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Modi agreed to discuss our demands: Tuliram

KAAC moves PM for Article 244 (A) execution



HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 29: Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) led by chief executive member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Wednesday.

The KAAC submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister requesting immediate implementation of Article 244 (A) of the constitution for the creation of an autonomous state for the hill districts of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and NC Hills in the state of Assam.

Himanta launches logo of Swasthya Sewa Utsav

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 29: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launched the official logo of the Swasthya Sewa Utsav at Janata Bhawan on Wednesday.

The government of Assam has decided to hold the Swasthya Sewa Utsav (SSU) from April 6 to April 8. As envisioned by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the final preparations for holding a Swasthya Sewa Utsav for government health institutions on the lines of Gunotsav, are in full swing by the Department of Health & Family Welfare. SSU was also announced during the budget speech by Ajanta Neog, finance minister of Assam on March 16.

State Assembly witnesses uproarious scenes over Rahul disqualification

Akhil among 3 MLAs suspended

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 29: The budget session of the Assam Legislative Assembly witnessed an unruly situation on Wednesday, with opposition Congress members creating a chaotic situation following the statement of Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma that he had prior information on the move of the Congress to disrupt the House proceedings.



Following a high drama in the House, Speaker Biswajit Daimary was forced to adjourn the House twice, and suspended two Congress MLAs and an Independent legislator for the entire day. The Congress MLAs attended the House wearing black dresses. Opposing the Adjournment Motion raised by Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma wondered if the Congress leader was not objecting to Gandhi's views as he had torn a copy of an ordinance which could have saved him.

The Speaker later rejected the Motion. As soon as the Question Hour was over, Daimary allowed Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia to raise the notice and asked him to speak on the admissibility of the motion. Saikia cited various clauses to buttress his point that the Constitution was violated by the disqualification of Gandhi. Replying to the motion, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "It's unprecedented that we're expressing opinions on a judicial matter here. I know that a decision was taken at the Congress Legislature Party last night to create noise here."

Oxygen plant of GMCH inaugurated

GUWAHATI, March 29 (PTI): An oxygen plant with 500 Litres Per Minute (LPM) capacity, set up at the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital's Cardiothoracic and Neuroscience Centre, was dedicated to the people on Wednesday by Assam health and family welfare minister Keshab Mahanta. The Himanta Biswa Sarma government is taking every measure to strengthen the healthcare infrastructure of the state, Mahanta said. "The government's aim is to provide affordable healthcare to every citizen of Assam and it is equipping state-run hospitals with modern critical equipment like oxygen plants to meet any future eventuality," he said. The oxygen plant has been set up by Bayer, a global enterprise in the life science fields of healthcare and agriculture, in partnership with LabourNet as part of its CSR initiative. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Guv hails Centre

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 29: Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria attended the 32nd foundation day of Tolaram Bafna Artificial Limb and Caliper Centre in Kamrup on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said that the service rendered by the family of Tolaram Bafna Artificial Limb and Caliper Centre was truly inspiring. The centre has dedicated its services to making a positive impact on the lives of the underprivileged. He claimed that the prosthetic limbs provided by the organisation are heartwarming and have brought smiles to the faces of thousands. Highlighting the country's rich tradition of empathy and compassion (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

State announces ₹ 50 lakh for World Champ

Assam House lauds Lovlina Borgohain's achievement

GUWAHATI, March 29 (PTI): The Assam Assembly on Wednesday congratulated World Boxing Champion Lovlina Borgohain, for winning Gold in the 75 kg category of the Women's Boxing World Championships, while the state government announced a reward of ₹ 50 lakh for her. Speaker Biswajit Daimary read out a congratulatory message on behalf of all the members of the House and said Assam Assembly principal secretary will convey it to the pugilist. Commenting on the development, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said: "At first, Lovlina won an

Olympic medal for Assam. Then she became the first woman player from the state to win a world championship." Based on the Sports Policy of the state, a ₹ 50 lakh reward will be offered to Lovlina, the chief minister said. "We need to create a new Lovlina and Hima Das (sprinter). They have already contributed enough to bring glory to the state. "Let us not scrutinise what will be her result in the next game. She has done so much that none of us could even think of doing it in our lifetime," Sarma said. Lamenting the reactions (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

