Massachusetts, Bharti Vidyapeeth, University of Hyderabad, and Directors of IITs, IISc, AICTE, NAAC, ICAR, ACU and IIIT will be joining this mega conference," Mittal said. Speaking on the occasion, USTM Vice Chancellor Gauri Dutt Sharma said this is for the first time in the Northeast that a private university is organising such a large conference with participation of domestic and international educationists and policymakers.

"Transformation of the education system will be discussed at length during the conference. This holds special significance because India aims to become a world leader in every field by 2047," he added.

GOVT. OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE JOINT DIRECTOR OF HEALTH SERVICES, KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT, DIPHU

No.Jt.DHS/KA/Diet/Tender/2023/817

Dated Diphu, the 20th March, 2023.

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Application are hereby invited from intending Diet Supplier for supply of the Dietary Articles to the Bokajan CHC, Bokolia CHC, Howraghat CHC, Hamren Civil Hospital, Donkamokam CHC and Kheroni Model hospital from 1st April, 2023 to 31st March 2024 and the rate of Diet will be Rs. 90/- (Rupees Ninety) only per patient per day and Diet should be such that on every Sunday of the week should be provided meal with meat such as Mutton/Chicken etc. 2 (two) meals with fish/eggs on Wednesday and Friday. The cost of all items including Rice and Daal etc. will be within Rs. 90/- (Rupees Ninety) only.

The Dietary articles to be supplied should be of best quality and fresh and as per specification which is to be obtained from the Superintendent of their respective hospital. The articles will have to be delivered on credit system at Bokajan CHC, Bokolia CHC, Howraghat CHC, Hamren Civil Hospital, Donkamokam CHC and Kheroni Model hospital according to the demand of the Hospital authority. The application must reach to the undersigned on or before 28/03/2023 upto 1:00 P.M. positively. No tender will be accepted as above mentioned date and time under any circumstances. The Tender will be open on the same day i.e. 28/03/2023 at 2:00 PM.

Items of Dietary Articles:

Group-II

1. Butter (Annual 400 gm)
2. Cow's milk (100% pure)

Group-III

1. L.P.Gas (Commercial)

Group-IV

1. Fish (Rui, Katla, Mirga, Mahasoul with head)
2. Fish (Kai, Magoor without head)
3. Meat (He-Goat) fresh
4. Eggs (Duck & Hens)

Group-V

1. Potato
2. Radish
3. Bringer
4. Green Banana
5. Cauliflower
6. Cabbage
7. Pumpkin
8. Tomato
9. Jinga
10. Papaya
11. Ginger
12. Potal
13. Bean
14. Ladies finger
15. Banana (Malbhug)k
16. Orange
17. Horlic (450 gm)
18. Onion

Group-VI-

1. Loaves.

Sd/-

Joint Director of Health Services,
Karbi Anglong District, Diphu

Memo No. Jt.DHS/KA/Diet/Tender/2023/ 817(A)

Dated Diphu, the 20th March, 2023.

North Garo Hills observes World Water Day

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 22: Under the theme "Accelerating Change", World Water Day was observed at Bakra Multi Facility Hall in Resubelpara, North Garo Hills on Wednesday. The programme organised by PHE (DWSM, JJM) NGH aimed at highlighting the importance of water, particularly freshwater and solving the water crisis through awareness and taking effective measures.

Speaking as the chief guest during the programme, Tadingchi N Sangma, Assistant Commissioner, NGH enlightened the gathering on the pressing issue of water crisis all around the world and added that due to rapid urbanization and clearing of forests for human settlement the problem of water scarcity has become inevitable. "Since water and forests are inter-related there would be no water without forests and no forests without water", she added.

She implored upon the gathering to un-

derstand the significance of preservation of water catchment areas and fresh water resources; rain water harvesting and conservation of forests.

Highlighting some of the government schemes designed for the welfare of the people at large and in particular of the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme, Sangma noted that for effective implementation of any scheme, people and the community need to have a 'sense of ownership'. Government's effort alone is not enough; peoples' participation is needed for successful implementation of the schemes as this would enable them to be part of the programme, she further added. During the programme, status of JJM in the district was also highlighted where Silgrak Sangma, DPM, DPMU, JJM informed that there were a total household of 40684 in the district and about 18012 households have been connected so far. Work is on to ensure full coverage of the scheme and hence Sangma sought cooperation from all stakehold-



ers for successful implementation of JJM. Earlier, A'we Pedallars, a team of cyclists, had a rally from Bakra MFC to Jolding Wari, a tourist spot to spread water awareness and its conservation. The rally was flagged off by Tadingchi Sangma, Assistant Commissioner in the presence of Dr N R Marak, Senior DM&HO besides other government officials. As part of the programme, students' winners of the essay, drawing and folk song competition were felicitated by the chief guest and a play on the objective of JJM was also enacted by Bakra Women's Club.

No.KOK/BLDG/Tech-40/Pt-Iv/2018-19/5534

Date 13-03-2023

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing Non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs.8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only with a validity period of 180 (One hundred eighty) days which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 Form are invited from the intending Registered contractors of class-I (A, B, C) and II category of the Assam PWD (Bldg.) for submitting tender for the work stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up-to 1-30 P.M. of 27-03-2023 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2-00 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of work	(Approx.) Estimated value of work)	Earnest money 2% for GNL & 1% for ST/SC/ OBC/MOBC	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
1	Repairing and Renovation of boundary wall Electric connection, drinking water facility with tube well at Rajadabri Sub-Centre in Kokrajhar District	Rs.17,80,834.00	Rs.35,700/- & Rs.17,900/-	Rs.1000/-	6 (six) months

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up-to 1.30 pm in all working days from 23-03-2023 to 27-03-2023 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker cheque/Bank draft/Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC. The contractor should submit up-to date copy of Registration Certificate, latest clearance certificate of Income Tax and GST along with the tender paper. In case the office is remain closed/bandh for any circumstances on tender receiving/opening date, then the same will be received/opened in the next working days.

Sd/-

Executive Engineer, PWD,
Kokrajhar Distric & Chirang District
Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)-1409/2022

SC to constitute special bench on Bilkis Bano gangrape case

The state government passed a 'mechanical order' completely ignoring the requirement of law as laid down by the Supreme Court: Bano

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to constitute a special bench to hear a plea against the remission of sentence of 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano gangrape case, which also involves the killing of seven members of her family during the 2002 Gujarat riots. A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala assured Bano, represented through her lawyer Shobha Gupta, that the new bench will be formed. Gupta mentioned the matter for urgent hearing and said a new bench needs to be constituted.

"I will have a bench constituted. Will look at it this evening," the CJI said. Earlier on February 7, the plea was mentioned for urgent hearing by a fresh bench and the CJI had assured Bano's lawyer that he will set up one at the earliest.

Prior to this, the hearing on Bano's plea could not be taken up for hearing on January 24 as the judges concerned were hearing a matter related to passive euthanasia as part of a five-judge constitution bench. On that day, the petition was listed for hearing before a bench of justices Rastogi and CT Ravikumar.

Both justices Rastogi and Ravikumar were then busy hearing, as part of a constitution bench headed by Justice K M Joseph, the pleas seeking modification of guidelines on the execution of a "Living Will or Advance Medical Directive" for permitting passive euthanasia.

On January 4, a bench comprising justices



Ajay Rastogi and Bela M Trivedi took up the plea, including some PILs. However, Justice Trivedi recused from hearing the case without citing any reason. Bano had moved the apex court on November 30, 2022 challenging the "premature" release of 11 lifers by the state government, saying it has "shaken the conscience of society". Besides the plea challenging the release of the convicts, the gang-rape survivor had also filed a separate petition seeking a review of the apex court's May 13, 2022 order on a plea by a convict. The review plea was later dismissed in December last year.

All 11 convicts were granted remission by the Gujarat government and released on August 15, last year. The victim, in her pending writ petition, has said the state government passed a

"mechanical order" completely ignoring the requirement of law as laid down by the Supreme Court. "The en-masse premature release of the convicts in the much talked about case of Bilkis Bano has shaken the conscience of the society and resulted in a number of agitations across the country," she has said in the plea.

Referring to past verdicts, the plea said en-masse remissions are not permissible and, moreover, such a relief cannot be sought or granted as a matter of right without examining the case of each convict individually based on their peculiar facts and role played by them in the crime.

"The present writ petition challenging the decision of the state/ central government granting remission to all the 11 convicts and releasing them prematurely in one of the most gruesome crimes of extreme inhuman violence and brutality," it said. The plea, which gave minute details of the crime, said Bilkis and her grown-up daughters were "shell-shocked with this sudden development".

"When the nation was celebrating its 76th Independence Day, all the convicts were released prematurely and were garlanded and felicitated in full public glare and sweets were circulated," it said. The top court is already seized of PILs filed by CPI(M) leader Subhashini Ali, Revati Lail, an independent journalist, Roop Rekha Verma, who is a former vice chancellor of the Lucknow University, and TMC MP Mahua Moitra against the release of the convicts.

FM Gahlot presents budget for 2023-24 in Delhi assembly



NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): Finance minister Kailash Gahlot on Wednesday presented a ₹ 78,800 crore budget in the Delhi assembly for the financial year 2023-24 with the announcement of nine schemes as part of the G-20 preparations.

The Delhi government's budget size for 2022-23 was ₹ 75,800 crore and ₹ 69,000 crore in the preceding year. This was the first time that Gahlot presented the budget after taking charge of the finance department following the

resignation of deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia who was arrested by the CBI in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case.