CEREMONIAL DISTRIBUTION

of benefits under Assam Tea Industries Special Incentive Scheme (ATISIS)

-A scheme for incentivizing production of Orthodox and Speciality Tea

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Tea Plantation of all sizes located in Assam
- Tea Manufacturing Units of Assam, manufacturing either of the following:
 - a) CTC Tea
 - b) Orthodox Tea
 - c) Speciality Tea including Green Tea, Oolong Tea, White Tea, Yellow Tea and Purple Tea

BENEFITS AVAILABLE

- Interest subvention of 3% p.a., on Working Capital Loan
- Industrial units manufacturing Orthodox tea and Specialty tea will get subsidy of Rs. 12 per kg for FY 2023-24
- Subsidy of 25% of the cost of Plant & Machinery of Orthodox or any other Speciality tea
- Agricultural Income Tax Holiday for 3 years

Finance Department, Government of Assam invites beneficiary of tea gardens to the ceremonial distribution of benefits under ASSAM TEA INDUSTRIES SPECIAL INCENTIVE SCHEME (ATISIS)

Venue: Conference Hall, Ground Floor, CM Block, Janata Bhawan
Date: 30th March 2023 | Time: 3:30 pm

🎤 **Chief Guest** 🎤

Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Assam

🎤 **Guest of Honour** 🎤

Smti Ajanta Neog
Hon'ble Minister of Finance, Women & Child Development

Shri Bimal Bora
Hon'ble Minister,
Industries, Commerce & PE

Shri Sanjoy Kishan
Hon'ble Minister of
Welfare of Tea Tribes of Assam

Total 370 Tea Estates are being provided this year amounting to

₹ 64.05 Cr

This Scheme will be implemented till FY 2027-28

Transforming **Tea Industry,**
Transforming **Assam**

Finance Department | Government of Assam

Janasanyog ID/24410/22
ExclusiveFin2022-2312

Govt launches 7th tranche of coal mine auctions to boost availability of dry fuel



NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): The government on Wednesday launched the seventh round of commercial coal auctions in a bid to increase the availability of the dry fuel in the country.

A total of 106 coal mines were put on the block in the latest round of auctions. Of the total mines offered, 61 blocks are partially explored and 45 mines are fully explored.

As many as 95 non-coking coal mines, 10 lignite mines and one coking coal mine are being offered in the latest round of auction.

The government amended the mineral laws to open up the coal sector to provide a level-playing field to the public and private sector players and to permit the auction of coal mines without any restriction on end use. Coal from these mines can be utilised towards own consumption, sale or any other purpose.

The seventh round of commercial coal auction was launched by defence minister Rajnath Singh in the national capital in presence of union coal and mines minister Pralhad Joshi and minister of state (MoS) Coal and Mines Raosaheb Patil Danve.

In his address, Singh said coal is considered black gold, which plays an important role in strengthening the economy of the country.

Coal has contributed in a major way to strengthening the economy of the country. The successful auction of the 106 mines will further strengthen the economy.

Coal fulfils a major need of India's energy demand. Not just availability, but utilisation of resources is necessary for the growth of the country.

"Our energy consumption has grown in the last few years and will continue to grow. And to meet this need, we will have to start taking efforts from today," he said.

Samsung launches new robotic vacuum cleaner

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 29: Samsung launched its premium range of vacuum cleaners in India - The Bespoke Jet™, a stick-type cordless vacuum, and the powerful and intuitive Robotic Jet Bot™. The new upgraded line-up of vacuum cleaners is customized for Indian consumers that not only offer effortless cleaning solutions but also come in stunning designs that complement the indoors of every living space.

Bespoke Jet comes with an innovative design that is first in its class and offers an effortless and hygienic cleaning experience. In addition to its All-in-One Clean Station, a dock that charges the vacuum cleaner and automatically empties the dustbin, the Bespoke Jet is lighter and is equipped with a more enhanced Digital Inverter Motor than its predecessor for even more powerful cleaning.

With this new line-up, Samsung has forayed into robotic vacuum cleaners for the first time in India while demonstrating cutting-edge innovations via intelligent solutions to optimize home cleaning routines for consumers. Robotic Jet Bot™ comes with a clean station to auto-empty the dustbin, smart connectivity and control through the SmartThings app, voice recognition, and LiDAR sensor-based navigation.

"Consumer focus towards a hygienic lifestyle has increased multi-folds. Our new line-up of vacuum cleaners has been designed to address consumer needs for hygiene and convenience along with great aesthetics, and best-in-class technology. An all-in-one clean station, 99.999% multi-layered filtration system, Wi-Fi connectivity, voice control, and LiDAR sensor-based navigation make our vacuum cleaners the best choice for modern consumers," said Mohandeep Singh, senior vice president, Consumer Electronics Business, at Samsung India.

HMSI sets up dedicated factory for electric two-wheelers in K'taka

The company aims to roll out 10 lakh units per year by 2030

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India on Wednesday said it is setting up a separate unit at its Narsapura plant in Karnataka to roll out electric two-wheelers with first two models expected to hit the market in the next fiscal. The company aims to touch 10 lakh electric vehicle production capacity at the plant annually by 2030.

"Electric mobility is growing in India and our aim is to build country's best EV business structure. To fulfil our EV business requirements we are coming up with a dedicated factory in Narsapura." Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) Managing Director, President and CEO Atsushi Ogata told reporters here.

Following the government's direction of 'make in India' and the focus on localisation, main components including battery and other critical components like PCU will be produced in-house, he added.

The motor for the products will also be designed and manufactured locally, Ogata said.

"We aim to reach one million annual EV production at Narsapura by 2030," he said.

HMSI plans to bring in a dedicated platform on which multiple EV models will

fixed and swappable battery would be introduced.

Ogata said the company will utilise its existing sales network of around 6,000 touchpoints to come up with charging stations and for utilising battery swapping.

Additionally, HMSI plans to leverage the overall ecosystem, including battery swapping stations at petrol pumps, metro stations, and other locations, to provide convenient battery swapping solution for EV users.

Ogata noted that in line with Honda's global direction - to increase electric vehicle and fuel cell vehicle unit sales ratio to 100 per cent by 2040, the company will continue to improve efficiency of ICE engines with introduction of flex fuel engine and follow government direction for alternate fuels while expanding electrification of models and eco system.

"With our EV roadmap, now in the execution phase, we are taking substantial steps towards creating exclusive infrastructure for manufacturing diverse range of electric vehicles. Parallely, we are also investing in the development of EV technologies, charging infrastructure and after-sales services," he said.

NCLAT upholds ₹ 1,337.76 cr fine on Google, make some modifications in CCI order

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): The NCLAT on Wednesday upheld the orders of the fair trade regulator CCI imposing a penalty of ₹ 1,337.76 crore on tech major Google in the Android mobile devices case, with some modifications.

A two-member bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has directed Google to implement the direction and deposit the amount in 30 days.

"We upheld this penalty... The appellant (google) is allowed to deposit the penalty" after adjusting 10 per cent of the amount already deposited as per its previous order of January 4 within a period of 30 days, it said.

It also granted Google 30 days time to implement the measures as directed by the Competition Commission of India, which have been upheld by NCLAT.

The NCLAT bench comprising chairperson justice Ashok Bhushan and member Alok Shrivastava also made some modifications to the CCI order passed on October 20, 2022. The modifications to the CCI order include striking down some portions related to permission for uninstalling Google suite software, and some other points.

It also rejected Google's plea that there was a violation of natural justice by the CCI in the probe.

An e-mail sent to Google for comments did not elicit any response.

On October 20 last year, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) slapped a penalty of ₹ 1,337.76 crore on Google for anti-competitive practices in relation to Android mobile devices.

Gold falls ₹110; silver jumps ₹350



NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Gold prices fell by ₹ 110 to ₹ 58,740 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid weak global trends, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had closed at ₹ 58,850 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver, however, jumped by ₹ 350 to ₹ 70,100 per kg.

"Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at ₹ 58,740 per 10 grams, down ₹ 110 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas market, gold was quoting lower at USD 1,962 per ounce while silver was up at USD 23.14 per ounce. Comex spot gold price is trading down by 0.60 per cent at USD 1,962 per ounce against its previous close, Gandhi said.