"I would have been happier if this budget was presented by Manish Sisodia who is like my elder brother. The budget is an expression of expectations and aspirations of the people," Gahlot said in his budget speech.

The minister said the budget is dedicated to a clean, beautiful and modern Delhi with ₹ 19,466 crore to be spent on upgradation of 1,400 kilometres of roads in the next 10 years. The government has allocated ₹ 2,034 crore for 2023-24 for various infrastructure projects.

This is the ninth consecutive budget of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government.

"Every possible help will be given to the MCD to remove the three mountains of garbage in Delhi. We will connect all colonies to the sewer network. In-

crease capacities of sewage treatment plants to clean Yamuna river," he said. He announced that local bodies will be given financial assistance of ₹ 8,241 crore in financial year 2023-24.

Addressing the assembly, the minister said that the budget has nine schemes as part of G-20 summit preparations.

The government will undertake upgradation and beautification of road network, construction of 26 flyovers, three double-decker flyovers in collaboration with DMRC, include 1,600 e-buses, carry out electrification of bus depots, construct world class ISBTs and work to remove landfill sites and clean Yamuna.

Out of 26 flyover projects, 10 are in construction stage while plans for 11 have been sent to UT-TIPEC for clearance.

Gahlot also rued the fact that despite its huge contribution, Centre has been allocating just ₹ 325 crore to Delhi as its share in central taxes.

JPC must to probe all aspects of Adani issue: Cong to SC



NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): The Congress on Wednesday claimed that the Supreme Court-appointed expert committee lacks jurisdiction to probe all aspects of the Adani issue and would only be a "clean chit" panel for the government, asserting that only a JPC investigation could bring out the truth in the matter.

Addressing a press conference as the party's total questions asked under its 'Hum Adani Ke Hain Kaun' initiative reached the 100-mark, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the Adani issue is "non-negotiable".

The Congress has been persistent in its attack on the government weeks after Adani Group stocks took a beating on the bourses after US-based short seller Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations, including fraudulent transactions and share-price manipulation.

The Gautam Adani-led group has dismissed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements.

Sarus crane taken away by forest officials from its human friend

AMETHI (UP), March 22 (PTI): The heart warming story of Arif Khan Gurjar and the Sarus crane is over.

The crane that lived with Gurjar in this district's Mandkha village, accompanied him to his fields and was accepted "like a family member" was on Tuesday taken away by forest department officials.

The bird was shifted to the Samaspur Bird Sanctuary in Rae Bareilly on Tuesday, so that it could live in its "natural environment". A YouTube video showed Gurjar placing the big bird in the back of a pick-up truck. He appeared to wipe away a tear as he walked away. The YouTuber asked his subscribers to comment if the officials did a good thing "separating" the man and the bird. But the department said Gurjar agreed with the decision. "Whatever action has been taken is with Arif's consent," Divisional Forest Officer D N Singh said on Wednesday. Before the send off, the bird was video-graphed by the department. The reason for breaking them up? The official said these birds always live in pairs. Since this one

was living alone, there was some apprehension. The bird probably wouldn't have left on its own. Last month, Gurjar told PTI, "This sarus is now like a family member. On a number of occasions, I left it in the fields to fly away to its own bird community but it refuses to leave me. It comes back to me every time."

Gurjar found the bird about a year back in his fields, lying unconscious with a bleeding leg. He initially thought the Sarus was dead, but took it home when he realised that it was still breathing. He cleaned the wound and applied a mix of turmeric and mustard on it. Then he devised a splint out of bamboo to keep the leg stable. But the crane refused to fly away even after it was well enough. Whenever Gurjar went out, it followed. "I have not attended any family function in the last year because I just can't go anywhere. If it doesn't find me around, it becomes uncomfortable. If I have to go for some work, I need to dodge it. During the night, the bird sleeps by my cot on his one leg," Gurjar had then said.



as Nasofilters, Nanoclean Pollution Net and Naso-mask. However, the advisory inspired us to broaden our scope of work and we decided to use the same technology to develop something that can help people quit smoking," Sharma said.

Sharma's team carried out a study which suggested that 63 per cent of smokers want to quit smoking but are unable to do so because of nicotine addiction. They also came to know that even according to the WHO, only four per cent of smokers succeed in quitting without any cessation support. "We realised there was a void between advising to quit smoking and actually quitting smoking. We worked for four years...and came

K C Tyagi relieved of organisational responsibilities: JD(U)

PATNA, March 22 (PTI): Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U) on Wednesday asserted that veteran leader K C Tyagi would "continue to be a strong pillar" of the party though he was relieved of organisational responsibilities upon his "repeated requests". The clarification came a day after the party came out with its new list of national office bearers wherein the name of Tyagi, arguably the JD(U)'s best known spokesperson, was conspicuous by its absence.

In a statement, the party's national general secretary Afaq Ahmed Khan rued "media circulating wrong message regarding the exclusion" of Tyagi, who previously held the designation of chief general secretary. Khan claimed Tyagi, who has been active in politics for close to five decades, had requested Nitish Kumar, the party's supremo, after the JD(U) national council meeting held in December last year, "to relieve him from the organisational responsibilities".

ISRO might ally with JASA on a moon mission: S Somanath

AHMEDABAD, March 22 (PTI): Indian Space Research Organisation chairman S Somanath on Wednesday said ISRO has successfully done significant collaborations on its space missions and is also discussing a possible mission to the moon with Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

Somanath also said there is a good opportunity to launch a mission to explore planet Venus by 2028. He was delivering the inaugural talk on "Indian Capabilities for Space and Planetary Exploration" at the 4th Indian Planetary Science Conference organised at Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) here.

The ISRO chief said it was important to have a connection between scientific institutions across the world and ISRO in building complex missions. He cited the example of the TRISHNA mission, designed to observe the earth's surface in the thermal infrared domain, which has been developed by ISRO and its French counterpart CNES.

"We are also discussing a possible mission to the moon with JASA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) where the land rover will be built by them and they will launch it using a Japanese rocket," said Somanath, who is also Secretary of the Department of Space. He said ISRO will look at possible engagement with other agencies in exploratory missions.

"It is very important that it will happen only when they have confidence in you and our instruments and measurement systems are complementary to their goals," he said.

He added, "Our primary objective is to help people quit smoking through our...Cigibud variants (Lite, Ultra, and Pro). Those who don't want to quit, they can at least start using Cigibud (Lite). The nanofibers of Cigibud (Lite) increase the smoothness of smoke and make it less injurious." Each packet of Cigibud contains 30 filters and it costs ₹ 350. One filter is advised to be used only once but people can use it up to three times because beyond that it loses its effectiveness. Asked if the cost factor will discourage people from using it with one filter costing around ₹ 10 and ideally should be used once, Sharma said that people should think about its long-term benefit, both in terms of health and money, which they will have after quitting smoking or minimising the frequency of smoking.

No. DME/P-Med/96/2022/ 6861

ADMISSION NOTICE

Provisional Admission into the 1st year Paramedical course in the Institutes of Para-Medical Sciences attached to the Medical Colleges of Assam for the session 2021

This is for information of all concerned that the provisional select list of candidate after the 2nd round of counselling for admission into vacant Diploma in Para-Medical seats in the Institutes of Para-Medical Sciences attached to the Medical Colleges of Assam for the session 2021, has been published which is now available in the official website of this Directorate www.dme.assam.gov.in.

All the selected candidates are hereby directed to report to the office of the Principal of the respective Medical Colleges with all their original testimonials, etc. on 27th & 28th March/ 2023 for admission, with following condition. If the candidates fail to get admitted within stipulated time, their allotted seat shall be cancelled.

- Candidates are to deposit the original Admit Cards, Marks Sheets, Pass Certificates of HSLC and H.S.SLC or Equivalent examination, Caste certificate, E.W.S. certificate etc. to the Principal of the respective Medical Colleges at the time of admission.
- The admission of the candidates are subject to the satisfactory Medical fitness certificate issued by the Medical Board constituted by the respective Principal of the Medical Colleges.
- All admissions are provisional.

Sd/-
Director of Medical Education,
Assam

Janasanyog/D/23921/22

BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION, ASSAM

BAMUNIMADAM, GUWAHATI-781 021

Website: sebaonline.org, email: boardassam@gmail.com

RE-SCHEDULED PROGRAMME OF HSLC EXAMINATION, 2023

Date & Day	Morning From 9:00 a.m. - 12 noon	Afternoon From 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m
March, 30 th , 2023 Thursday	General Science	X
April, 1 st , 2023 Saturday	MIL/*English (IL)	X

N.B.: On 28th of March (Tuesday), 2023, examination of English subject will be held in 1(One) Examination Centre bearing Centre Code B23 - 0138 in the district of Cachar.

Please Note :

- (5) (five) minutes extra time is allowed from 8:55 a.m to 9:00 a.m in the Morning shift and 1:25 p.m to 1:30 p.m in the Afternoon shift to read the Question Paper only. The Officer In-Charge will arrange distribution accordingly
- (b) Modern Indian Languages (MIL) : Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Hindi, Manipuri, Hmar, Nepali, Mizo, Khasi, Garo, Karbi & Urdu.
- (c) This has been issued in continuation of earlier notification No. SEBA/EX/HOLD/65/2022-23/50 dated 13th March, 2023 & No. SEBA/EX/HOLD/65/2022-23/54 dated 17th March, 2023.

Dated Guwahati
The 22nd of March, 2023

Janasanyog/D/23946/22

Sd/- (Nayan Jyoti Sarmah)
Controller of Examinations
Board of Secondary Education, Assam
Guwahati - 21

President Murmu confers Padma awards

Former K'taka CM S M Krishna, noted industrialist Kumar Mangalam Birla, and famous playback singer Suman Kalyanpur were given Padma awards

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): Former Karnataka chief minister S M Krishna, noted industrialist Kumar Mangalam Birla, and famous playback singer Suman Kalyanpur were given Padma awards by President Droupadi Murmu at a ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Wednesday.

Besides them, billionaire stock market investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, who passed away last year, was given the Padma Shri posthumously.

Krishna, a former external affairs minister who is "known for his statesman-like vision and administrative acumen during a career spanning more than six decades", was given the Padma Vibhushan, the Rashtrapati Bhavan tweeted.

He was an external affairs minister in the Congress-led UPA government but later joined the BJP.

Noted architect Balkrishna Doshi (posthumously) was also given Padma Vibhushan, the country's second highest civilian honour. Doshi, known for using a minimalist, simple, and eco-friendly approach to architecture, designed many iconic structures.

Birla, chairman of the Aditya Birla Group, was given the Padma Bhushan. One of the first Indian groups to venture abroad, it has acquired a widespread global presence, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in another tweet.

Delhi-based professor Kapil



Kapoor, spiritual leader Kamlesh D Patel, and Kalyanpur were conferred Padma Bhushan, the country's third highest civilian award.

A former Professor of English at JNU, Kapoor is known for striving to indigenise higher education by integrating Indian knowledge systems and establishing dedicated institutes, it said.

Patel is the founder of the Heartfulness Movement and has developed Kanha Shanti Vanam, which is home to one of the world's largest meditation centers.

In another tweet, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said Kalyanpur, a renowned Indian playback singer, lent her voice to innumerable hit songs in Hindi, Marathi and 11 other languages during a career

spanning four decades.

The Narendra Modi government has been honouring many unsung heroes who have been contributing to society in different ways with Padma awards since 2014 when it came to power for the first time.

Jodhaiya Bai Baiga, a prominent artist of Baiga painting; Usha Barle, performer of Pandwani and Panthi art forms of Chhattisgarh; and Raman Cheruvayal, a tribal farmer from Kerala who is known for his contribution to sustainable agriculture and the preservation of biodiversity, were given the Padma Shri.

Bhanubhai Chunilal Chitara, who has helped in preserving and promoting the traditional Mata Ni Pachedi craft of Gujarat, and

Sankurathri Chandrasekhar, a managing trustee of the Sankurathri Foundation, which has educated a large number of rural students, provided eye care to over 37 lakh people, and performed over 3 lakh surgeries, were also awarded the Padma Shri.

The ceremony was attended by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Modi, and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, as well as Home Minister Amit Shah and several other Union ministers.

On the eve of this year's Republic Day, the President had approved conferment of 106 Padma awards, including three duo cases (in a duo case, the award is counted as one), on the eve of this year's Republic Day.

Of these, over 50 people were awarded - Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri on Wednesday. Rest of the awardees would be conferred the honour in another ceremony later.

Padma awards are conferred in three categories: Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri. India's top civilian award - the Bharat Ratna has not been given to anyone since 2019.

The awards are given in various disciplines and fields of activities, vis-a-vis art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.

Several disciples of Osho Rajneesh forcefully enter his Pune ashram

PUNE, March 22 (PTI): Several disciples of late spiritual guru Osho Rajneesh, wearing 'sanyas malas' on Wednesday forced their way into his ashram here in Maharashtra on Wednesday in protest against the purported plans by the management to sell the ashram land.

Since Tuesday, tension has been brewing between a group of disciples and the OSHO International Foundation (OIF) management, which manages the affairs of the ashram.

Police said on Wednesday afternoon, more than 250 followers forced their way into the Osho International Meditation Centre (OIMC), situated in the Koregaon Park area.

Outside the ashram, police detained a man after he became "violent" and tried to attack police personnel. The man was not a part of the group of protesters, but he became aggressive after the followers forcefully entered the Ashram premises, a police officer said.

A day earlier, the Ashram management had allowed those followers wearing the 'sanyas mala' to enter the premises in view of the law and order situation.

"After our intervention on Tuesday, the followers were allowed to enter the Ashram campus with 'malas' but today these followers forcefully entered inside. A man, who is not a part of the followers' group, became unruly and violent and tried to manhandle police personnel, forcing the police to use force to evict him from the spot," said Smartana Patil, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone II).



Swami Chaitanya Keerti, one of the protesters, claimed the Ashram management had on Tuesday allowed the followers wearing 'malas' to enter the premises but restricted them on Wednesday.

"During the commotion, a man who is said to be an Indian-origin US citizen who had not received 'diksha' (initiation) might have said something out of aggression and was whisked away by police," he said, adding that the followers do not know the man.

Maa Amrit Sadhana, the spokesperson and one of the trustees of OIF, on Tuesday said the entry was allowed in view of maintaining law and order.

"To respect the law and order and to support the police, the management allowed them on the premises with 'malas' only for today (Tuesday), but from tomorrow (Wednesday), the usual rules will apply," she had said.

Contd. from Page 1...

Government to renovate all anganwadi

the welfare of children and women. He said the department will also give considerable attention to prevention of child marriage so that the state can be freed from the scourge of child marriage by 2026. He also announced that the state government will construct around 4,000 new anganwadi centres and initiatives will be taken to renovate all anganwadi centres in the state within the next 7-8 years. The chief minister also presented gifts to five healthy children and spent some time with children of Bongaon anganwadi centre of the city.

Women and child development minister Ajanta Neog, power minister Nandita Gorlosa, principal secretary of Women and Child Development Department Mukesh Sahu, chairperson of Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights Dr Sunita Changkakati and director of Women and Child Development Bibhash Modi were also present on the occasion.

Assam-Meghalaya border talks

Stating that the issue is indeed a very complex situation, Sangma said, "It is not going to be easy for us to find a solution acceptable to all but I appeal to the members of the House to let us keep the larger picture in mind. If we go with a negative mindset that we will not move an inch and not agree to anything said by the other side then we will not be able to solve the issue. We must go with open minds sticking to our demands and not compromise the interest of the people."

He further asserted that negotiation can never be from a point of position and said, "It is not a deal. We are not trying to deal as we are here to find a solution. The approach has to be thought of very well. I can assure the House that we are not going to rush and we are not going to compromise but we should ensure we are consistent in our approach keeping the larger interest of the people."

"While we work to find solutions, we also assure that we will ensure sufficient manpower of our forces are present in the areas of difference so that the safety level of our people is maintained," he also assured.

While supporting the special motion, Voice of the People Party legislator from Nongkrem Ardent Miller Basaiamwoit cited the rules and questioned if the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between Meghalaya chief minister and Assam chief minister will stand in the Court of law.

He also said that it was a fit case for the government of the day to review and relook into the MoU. "I don't think we will allow the government to take us for a ride. How can we allow more than 18 sq km of land to be given to Assam. We are on the losing side as I said anything done in haste will end up in waste," Basaiamwoit said.

He also slammed the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government for claiming that it is the only government which has done marvellous work as far as boundary issue is concerned and said, "It is not fair because we must also give credit to the previous governments which have done diligent works and placed the documents (before) Assam."

In his reply, the chief minister said that it would be incorrect for the VPP leader to say that the MDA government is making claims and not giving credit to the past governments and their contributions towards the border issue.

He reminded and said, "I (have always) started my speech by thanking the governments and contributions made by the past governments and former chief ministers towards the border issue."

Sangma however said many times the governments would have meetings and discussions but there was no concrete conclusion for ending the boundary dispute as it always ends with "we will maintain a status quo".

"It is not an easy task (as the issue) requires a political will and the MDA government had that political will to take the talks to the next level," he said.

He said 32 meetings were held between the two states since 1971 and of these 10 meetings were held at the chief ministers' level in the past five years from 2018 to 2022. This led to the signing of the MoU which resolved the first six areas of difference shared between the two states.

Further, the chief minister also maintained that the MDA government is clear that it will go ahead with the MoU and said, "Overall it was a huge milestone".

"This is the MoU (signed) at the highest level and in presence of the union home minister," he said while adding that based on this, surveys are being conducted.

Sangma also informed that based on the people's will Tarabari (4.69 sq km), which was earlier under the administrative control of Assam was given to Meghalaya and said, "Assam government had also pulled out teachers it appointed and now Meghalaya is in the process of appointing the teachers (there)."

He said that the MDA government had to face a lot of challenges because of the 2011 report submitted to the Assam government. The report had failed to include some of the villages.

"For example when we had gone to the West Khasi Hills sector to discuss the public hearing that had to take place. At that point in time, 21-22 villages were there in the report but 36 villages came to the meeting and said we want to be part of Meghalaya. Because they were not included in the 2011 report it became a very big challenge for us as Assam maintained that we cannot discuss the matter as they were not in the 2011 report," Sangma said while referring to the protests against the MoU.

PM lays stress on Covid-appropriate

A mock drill was also conducted on December 27, 2022 in 22,000 hospitals, and many remedial measures taken by hospitals thereafter.

The Prime Minister was apprised of the influenza situation in the country particularly with respect to the higher number of cases of H1N1 and H3N2 being noted in the last few months.

Modi directed officials to enhance whole genome sequencing of positive samples with the designated IN-SACOG genome sequencing laboratories. This will support tracking of newer variants, if any, and timely response, the PMO said.