NASSCOM Foundation, DXC Technology collaborate to bridge skilling gap

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 29: NASSCOM Foundation and DXC Technology have joined forces to address the skill gap and promote digital education in India's northeastern region. The partnership aims to provide the youth with opportunities to harness and scale-up technology, thereby enhancing their employment prospects. As part of this initiative, more than 800 students in Assam will receive training in both technical and non-technical skills, enabling them to meet the demands of the modern job market. Nidhi Bhasin, CEO, NASSCOM Foundation said, "We firmly believe that the key to achieving a digitally empowered society and a knowledge-based economy lies in two main objectives: enhancing digital

literacy and addressing the glaring skilling gap that currently hinders India's youth. NASSCOM Foundation, in partnership with DXC Technology, is taking a significant step towards providing technology access to some of the most marginalized and remote communities in India. By combining our efforts, we aspire to expand the digital ecosystem's reach and ensure that no one is left behind." Lokendra Sethi, Vice President, India HR Lead, DXC Technology added, "We at DXC are committed to our social responsibility mission of strengthening the backbone of our society by providing the youth with appropriate education and skilling opportunities. Providing technical knowledge and essential life skills to communities, particularly to those who need it the

most, can positively shape the country's future in today's digital age. By collaborating with NASSCOM Foundation we are steadily moving towards our goal, and we are proud to be a part of this journey." Notably, this project closely aligns with both NASSCOM Foundation and DXC Technology's philosophy of leveraging technology for social good and for improving the quality of life of the youth from marginalized communities and society at large. In line with the Digital India vision, the goal is to foster economic growth and development in communities. The initiative is part of a larger collaboration between the two organizations, announced last year, to strengthen India's Aspirational Districts Programme, contributing to shaping a technologically empowered society.



HMSI, which sold over 40 lakh two-wheelers in the domestic market this fiscal, has initiated Project Vidyut to introduce a new customer journey that caters to the demand of electrification age. As part of this project, HMSI will launch two new electric two-wheelers in FY24. The first one, a mid-range electric vehicle and the second, a swappable battery type that utilises the Honda Mobile

Power Pack. Elaborating on the company's business direction in the next fiscal, Ogata said the company will complete the transition of its existing model line-up to the latest on-board diagnostics regulation OBD2 and E20 (20 per cent ethanol-blended) fuel compliance in the first half of the next financial year. He noted that HMSI will be expanding

exports to 58 countries with 20 models in FY24. The company currently exports 18 models to over 38 countries.

Ogata said the company also plans to soon start a new assembly line for scooters with an additional capacity of 6 lakh units at its Vithalapur plant in Gujarat.

The company plans to shift the Activa production from Narsapura plant to the Gujarat facility. Ogata said the mass production of the electric two-wheeler models at the Narsapura plant would begin by March next year, followed by market launch of products.

HMSI currently has four plants in the country with an installed production capacity of around 52 lakh units per annum.

On new product launches, Ogata said the company aims to introduce a 160 cc bike and a 125 cc scooter in the next three months.

Besides, the company is considering to drive in a new 350 cc bike around the festive season this year.

On sales expectations in the next fiscal, HMSI Operating Officer (Sales and Marketing) Yogesh Mathur said the company expects to log in a lower double-digit growth.



The regulator had also ordered the internet major to cease and desist from various unfair business practices.

This ruling was challenged before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), which is an appellate authority over the orders passed by the CCI.

Google in its petition had contended the investigation carried against it by the CCI was "tainted", contending that the two informants on whose complaint the fair trade regulator initiated the enquiry were working at the same office as was investigating the tech major.

According to Google's plea, the CCI failed to conduct an "impartial, balanced, and legally sound investigation" while ignoring evidence from Indian users, app developers, and OEMs.

Challenging the CCI order, Google said the findings are "patently erroneous and ignore" the reality of competition in India, Google's pro-competitive business model, and the benefits created for all stakeholders.

and user data.

According to him, data capture and data deployment are getting exploited and monetised as advertisement revenues. When choice is the guiding principle of the competition law, Google's hegemony reduces both choice and competition.

Venkataraman emphasised that implementation of the remedies made by the CCI would go a long way towards having a market with greater freedom for all players, which would be in total sync with the principles of free competition rather than the 'walled garden' approach of Google.