The Prime Minister emphasized Covid-appropriate behaviour including wearing of masks in hospital premises by patients, health professionals and health workers. He also stressed that wearing of masks is advisable when senior citizens and those with co-morbidities visit crowded areas, the statement said.

G20 RIIG conference to deliberate

in creating new, resource efficient, sustainable and more circular bio-based technologies, products and services and cooperation between G20 members on specific thematic areas.

This event will further promote active engagement between all key stakeholders, including the 3Ps (people, policies and places), and lead towards an inclusive policy-making approach providing a conceptual framework to mainstream circular bio-economy models across different sectors, the release added. (With inputs from PTI)

PM Modi to attend biggest Bihu

biggest Bihu festival and to create history together. Even in the yellow and blue lines of Delhi Metro, all the coaches have been wrapped up in Bihu hoardings. Hoardings can be seen on the major roads leading to the Indira Gandhi International Airport.

This upcoming event comes close on the heels of the concluding function of the year-long 400th birth anniversary celebrations of Ahom General Lachit Barphukan in the national capital in November last year.

Not only in Delhi-NCR, the government has also launched publicity in a big way in Mumbai and Kolkata metropolises, even in Metro trains.

Delhite Vinod Dikshit, who was waiting at a bus stop at Chanakyapuri where hoardings have been splashed all over, said, "I have heard something about Bihu festivity of Assam which coincides with other festivities like Baisakhi, Vishu, Puthandu, Poila Boishaki, etc. But my knowledge was limited. Now, I started surfing the internet and gathered a wealth of information on it and also how the Assam Government is making efforts to make the Bihu event a spectacular one by finding a place of pride in the Guinness Book."

Observed on April 14-15 every year, Rongali or Bohag Bihu which heralds the Assamese New Year is widely celebrated across Assam, and parts of Manipur and Bengal. The Assamese celebrate Bihu thrice a year, which signify the distinct cycles of farming - Bhogali/Magh Bihu (January), Bohag/Rongali Bihu (April), and Kongali Bihu (October).

On the day of Bihu, various delicacies like til pitha, narikol laddoo, murir laddoo, ghila pitha, poka mithoi are made. Women, men and children are seen singing, feasting, exchanging gifts, seeking blessings from elders, donning new attire, and performing the traditional Bihu dance in open fields and stage.

Social media admin held for posting meme against DMK's scheme



CHENNAI, March 22 (PTI): An administrator of a Twitter handle was arrested by police here on Wednesday for denigrating women by tweeting a video clip, a meme that is intended to criticize the DMK regime's eligibility norm for women to avail of the ₹ 1,000 assistance.

The police action led to a political furor, with the principal opposition AIADMK and its ally the BJP strongly condemning the action, even as "#ArrestMeToo Stalin" trended on Twitter. Police said the man was arrested for denigrating women by posting the meme.

Using a comedy scene from a decades-old Tamil movie, the social media influencer handle 'Voice of Savukku Shankar' embossed the names of Chief Minister M K Stalin and Finance Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan on the comedy characters.

In the state budget presented on Monday, Rajan had announced ₹ 1000 monthly in assistance to eligible women heads of families, implementing the DMK's post-time assurance made in 2021.

The original comedy, featuring top Tamil actors Goundamani and Senthil, is considered by many to be offensive and in bad taste as it appeared to belittle women if they were not young and glamorous. Still, it is popular.

The intention of the tweeted clip appeared to criticize the government's proposed eligibility norm, which is expected to be based on the economic criterion.

The AIADMK had time and again hit out at

People celebrate Gudi Padwa to welcome traditional new year

THANE/MUMBAI, March 22 (PTI): Maharashtra chief minister, Eknath Shinde, joined the Gudi Padwa celebrations in Thane city on Wednesday to welcome the beginning of the traditional Marathi new year. The festival is being celebrated with enthusiasm and pomp in Mumbai and other parts of the state, with people hoisting 'gudis' at their houses, which are considered auspicious and believed to bring good luck and fortune.

The word 'Gudi' or 'Gudhi' means a flag, and 'Padwa' is Pratipada, the first day of the new moon phase. Farmers celebrate the festival to mark the beginning of the new harvest season.

In Thane city, neighbouring Mumbai, chief minister Shinde carried a palanquin of the presiding deity of Kopinshwar temple on his shoulders along with others for some distance. He also showered flowers on the participants and the performers in gymnastics at Chintamani chowk.

Renowned violinist N Rajam, a Padmabhusan awardee, was also present.

Shinde later participated in a Gudi Padwa procession at Dombivali township in Thane district.

"All the restrictions on festivals are lifted. It is nice to see that people from all walks of life are celebrating Gudi Padwa," Shinde said.

"Our government has lifted all restrictions on celebrating festivals, because of which we could celebrate Dahihandi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, Dussehra, and other festivals. It is good to see the culture being protected and preserved in its true spirit," he said.

The Gudi Padwa day is marked by people cleaning their houses and decorating them with colourful rangolis and hoisting gudis- bamboo sticks decorated with a colourful cloth tied to a 'kalash' at the top and a garland of flowers attached to it along with mango leaves and neem leaves.

In Mumbai and elsewhere, colourful processions are being taken out, joined by men, women, and children in traditional attire. Music performances and the playing of traditional dhols and lezim dances are the major attractions of these processions, or shobhayatras.

IPCC report a call to action for all, especially countries like India

The country is going to bear the devastating effects of global warming, say two prominent co-authors of the key United Nations document

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 22 (PTI): India should bolster its adaptation and mitigation efforts, in line with the warnings issued in the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as the country is going to bear the devastating effects of global warming, say two prominent co-authors of the key United Nations document.

Aditi Mukherjee and Dipak Dasgupta, the Indian co-authors of the report released on Monday, said rising sea levels are a matter of concern for the Indian subcontinent as it would affect the ecology and livelihood of millions of people living in coastal areas.

"This report (the Synthesis Report of the IPCC) is a call for action for all countries, especially countries like India, which are very vulnerable to climate change given their location in the tropics. The report provides a menu of climate actions, both mitigation and adaptation actions, which India can implement based on its national circumstances," Mukherjee told PTI in an online interview.

According to the report, which presents a sort of urgency in implementing policies that could bring down the emissions; the world is already only a few tenths of a degree away from the global target of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

"Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with the global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from un-



sustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles, and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals," the report said. As per the report's indicators, India, with a large coastline and millions of people surviving on the revenue they earn from fisheries, has many things to worry about. With the rise in seawater level, which the report documented as 3.7 mm per year between 2006 and 2018, compared to the 1.9 mm per year between 1971 and 2006, India is facing a huge challenge.

"We do have some of our main urban areas on the coast, and they will get impacted due to the rising sea levels, but comprehensive coastal data is not available to understand how significant that is going to be," said Dasgupta, who is a well-known economist and a Distinguished Fellow at The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi.

"India, being a large country, has the resources to raise funds both for adaptation and mitigation. Our GDP, unlike that of some small island nations, does not get affected largely because of

one weather event. Having said that, we should also be prepared to face multiple, cascading events and should double up our adaptation efforts," Dasgupta added.

Mukherjee also agrees that rising sea levels are going to be a major threat to the Indian subcontinent.

"Sea level rise is a threat in low-lying coastal areas, and that would include cities like Mumbai and Kolkata. Sea level rise and tropical storm surges are leading to salinisation of coastal areas, e.g., in the Sunderbans of India. Here, protecting mangroves and investing in ecosystem-based adaptation is the need of the hour," Mukherjee added. The Synthesis Report attributes human activities as the main driver of seawater level rise. "Human influence was very likely the main driver of these increases since at least 1971. Evidence of observed changes in extremes such as heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, and, in particular, their attribution to human influence, has further strengthened," quoted the report.

However, the scientists do agree that India's mitigation efforts are on the right track. "India is doing the right things," Dasgupta said.

He, however, said India has a major role to play globally and should be ready to absorb additional resources for both adaptation and mitigation funding.

The Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE), a project that was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 2021 Glasgow COP, where he also announced to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2070, is a step in the right direction, according to Mukherjee.



'The Last Salute' a reminder about importance of artist in shaping public opinion: Mahesh Bhatt

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): From a book to a play to now another book, it's a full circle for "The Last Salute", says director Mahesh Bhatt, recalling how Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zaidi's account of hurling a shoe at the US president George W Bush back in early 2000s, inspired them to recreate the story for the stage.

Zaidi's book was named "The Last Salute to President Bush" and the Indian play inspired by it became "The Last Salute" with Bhatt serving as the presenter on the stage production.

The filmmaker has now penned the foreword to Rajesh Kumar's book chronicling their play.

Recalling the seed of the idea for the play, the director said he had refused an invitation to attend the 51st National Prayer Breakfast with Bush in 2003.

It was Bhatt's protegee, Imran Zahid who prompted him to develop al Zaidi's "The Last Salute" as a play. Zahid acted in the production, scripted by Kumar and directed by Delhi theatre veteran Arvind Gaur.

"My association with the world of

amateur theatre was to be in touch with the heartbeat of the nation, where the nation actually breathes, aspires, dreams. That brought me to Delhi, where I met Arvind Gaur and Imran Zahid, one of my very dear proteges," Bhatt told PTI in an interview.

"Mr Zahid said to me 'Bhatt sahab, you wrote a letter when you were invited in 2003 for the prayer breakfast meeting which expressed a similar sentiment' as Muntadhar's shoe hurling incident"... This play is a reminder about the importance of the artist in shaping

public opinion. A journey that began from a book went into a play and it comes back into a book form. That's a circle of journey," he added.

Bhatt, 74, said he took "The Last Salute" across the country, adding, this play could have only been done in India. "It's only India which can perform a play like this because our founding fathers have given us the freedom to express our dissenting views," he noted.

But the journey was not without obstacles.

BIFFES 2023: FROM WONG'S WORLD TO BODO FLUTE

BENGALURU, March 22 (PTI): It is a pity Wong Kar Wai will not be coming to the city along with his films. Clearly, he is taken in with things Indian.

In the video, Lessons on Directing: Wong Kar Wai, a loving tribute from a fan who has spliced various Wong interviews and stitched them together into a coherent masterclass on direction (available in YouTube), Wong guides the cameraman to an underground market in Hong Kong, presumably after his film *Chunking Express* was released – the film introduced the audience to many hidden gems in the Hong Kong that Wong grew up in. The market looks similar to Delhi's Palika Bazaar and, according to Wong, it sells everything from everywhere around the world, but he nevertheless guides the cameraman to the stall selling Indian music as well as the stall that was featured in his film with two Indian characters.

But *Chunking Express* has made it to the 14th Bengaluru International Film Festival. Five films of Wong will be featured under the section 'study of director' in this edition of the festival, which will be held from March 23 to 30. Screening will commence from March 24 at 11 screens at Orion Mall, at Kannada Kalavidara Sangha and Suchitra Film Society.

"It was a natural choice—a director of Wong's calibre should be studied. He experiments a lot in his film. Basically, he is an action film director who experiments with many genres. Also, these days people watch a lot of Asian films, particularly South Korean ones. So, it is imperative that we study these films to see how they do it—cut across cultural barriers to gain global recognition," said Ashok

Kashyap, the festival director of BIFFes 2023 and chairman of Karnataka Chalachitra Academy.

It is ironic in a way that the action film director's most known work is an intense love story. A film that Wong himself describes as the "aftertaste of love", *In The Mood For Love* will also be showcased at the festival, along with *Fallen Angels*, *Happy Together* and *2046*.

Although Wong experiments a lot with format and content, his films are instantly recognisable – the music, the theme of unrequited love and loss, and distinct cinematography that conveys moods with colours come together in a uniquely Wong way.

Just as his characters are unable to move on, lost in love, Wong too seems to revisit his earlier work and carries it forward – *2046* could be a sequel to *In The Mood For Love*, the characters show how the agony of being in love with the "right person at the wrong time" (the theme for *In The Mood For Love*) can drive a person to destruction. "Personally, as a filmmaker, I have been watching films like these in the last 43 years. It gives me great pleasure that as festival director I could revisit my student days' fascination for iconic directors," said Kashyap.

He said his artistic team has also helped him curate films of 'Father of African Cinema', Senegal's Ousmane Sembene (for the retrospective section), many master classes featuring the industry's best talents, works of Dada Phalke award winner and renowned cinematographer late V K Murthy as well as three legendary figures in Indian cinema – late M V Krishnaswamy, late S K A Chari and Lt Narsimha Raju – as part of their centenary celebrations.

'Lord Ram in 'Adipurush' most challenging voice role for me'

- SHARAD KELKAR



MUMBAI, March 22 (PTI): Voice acting is a "responsible job" and for actor Sharad Kelkar his performance behind the screen as Lord Ram in the Hindi language dub of "Adipurush", the multilingual period saga, is the "most challenging" role till date.

In the project, Kelkar lends his voice to Telugu star Prabhas, for whom he previously dubbed the superhit "Baahubali" franchise.

One false note of the voice actor can destroy all the work the actor on screen has put in, added Kelkar, who will next voice for actor Nani's Telugu movie "Dasara".

"Voice acting is a responsible job because you are lending your voice to someone else who has performed with all his heart out. Your one mistake can ruin his performance.

"So, I am responsible (for lending my voice) whether it is for Lord Ram or for Nani's character. Lord Ram is the most challenging one. It is a matter of pride for me also to give voice for 'Adipurush'," Kelkar told PTI in an interview.

"Adipurush" is directed by Om Raut of "Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior" fame and produced by Bhushan Kumar-led T-Series. It is set to release in June.

Best known for his performance in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's "Ram Leela", web series "The Family Man", and "Tanhaji", Kelkar said there have been times when he felt pigeonholed due to his baritone.

"As an actor, it is a disadvantage for me because it is difficult for people to imagine me in different roles. They tend to offer me similar kinds of roles because I have a certain personality and voice, which they think can go well with a particular range of characters, like a cop or a villain.

"I try to do different kinds of stuff. I am trying to prove again and again that I have a good voice but my strength is my acting. It (voice) is an added advantage and I don't take credit for that voice as such," he said.

His latest release is heist drama "Chor Nikal Ke Bhaga", also starring Yami Gautam and Sunny Kaushal. It is directed by Ajay Singh and produced by Amar Kaushik and Dinesh Vijan of Madock Films.

In the upcoming Netflix film, the 46-year-old actor plays Shaikh, a character he described as an important government officer investigating the heist.

I don't want to disturb sanctity of my film: Anubhav Sinha on 'Bheed' controversy

MUMBAI, March 22 (PTI): There's a sanctity to his film and he would not like to disturb it, says Anubhav Sinha, sidestepping the controversy over the trailer of "Bheed" for drawing parallels between the lockdown and Partition.

The first trailer of the movie was pulled off and re-released with changes, including the omission of a speech by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a dialogue referencing Partition.

"Of course, these changes are obvious. The trailer was off air for two days (and) the changes mentioned are correct. But that reason is the filmmaker's business.

"There is a sanctity to the film and I would not like to disturb it," Sinha told

PTI in an interview.

"Bheed", a black and white film starring Rajkummar Rao and Bhumi Pednekar, is Sinha's take on the mass migrant movement during the March 2020 lockdown in India. He termed the "lockdown" the trigger for the film.

"Sometimes I get attracted by the headlines, or something that has been probably bothering me for sometime...I don't like being angry but I am angry towards who we have become and who we are becoming." Referring to the controversy over his film's trailer, the director said audiences these days are provoked into talking about gossip surrounding a movie when all they should care about is whether they like it



or not. "Unfortunately, these days, they are being provoked into talking about this because it is gossip. And human nature likes gossip, likes sensational news, even if it is untrue. (But) art should be excluded from that. What is important is, did you like the film?"

Referring to "Bheed" being labelled "anti-India" by a section of social media users, he said "... there are enough people thumping their chest and celebrating it, which is great" but someone has to speak up about the issues too.

'John Wick' films have gotten bigger, better and there's more action: Ian McShane

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): The "John Wick" films have become bigger and better with each installment, says veteran actor Ian McShane, who plays the role of hotel owner and close friend to Keanu Reeves' eponymous assassin in the movie franchise.

Working on the movie series, which has a dedicated fan base for its well-choreographed stunt sequences as well as the aura surrounding its lead star, has been "a pleasure for over the last 10 years" for McShane.

"They're terrific films to do. We've become great friends. Keanu is great to

work with. It's been a pleasure over the last 10 years, though it doesn't seem like 10 years. The films have gotten bigger, better and there's more action. I'm just glad that I'm observing it from the outside," the 80-year-old actor told PTI in a virtual interview ahead of the release of "John Wick: Chapter 4" on Friday.

In the fourth part, McShane returns as Winston, the owner of the fictional upscale New York hotel called The Continental, a safe haven for international assassins.

The action franchise



started with 2014's "John Wick", about a retired assassin who returns to the world he had left behind to avenge the murder of a pup, a gift from his late wife.

It was followed by two sequels -- "John Wick: Chapter 2" (2017) and "John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum" (2019).

The films are known for their intense combat sequences and violence so much so that McShane said whenever the new script comes to him, he goes to the last page to check whether his character has survived or not.

"I always look at the last page and see if I'm still around. And then this one, I thought, 'oh well, I'm still around'," the British veteran said.

McShane, also known for starring

in American show "Deadwood" as well as films such as "Death Race", "Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides", "Scoop" and "Snow White and the Huntsman", said the fourth part was shot over the course of 104 days.

"... 104 shooting days, 101 of which were nights. So on the final night when they said wrap, that was the most memorable because we were all freezing our a**s off in some parking lot outside Paris and driving in with the rush hour traffic at four in the morning. What a hell of a way to finish a movie," he said.

For McShane, there is another adventure waiting in the "John Wick" universe with a spin-off movie, titled "Ballerina" and headlined by Ana de Armas.

PORTUGAL START EURO 2024 QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN TODAY

Portugal back with Martínez as coach, Ronaldo in the squad

LISBON, March 22 (AP): It's a new era for Portugal as it begins European Championship qualifying under a new coach and with Cristiano Ronaldo far away from soccer's biggest stadiums.

Portugal starts its Euro 2024 qualifying campaign at home against Liechtenstein in Group J on Thursday, with Roberto Martínez debuting as coach and Ronaldo still in the squad.

It will be Ronaldo's first appearance with Portugal since leaving Europe for Saudi club Al Nassr after a mostly disappointing stint with Manchester United. He is set to break the all-time record of appearances with a national team after tying Bader Al-Mutawa's mark of 196 outings for Kuwait during last year's World Cup.

Martínez is taking over Fernando Santos, who quit in December after Portugal's elimination by Morocco in the quarterfinals of the World Cup. Santos left amid the controversy of benching Ronaldo in the knockout stage of the tournament in Qatar.