The abuse of dominance by Google stands proved in every criterion laid under Section 4 of the Competition Act in terms of mandatory pre-installation, premier placement and bundling of core apps. Such practices result in the imposition of unfair conditions and supplementary obligations, he said.

The NCLAT started its hearing in the Android matter on February 15, following a direction of the Supreme Court. The apex court had directed the NCLAT to decide the appeal by March 31.

On January 4, a separate bench of the NCLAT issued a notice over Google's plea, directing it to pay 10 per cent of the ₹ 1,337 crore penalty imposed by the CCI. It had declined to stay the CCI order and put the matter for a final hearing on April 3, 2023. This was challenged by Google before the Supreme Court, which also declined to stay the CCI order but directed the NCLAT to decide on Google's appeal by March 31.

Sensex rallies 346 pts, Nifty inches closer to 17,100 on global relief rally

MUMBAI, March 29 (PTI): Benchmark Sensex settled higher by 346 points while Nifty inch closer to the 17,100 level in a volatile trade on Wednesday driven by foreign fund inflows and firm trends in global markets.

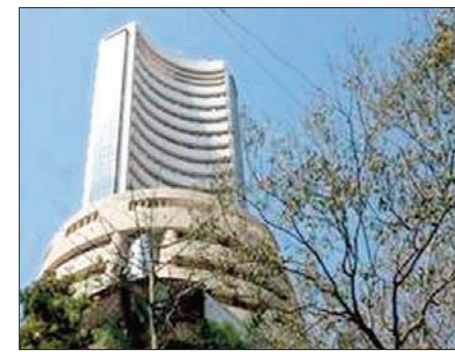
Buying in services, realty, commodities and auto stocks on the monthly expiry day also aided the momentum.

The 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 346.37 points or 0.60 per cent to close at 57,960.09. During the day, it jumped 510.48 points or 0.88 per cent to 58,124.20.

The broader NSE Nifty climbed 129 points or 0.76 per cent to end at 17,080.70.

Among the Sensex firms, HCL Technologies, Tata Motors, Hindustan Unilever, NTPC, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance and Mahindra & Mahindra were the major gainers. Bharti Airtel, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and Asian Paints were the laggards.

Markets managed to gain nearly a per cent on the monthly expiry day amid excessive volatility, Ajit Mishra, VP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said, adding that a sharp surge in the last half an hour helped barometers notch gains. Global markets advanced on ebbing concerns that the global financial system might be crack-



ing under the strain of interest rate hikes to cool inflation, analysts said.

"The home market is being impelled to stay non-sticky in both directions by the continuous instability in the international market. The domestic market's favourable ending was supported by a significant upswing in both the US and European markets.

"This volatility is expected to continue until the global banking system gets fully recovered from the turmoil, along with a confirmation of the Fed's decision to pause rate hikes," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial

Services.

Global equities were mostly up on Wednesday as easing concerns over the banking sector revived risk appetite, said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.68 per cent and midcap index jumped 1.67 per cent.

Among indices, services rallied 3.28 per cent, realty jumped 2.55 per cent, commodities (1.89 per cent), auto (1.74 per cent), industrials (1.66 per cent), metal (1.57 per cent) and capital goods (1.42 per cent).

Oil & Gas index was the only laggard, ending marginally lower. In Asian markets, Seoul, Japan and Hong Kong ended in the green while Shanghai finished lower.

European markets were quoting in the positive territory during the afternoon trade. The US markets ended lower on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude advanced 0.38 per cent to USD 78.95 per barrel.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net buyers on Wednesday as they bought equities worth ₹ 1,245.39 crore, according to exchange data. Markets would remain closed on Thursday for Ram Navami.

HFCL bags ₹ 283-crore order from Gujarat Metro

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Telecom gear maker HFCL on Wednesday said it bagged a ₹ 282.61 crore contract from Gujarat Metro Rail Corporation to deploy communication systems for Surat Metro Rail Project Phase-I. The company has to deploy the project within 90 weeks from the date of contract. "...the company has bagged an order worth ₹ 282.61 crore from Gujarat Metro Rail Corporation (GMRC) Limited, for design, manufacture, supply, installation, testing and commissioning of telecommunication systems for Surat Metro Rail Project Phase-I," the company said in a regulatory filing.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Burhana Begum, do hereby affirm and declare that my father's actual and correct name is Bachchu Mandal. But his name has been wrongly inserted in my Passport vide Passport No W6632014 as Bachu Mandal in place of Bachchu Mandal. Both Bachchu Mandal and Bachu Mandal are the same and one person.

Sd/-
Burhana Begum
D/O- Bachchu Mandal
Village- No. 1 Mazgaon
P/S- Daigaon
O/P- Daigam.
District- Darrang
(Assam)

CEM Pramod Boro meets family members of Ramesh Narzary



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 29: Chief executive member (CEM) of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and UPPL president, Pramod Boro on Wednesday visited and met family members of late Ramesh Narzary, senior UPPL leader who passed away on March 27 at his Chechapani residence near Magurmari in Kokrajhar.

During the visit, Boro was accompanied by ex-MLA Chandni Basumatary, UPPL media cell secretary Hantigiri Narzary, Kokrajhar district committee of UPPL general secretary Suraj Moshahary.

Narzary was regarded as one of the prominent founding members of the UPPL party and a retired employee of NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati. He was a noted social activist and member of the Land Advisory Board, Kokrajhar, government of Bodoland Territorial Region.

CEM Boro expressed his sorrow at the demise of Narzary and prayed for eternal peace for the departed soul. He extended condolences to the bereaved family members.

He further recalled contributions of late Ramesh Narzary who was one of founding members of the UPPL party.

He said that the UPPL party lost a great party leader and social activist with his demise.

"It is deeply saddened by the demise of senior UPPL leader, Ramesh Narzary," he said, adding that he was a man of immense dedication & integrity.

"Narzary worked tirelessly to elevate the stature of our party," Boro added.

"I pray his soul finds eternal peace & extends my sincere condolences to his family," Boro further said.

Meanwhile, the adhyasradhya of late Ramesh Narzary will be held on April 5 at his Chechapani residence near Magurmari.

Family members and villagers of greater Chechapani village are seen busy on the preparation and arrangements for holding the adhyasradhya with traditional rituals.

Tarpaulin distributed to hailstorm-affected families



HT Correspondent
KOILAMATI, March 29: District Disaster Management team on Wednesday visited Koilamati area in Karbi Anglong district affected by hailstorms and distributed tarpaulin as relief measures to the affected families.

Heavy rain accompanied with hail storms occurred in various areas of Koilamati on Tuesday last,

where several dwelling houses, betel nut and banana trees were destroyed. Poultry were also affected.

The District Disaster Management team was led by Bijoy Tisso. The team also took a record of 1,000 families being affected from Tuesday's incident. Copies of Aadhaar card, PAN card and bank passbook were collected from the affected families for providing relief to them.

Book on 6th schedule area released

HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 29: A book on Karbi Modern Indian Language (MIL) paper I & II specially edited for the upcoming 6th Schedule area Special Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) was formally released by executive member (EM), Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Education, Richard Tokbi in his official chamber at KAAC Secretariat here on Wednesday.

During the release of the book, EM Richard Tokbi expressed his gratitude to the editorial team of the book for their effort in publishing the book which will be beneficial for the aspirants who are going to appear in the forthcoming 6th Schedule area special TET.



The book is prepared as per the new syllabus of TET approved by the government of Assam, the book is included with sample paper with answers from 2019 & 2021 Assam TET edited by Hukursing Rongpi, Somoi Senar, Sarsing Tisso and Ranjit Hanse. The price of the book is Rs 300.

DC's administrative powers entrusted to ADCs of four merged districts in Assam

GUWAHATI, March 29 (PTI): The Assam government on Wednesday said it has issued a notification entrusting all administrative and statutory powers of a deputy commissioner to the additional deputy commissioners in-charge of four districts which were merged with others on the day before the delimitation exercise began in the state on January 1.

The Assam cabinet had, in December last year, decided to merge four districts with the ones from which these were carved out and made separate districts.

The cabinet decision reduced the number of districts from 35 to 31 with Biswanath merged with Sonitpur, Hojai with Nagaon,

Tamulpur with Baksa and Bajali with Barpeta.