Santos was in charge of Portugal for eight years, leading the national team to the Euro 2016 title — the country's first major trophy — and the 2019 Nations League title. He reached an agreement with the federation to leave two years before his contract was to end.

Martínez ended his six-year stint with Belgium after the team's disappointing group-stage elimi-



nation at the World Cup. He arrived pledging to respect Ronaldo's history with the national team.

In addition to Ronaldo, Martínez will inherit a squad filled with talented players such as Bernardo Silva, Bruno Fernandes, Diogo Jota, Gonçalo Ramos and João Félix. The coach made few changes to the squad, with 40-year-old defender Pepe also re-

turning to play alongside the 38-year-old Ronaldo.

"We were briefly introduced to him on the training field," Félix said about Martínez. "He explained to us some of his ideas, mainly for these two games, which are going to be very similar. He talked about the attacking dynamic, the connections between wingers and strikers."

Félix downplayed Portugal's

chances in the matches against Liechtenstein and at Luxembourg on Sunday.

"We always have to be prepared and not take any game lightly," he said. "We have the recent example of the World Cup, when everyone thought we were going to get past Morocco and we didn't. It's always complicated, it's always the best from each country, and everyone plays each game like it is a

final. All games will be difficult, both at home and away. We have to be cautious."

Portugal is unbeaten against Liechtenstein, with six wins and a draw in seven matches.

Portugal's Euro 2024 qualifying group also includes Iceland, Slovakia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The top two nations from each of the 10 groups qualify for the final tournament in Germany.

Former Germany midfielder Mesut Özil retires at 34

ISTANBUL, March 22 (AP): Former Germany midfielder Mesut Özil, who won the World Cup in 2014, retired from soccer Wednesday at the age of 34.

Özil said injuries played a role in his decision.

"I've had the privilege to be a professional football player for almost 17 years now and I feel incredibly thankful for the opportunity," Özil wrote on social media. "But in recent weeks and months, having also suffered some injuries, it's become more and more clear that it's time to leave the big stage of football."

His immediate retirement brings an early end to his season with Turkish club Istanbul Basaksehir, where he made only seven appearances for the team.

Özil won the Spanish league title with Real Madrid in 2012 and the FA Cup four times with Arsenal. His international career ended abruptly in 2018 when he quit the Germany squad citing

"racism and disrespect."

That followed

anti-Turkish comments from German politicians and abuse from some fans toward Özil, who has Turkish heritage, amid criticism of his decision to pose for a picture with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the run-up to the 2018 World Cup.

Özil started his career in Germany with hometown club Schalke before a good spell at Werder Bremen earned him a spot on the German national team. Standout performances for Germany at the 2010 World Cup were followed by a move to Madrid. He then had an eight-year stint with Arsenal.

Özil moved Turkish club Fenerbahce in 2021 after his relationship with Arsenal broke down. He was left out of the Arsenal squad for months before his departure following a rift with manager Mikel Arteta. The club also distanced itself from Özil for posting his support for Muslims in the Xinjiang province of China, comments which led to an Arsenal game being pulled from Chinese television.



Treesa and Gayatri exit from Swiss Open women's doubles in first round

BASEL, March 22 (PTI): All England Championships semifinalists, Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand made an early exit from the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here as they lost their first-round match.

The Treesa-Gayatri duo lost to second-seeded Indonesian pair of Apriyani Rahayu and Siti Fadia Silva 14-21, 14-21 in 41 minutes in the opening round on Tuesday night.

Treesa and Gayatri had made a sensational run in the All England Championships women's doubles last week before losing in the semifinals.

Meanwhile, Malvika Bansod qualified for the main draw of the women's singles after beating USA's Lauren Lam 21-17, 21-7 in the qualifying round.

The women's doubles pair of Sikki Reddy and Arathi Sara Sunil also made it

to the main draw after beating Paula Lynn Cao Hok and Lauren Lam 21-15, 15-21, 21-18.

The mixed doubles pair of Rohan Kapoor and Sikki Reddy notched up a 21-17, 15-21, 21-18 win over Germany's Patrick Scheidel and Franziska Volkman to book a berth in main draw.

However, Meiraba Luwang Maisnam and Priyanshu Rajawat couldn't qualify for the main draw. Rohan Kapoor and B

Sumeeth Reddy also lost in the first round of men's doubles qualification.

On Wednesday, PV Sindhu, seeded fourth in the tournament, will look to snap her three first-round exits on the trot this season when she faces local player Jenjira Stadelmann in women's singles.

Kidambi Srikanth, H S Prannoy and Lakshya Sen will also begin their campaign in men's singles.



General Secretary, Assam Sepak Takraw Association, Bishnuram Nunisa called on cabinet minister Bimal Borah regarding promotion of Sepak Takraw and overall development of sports in Assam at his office chamber in Guwahati on Wednesday. HT photos

Mallorca bans fan who racially insulted Vinícius Júnior

MADRID, March 22 (AP): Spanish club Mallorca handed the fan who racially insulted players Vinícius Júnior and Samu Chukwueze a three-year ban from club membership on Tuesday.

The fan, reportedly a 20-year-old Mallorca season ticket holder, is accused of calling Real Madrid forward Vinícius and Villarreal midfielder Chukwueze a monkey in separate Spanish league games this year. Both Vinícius and Chukwueze are Black.

Spain's anti-violence commission has already proposed a fine of 4,000 euros (\$4,300) and a 12-month ban from stadiums for the fan, who may also face criminal charges. He was identified by club security officials.

"RCD Mallorca is against all xenophobic manifestations and will continue to work actively to eradicate this scourge," said the



club, whose president is American Andy Kohlberg.

Vinícius was also insulted after the Mallorca match when he stopped to pose for photos and sign autographs for fans.

The Brazilian has been sub-

jected to insults since arriving in Spain five years ago, though little has been done to punish fans.

Valladolid recently suspended 12 season ticket holders while investigating their alleged verbal abuse of Vinícius.

The first trial against a fan who racially insulted a player in Spain is expected to begin this year following remarks by an Espanyol supporter against Athletic Bilbao forward Inaki Williams a few years ago.

The Spanish league has filed several complaints to authorities for racist insults or chants against Vinícius, with some of them being shelved by prosecutors.

The league has also increased the number of overseers at matches to try to identify perpetrators, especially when Vinícius plays.

Authorities have yet to find those responsible for hanging Vinícius' effigy from a bridge in Madrid before the derby against Atletico Madrid earlier this year.

The attacks against Vinícius increased after he began celebrating his goals by dancing.

Navratilova says she is cancer-free, returns to her TV work

LONDON, March 22 (AP): Martina Navratilova returned to TV work at Tennis Channel for its coverage of the Miami Open on Tuesday, less than three months after saying she had throat cancer and breast cancer.

"It's great to be back. ... Thrilled to be here," said the 18-time Grand Slam singles champion and member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame. "So happy to be working. How many people can say that?"

The 66-year-old Navratilova said her sense of taste disappeared during the treatment for cancer and she lost 15 pounds. She did not appear on television during the Australian Open in January or the BNP Paribas Open this month.

"It puts you face-to-face with your mortality, No. 1, because at the beginning, I wasn't sure if it was treatable, so that was hard," she said, wiping away tears. "But

once I got into the program, it was a little easier emotionally, but more difficult physically. ... But I'm still standing."

In an interview with TalkTV's Piers Morgan shown later Tuesday, Navratilova said she has been told by doctors that, "as far as they know, I'm cancer-free," and she should be "good to go" after some additional radiation treatment.

"I definitely won't be missing any of my checkups. I will be very, very diligent about it. But the prognosis is excellent," Navratilova said. "But you never know. Just, like, you never know."

She also told Morgan that when she was diagnosed, "I was in a total panic for three days, thinking I may not see next Christmas" and came up with a bucket list of things she wanted to do.

She noticed an enlarged lymph node in her neck while attending

the season-ending WTA Finals in Fort Worth, Texas, in November, and a biopsy showed early stage throat cancer. While Navratilova was undergoing tests on her throat, she said, the unrelated, early stage breast cancer was discovered.

Navratilova was diagnosed with a noninvasive form of breast cancer in 2010 and had a lumpectomy.

She won 59 Grand Slam titles overall, including 31 in women's doubles and 10 in mixed doubles. The last was a mixed doubles championship with Bob Bryan at the 2006 U.S. Open, a month shy of her 50th birthday.

Navratilova originally retired in 1994, after a record 167 singles titles and 331 weeks at No. 1 in the WTA rankings. She returned to the tour to play doubles in 2000 and occasionally competed in singles, too.

Messi mania in Argentina as soccer star mobbed at restaurant

BUENOS AIRES (ARGENTINA), March 22 (AP): A steakhouse in the trendy Buenos Aires neighborhood of Palermo was mobbed by hundreds of frenzied soccer fans late Monday night when word spread that Lionel Messi was inside having dinner.

People rushed to the exclusive Don Julio restaurant eager to get a glimpse of the man who led Argentina to its third World Cup title. Messi eventually needed a police escort to leave.

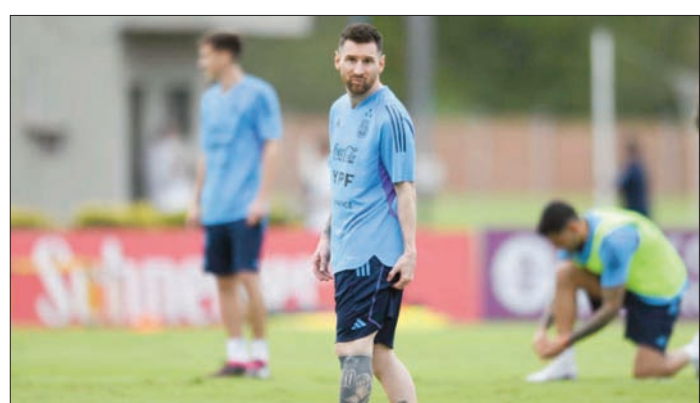
Fans on the street corner chanted "Messi, Messi" and sang the words to "Muchachos," which became the unofficial anthem for the Argentina squad that beat France in a thrilling final in Qatar.

The scene witnessed in the neighborhood of Argentina's capital known for its bars and restaurants illustrates how Messi has now become like the late Diego Maradona,

who led Argentina to its second World Cup trophy in 1986, and he can no longer walk through Argentina's streets without being mobbed.

It wasn't always this way.

The man who is now cheered wherever he goes once used to suffer the indifference and even apathy from many Argentina fans who blamed him for the country's failings in previous championships. All that vitriol led the man who is often called the best soccer player in the world to even quit the national team in 2016, although he later backtracked. All of that now seems to be forgotten as Messi fever has decidedly taken over, recalling what happened with Maradona 36 years ago after he raised the World Cup in Mexico. The then-captain also had to deal with fans who chased him wherever he went in the hopes of getting a photograph or an auto-



graph. On Monday night, the multitude was so great that police officers had to arrive at the restaurant to accompany the 35-year-old Messi to his vehicle while keeping fans at bay.

Images and video posted on social media showed the furor of the fans who seemed willing to do any-

thing to greet and touch the Paris Saint-Germain player. "Messi I love you" and "Thank you, Leo" were just a few phrases that could be heard as he was escorted out of the restaurant. "Thank you for looking at me captain, I can die in peace," one user wrote on Twitter accompanied by a video that showed a smil-

ing Messi being escorted as people shouted "I love you!"

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni celebrated the Messi mania that has been unleashed in Buenos Aires and across the country. "What Leo is experiencing is beautiful because he deserves all that love, him and all the players who are here," Scaloni said at a news conference Tuesday. "Leo also needs to see that people love him and what happens when he comes here. I think it's beautiful, it will stay with him forever."

Messi arrived in Argentina on Monday to celebrate the World Cup title with a friendly match against Panama on Thursday in Buenos Aires. The 63,000 tickets sold out in a flash. Security officials are not revealing any details about how the team will travel to the stadium out of fear that fans will block roads and ultimately block the passage of the players.

Brazil players contemplate possibility of Ancelotti as coach

TANGIER, March 22 (AP): Ederson wants Real Madrid out of the Champions League so that coach Carlo Ancelotti can come to Brazil "as quickly as possible."

Never mind that Ancelotti is under contract in Madrid until the end of next season and that Brazil's confederation recently denied it had reached a deal with the 63-year-old Italian.

Brazil's national team players seem confident that Ancelotti could be their next coach. It's been a subject of discussion among the squad ahead this weekend's friendly at Morocco.

"I was discussing this with Casemiro, Vini Jr, (Eder) Militão. There is a big possibility that he comes," Ederson said in a press conference on Tuesday.

The job has been vacant since Tite's six-and-a-half-year tenure ended after Brazil lost to Croatia in the quarterfinals of the World Cup in December.

The Manchester City goalkeeper said he and his Brazil teammates see Ancelotti as "an exceptional coach, everyone in his group likes him, a victorious career."

"Just look at his CV. We will know shortly whether he will be here or not," Ederson said. "I hope we can have a new coach quickly. I feel the anticipation too because there's too much speculation. Is it a Brazilian or a foreign coach? We are also living that phase of anxiety."

Under-20 team coach Ramon Menezes will be in charge at Saturday's friendly.

Nitu, Saweety cruise into semis, assure India of medals at Women's Boxing World C'ships

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): Commonwealth Games champion Nitu Ghanghas (48kg) and the seasoned Saweety Boora (81kg) assured India of two medals at the ongoing Women's Boxing World Championships after reaching the semifinals here on Wednesday.

The first Indian to take the ring, 22-year-old Nitu notched a second-round RSC (referee stops contest) win over Madoka Wada of Japan in her quarterfinal bout to assure herself and India of at least a bronze medal.

Saweety, playing her first bout of the tournament, lived up to her top seeding to dispatch 2018 bronze-medal winner Viktoriya Kebikava of Belarus 5-0 to confirm her second world championship medal. She had won the silver in 2014.

Sakshi Choudhary (52kg) and last edition's bronze medallist Manisha Moun (57kg), however, failed to reach the last-four stage.

While Sakshi lost to Yu Wu of China 0-5, Manisha was outplayed by a 1-4 margin by Amina Zidani of France.

Nitu looked a bit tentative at first but as the seconds ticked, she gained confidence to go ahead and attack.



Halfway through the first round, Nitu, the 2022 Strandja Memorial gold medallist, moved forward and threw a combination of clean, accurate punches to force the referee

to give Wada her first standing count. Another set of combination punches by Nitu in the second round compelled the referee to stop the contest and rule in the home

boxer's favour.

Nitu has won all her three bouts in the tournament so far by RSC verdicts.

"I had to be careful and couldn't be aggressive because she (Wada) was also a southpaw like me, but then towards the end (of the contest) I thought I could attack," Nitu said after the bout.

"The advantage of winning all my three bouts by RSC is that in the coming bouts, my opponents will be under pressure," she said.

Multiple-time national champion Saweety, who received a first-round bye, was just one win away from a medal and the 30-year-old managed to make it a comfortable one. The bout between the two light heavyweight boxers was messy and filled with body blows. But Saweety defended and attacked well, landing hooks and jabs with ease.

Reigning world champion Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaimine Lamboria (60kg), Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), and Nupur Sheoran (+81kg), will look to make the last-four stage later in the day.

Sarabjot clinches men's air pistol Gold, women shooters falter in ISSF World Cup



BHOPAL, March 22 (PTI): Sarabjot Singh shot down a gold in men's air pistol while Varun Tomar clinched a bronze in the same event as India opened their ISSF Pistol/Rifle World Cup campaign with two medals here on Wednesday.

The Indian women air pistol shooters though couldn't make it to the medal bracket, with Manu Bhaker, Divya Subbaraju and Rhythm Sangwan failing to come good on the inaugural day of competitions here.

Sarabjot, the 2021 junior world champion in the team and mixed team categories, defeated Azerbaijan's Ruslan Lunev 16-0 in the gold-medal match in the first final of the World Cup.

The 21-year-old Sarabjot was in awesome form all through as he emerged leader at the end of the qualification round with 585 points.

Sarabjot was hitting the bulls eye every time he took aim, with his scores of 98, 97, 99, 97, 97, 97 in the six qualification series suggesting he would be hard to beat.

China's Liu Jinyao was a close second at 584.

Six other shooters -- Jason Solari (Switzerland, 583 points), Vladimir Svechinko (Uzbekistan, 582), Frederik Larsen (Denmark, 580), Zhang Jie (China, 580), Ruslan Lunev (Azerbaijan, 579) and Varun Tomar (India, 579) -- completed the list of eight marksmen who made it to the ranking round.

In the ranking round, Sarabjot continued to excel, while 19-year-old Varun also began superbly after qualifying eighth and last for the ranking round.

At the end of the ranking round, Sarabjot (253.2 points) and Ruslan (251.9) were placed first and second respectively and both of them

entered the gold-medal round high on confidence, while Varun, who scored 250.3, settled for bronze.

In the battle for the top podium place, the Azerbaijan shooter was no match for Sarabjot, with the Indian firing single-shot scores of 10.4, 10.4, 10.3, 10.2, 10.2, 10.9 in comparison to Ruslan's 10.1, 10.1, 9.6, 9.5, 8.9 and 10.4.

As per the ISSF's new format, the winner of a single shot in the final gets awarded two points and the first to race to 16 points is the winner of the competition.

With Sarabjot shooting better scores in all six shots, he raced to the title, giving India its first gold medal in the competition.

For Varun, who has given ample indication of his precocious talent, this was his second consecutive World Cup bronze after he had finished third last month as well in Cairo. He had beaten Sarabjot in the shoot-off for the third place then.

The third Indian in the fray, Sumit Raman could not make the eight-shooter ranking round, bowing out in the qualification after finishing 13th with a score of 577.

In the women's air pistol event, 27-year-old Divya Subbaraju did much better than Olympian Manu Bhaker, entering the ranking round after coming third in qualification with a score of 579.

However, the Indian ended up ranked fifth with China's Li Xue winning gold after defeating Germany's Doreen Vennekamp in the title round. Another Chinese shooter, Wei Qian bagged the bronze medal.

The two other Indians -- Rhythm (572) and Manu (568) -- couldn't make the ranking round, getting eliminated in the qualification, after finishing 13th and 16th respectively.

2023 World Cup in India likely to start on Oct 5, final in Ahmedabad: report

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): The 2023 ODI World Cup in India is likely to start on October 5 with the final to be held at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on November 19, according to a report.

The BCCI has shortlisted at least a dozen venues for the 10-team marquee event, which will see 48 matches, including three knockouts across the 46-day period, an ESPNcricinfo report said. The 11 other shortlisted venues, according to the report, are Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi,

Dharamsala, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Indore, Rajkot and Mumbai.

Except for the final match, which is set to be played at the world's largest stadium in Ahmedabad, the BCCI has not specified the venues for any games as yet. The list of 12 cities, however, does not include Mohali and Nagpur, which had hosted a Test match against visiting Australia recently.

India had won the title when it last hosted the 50-over World Cup in 2011.

Guwahati Junior Open Tennis tourney: Aarav, Sayyam reach final

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 22: Aarav Kandoi and Sayyam Agarwal have reached finals in the Boy's/Girl's (Combined) under 10 categories in the sixth edition of the Guwahati Open Junior Tennis Championship -- 2023, a flagship tournament of the state, organised by the Guwahati Lawn Tennis Association (GLTA) at the RG Baruah Sports Complex, Nehru Stadium playing here on Thursday. All the seeded players are sailing towards semi-final stages in their respective categories. The tournament is being held for both Boy's and Girl's Singles Under -- 12, 14, 18 years and Boy's / Girl's (combined) -- Under 10 years respectively. The championship is carrying a total of Rs. 2.10 lakhs as scholarship. Till the final of the report the quarter final matches of Boy's and Girl's Singles (under 12 years) and Boy's Singles (under 18 years) are under way.

Thursday's results: Boy's / Girl's Singles (Combined) -- Under 10 years -- (Semi-Final) -- Aarav Kandoi bt. Sandipan Kalita 4-0, 4-1, Sayyam Agarwal bt. Aryan Kundalia 4-0, 4-1, Boy's Singles -- Under 14 years -- (Quarter Final) -- Parthiv Kalita bt. Aditya Kaman 6-3, 6-3, Chandra Sekhar Mohanty bt. Naman Bora 6-0, 1-6, 10-6, Samvid Bora bt. Arnab Bhuyan 6-2, 6-2, Ritik Rout bt. Enrich Pator 6-2, 6-3, Girl's Singles -- Under 14 years -- (Quarter Final) -- Nayeem Hussain bt. Prapti Baruah 4-0, 4-1, Soni Prajapati bt. Suzanne Lourenbam 4-0, 4-0, Naodita Sukla bt. Angelica Hazarika 4-0, 4-0, Sernya La bt. Utpalakshree Saikia 4-1, 4-1 Girl's Singles -- Under 18 years -- (Quarter Final) -- Anshita Sukla bt. Naobita Sukla 8-3, Nayeem Hussain bt. Prapti Baruah 8-2, Namrata Das bt. Prakritika Kashyap 8-0, Bishnupriya Borgohain bt. Soni Prajapati 8-1.

Thapa's strike hand India 1-0 win over Myanmar in Hero Tri-Nation opener



IMPHAL, March 22 (PTI): Anirudh Thapa struck in the added time of the first half to hand India a 1-0 win over Myanmar in the opening match of the Tri-Nation International Football Tournament, here on Wednesday.

The scoreline should have been bigger considering the fact that India dominated the share of possession, but missed chances combined with the luck factor kept the victory margin at the bare minimum for the hosts.

Indian wingers Bipin Singh and Lallianzuala Chhangte looked lively from the start, as they made repeated inroads into the opposition third.

Sunil Chhetri had an early look in, as he headed a cross by Thapa over the crossbar. The India captain had another chance from a flag kick at the far post, but the effort produced the same result.

Local boy Jeakson Singh, playing a holding role, stood up to his task, nipping Myanmar attacks in the bud.

Chhetri had a golden chance just a little over the half-hour mark, when Chhangte played him in, but his shot from close range went straight into the keeper's gloves.

Minutes later, India keeper Amrinder Singh kept the scores

level at the other end, when he put his big gloves in the way to keep away Aung Thu's effort.

The Blue Tigers finally found the breakthrough they were looking for during the injury time of the first half as Thapa latched on to a stray rebound inside the box and smashed it past the keeper from close range.

India head coach Igor Stimac decided to give more reason for the Imphal crowd to cheer, as he brought on Suresh Wangjam instead of Mohammad Yasir in the second half. Soon after, local boy Mahesh Singh got his debut as he and Manvir Singh replaced Bipin Singh and Chhangte.

India thought they had added another goal to their tally with little over quarter of an hour of regulation time left when Chhetri poked in a Thapa cross, but he ruled offside.

The India captain had a crack at the rival goal just minutes later, but it was saved by the opposition keeper.

As the clock wore down, Ritwik Das was given his debut.

Das and Roshan Singh replaced Akash Mishra and Thapa. Seconds before the final whistle, the Myanmar goal had a close shave when Suresh's shot was saved by the custodian.

Fleming to be Texas Super Kings coach in Major League Cricket in US as CSK announces partnership

DALLAS (US), March 22 (PTI): Former New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming will be the coach of Dallas-based Major League Cricket (MLC) club Texas Super Kings (TSK), which announced its partnership with IPL side Chennai Super Kings (CSK).

Four-time IPL champions, CSK had recently said that they would make a "major announcement" with regard to their association with the new T20 tournament in the US.

TSK said in a statement that CSK will bring "operational expertise" and help "Texas compete on the field".

"The (Texas Super Kings) team will be led by coach Stephen Fleming. Fleming is a former captain of the New Zealand national cricket team and head coach of Indian Premier League team Chennai Super Kings. He played in the first-ever Twenty20 international to be staged as captain of the New Zealand team in 2005," said a TSK statement.

Fleming is a long-serving CSK head coach and has guided the Chennai franchise to four IPL titles.

CSK join Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians as the third IPL side to get associated with the six-team MLC, scheduled to begin on July 13. The six MLC teams are San Francisco Unicorns, Los Angeles, MI New York, Seattle Orcas, Texas Super Kings and Washington DC.

Delhi Capitals, co-owned by GMR Group, are partnering with Seattle Orcas to "help build and operate a world-class cricket team", while Mumbai Indians have joined the US cricket revolution by acquiring the New York franchise.

Meanwhile, all six MLC teams completed the domestic player draft at the Space Center in Houston, where they selected nine players each from more than



100 cricketers eligible to represent the "US cricket community". The remainder of each team's player roster will be filled with top T20 cricketers from across the world.

"Cricket is the second-most popular sport in the world with a global fan base of around 2.5 billion followers, but there has not been an opportunity for the sport to grow in the US," said Anurag Jain, co-owner of the MLC Texas Super Kings.

"We look forward to having a professional team in Texas for the passionate local cricket community to root for and to introduce the sport to new fans across the country," added Jain.

Short break for India's white ball players before joining IPL teams, Iyer to undergo surgery

NEW DELHI, March 22 (PTI): The Indian players, who are part of the ODI series against Australia, will get a short break for three to four days before joining their respective IPL camps with the tournament starting from March 31.

Defending champions Gujarat Titans and Chennai Super Kings will play in the opening match of the season in Ahmedabad.

It is understood that all the players, who are in the World Cup scheme of things, will have their workload management monitored and hence the rest is going to be paramount.

"Some players might join their



IPL camps directly but they will have an option of taking a three-four day break and relax at home before touching base with their respective IPL teams," a BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Even if the players directly join the training camp, it is unlikely that they would be training for at least next 72 hours.

Iyer to miss entire IPL, could miss WC too

Shreyas Iyer is all set to undergo lower back surgery and will not take any part in the IPL, according to sources in the board.

The decision is being taken keeping the player's best interest in mind as a surgery right now will give him an outside chance of at least making a comeback before the World Cup in October, although chances of making it for the marquee event also looks dim at the moment.

Jasprit Bumrah and Prasidh Krishna are the two players who have already undergone back surgery.

India's dominance continues in Asian Kho Kho Championship

HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, March 22: Host India's dominance continued on the second day of the fourth Asian Kho Kho Championships being held at Tamulpur in Baksa district of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

Both Indian men and women teams registered wins against their respective opponents in matches held on the day.

For the Indian women, it was an easy outing against Malaysia. Nasreen-led Indian side thrashed their opponents by 64 points and an innings. India scored 79 points in the first innings against Malaysia's 15.

Captain Nasreen and Archana Majhi were at their attacking best helping their team to earn maximum points in front of the roaring crowds.

"It was an amazing match. We are upbeat and excited. We have been able to put pressure on the opponents since the start of the game. This has helped up to carry on with our good run," captain Nasreen said after the match.

Nasreen thinks Nepal and Bangladesh can give a tough fight to the Indian team which



has been unbeaten so far.

"We are expecting some tough challenges from our neighbours -- Nepal and Bhutan. But we are working hard to overcome whatever challenges come on the way," she added.

However, it was a tough contest between Indian men and Iran. The hosts managed to win the dual by 4 points and an innings.

In other matches of women, Bangladesh defeated South Korea by 63 points and an innings. Nepal also tasted victory against In-

donesia by 58 points and an innings. Sri Lanka registered a win against Bhutan by 47 points and an innings.

In men's matches, Bangladesh registered a win by 60 points and an innings against Indonesia. Nepal got the better of their neighbours Bhutan by 23 points and an innings.

Sri Lanka beat South Korea by 50 points and an innings.

Altogether 16 teams (both male and female) will participate in this event. The participating countries are -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nepal, South Korea, Sri Lanka and the host India.

The event is being organised by the Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI) and is being hosted by the Assam Kho Kho Association (AKKA) with support from the BTR Government. The government of Assam also extended their support for the competition.

Around 500 players and officials are part of this event. The matches will be held on mats and a makeshift indoor stadium with a capacity to accommodate around 7000 people has been set up at the venue at Tamulpur Higher Secondary School.