An official release on Wednesday said that the notification, issued by the General Administration Department recently, stated that the deputy commissioners of these districts under which these sub-divisions (Biswanath, Hojai, Tamulpur and Bajali) fall will have the powers of overall supervision of government programmes, projects and schemes.

The deputy commissioners, however, will not interfere in the day-to-day functioning and work of these sub-divisions, the release said.

The delimitation exercise to redraw the boundaries of 14 parli-

mentary and 126 assembly constituencies is being conducted by the Election Commission of India.

Notably, the Congress had alleged that the state cabinet had a "mala fide intention" in merging the four districts with others.

"Almost all the opposition parties condemned the move and accused the ruling party of attempting to redraw Muslim majority seats in Assam to benefit itself and also to spark religious polarisation. In many localities, widespread protests were held by blocking the national highway," state Congress president Bhupen Bora had said.

The ECI had banned the creation of new administrative units

in Assam from January 1, 2023, since when the notification of the delimitation exercise came into force.

The full bench of the ECI was on a three-day visit to the state from March 26 to hold consultations with various stakeholders, including political parties and civil society, on the delimitation process.

The ECI on Tuesday said civil society organisations did not oppose Assam's delimitation process, but several political parties have expressed reservations over issues like the exercise being done based on the 2001 census or not putting it off till 2026 when the next nationwide delimitation is due.

Assam Congress files Privilege Notice against CM
GUWAHATI, March 29 (PTI): The Congress on Wednesday filed a complaint against Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for breach of privilege in the state Assembly for one of his remarks during a debate on Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha. The Congress Legislature Party filed the complaint with the Principal Secretary of Assam Assembly, following which Sarma withdrew the comments inside the House. The Congress, however, has not withdrawn the privilege notice yet and demanded an apology from the chief minister instead of a mere withdrawal of the statement. "Today in the House, the Leader of the House Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma has stated that he is aware of the discussion held in the ACP (Assam Congress Legislature Party) room. Further, he has also stated that some Hon'ble Member of the ACP has informed him about the decision taken in the CLP meeting held on 28th March, 2023," said the complaint letter, which is accessed by PTI.

NFR commissions electronic interlocking at Khotkhoti station

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 29: NF Railway has commissioned Electronic Interlocking (EI) of Siemens at Khatkhati station in Lumding division on Tuesday. The RDSO approved EI will provide better flexibility in train operations. The whole work has been commissioned by taking the disconnection and traffic block in the section.

The EI is done under first composite work of Signal & Telecom, Engineering and Electrical departments. This work included construction of a new RBG building and installation of new Optical Fibre Communication equipment. Integrated Power Supply system replaced with new one for reliable power supply for signalling equipment. Tokenless Block Instruments of PTJ make were replaced by Universal Fail Safe Block Interface in between Khotkhoti - Bokajan & Khotkhoti - Dimapur sections. 1 independent and 4 dependent

new shunt signals provided. 2 new point machines provided in place of ED. There are 44 route connections in this EI.

With the commissioning of EI system at Khatkhati station the movement of trains over this route will get eased up considerably and result in improved punctuality of Mail/Express trains and increase in average speed of goods trains. The new interlocking will help in ensuring safe and seamless train operations in the section.

Inauguration of welfare activities under CAP at Khatkhati



HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 29: President, United International Mission, Christopher Prince Fernandes inaugurated the wooden/RCC pipe bridge constructed by 20 Bn CRPF under Civic Action Programme 2022-23, at Bongruvillage, Khatkhati in Karbi Anglong district on Wednesday. The inaugural programme was chaired by Commandant 20 Bn CRPF, Swarn Singh; Sarkari Gaon Bura, Babu Bongruvillage; officials and jawans of 20 Bn CRPF. Likewise, Borewell with submersible pump and 2,000 litres water storage tank was also inaugurated by Fernandes. Similarly, Commandant, GC, CRPF, Khatkhati, Gopal Yadava inaugurated a waiting shed renovated by 20 Bn CRPF at Khatkhati. Meanwhile, the 20 Bn CRPF statement said that under the aegis of IG (OPS) Jorhat sector, it has been carrying out Civic Action Programme for the welfare and essential requirement of the needy people of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong like construction of waiting sheds, resting sheds, toilet blocks, installation of solar street light and conducting free medical camp along with distribution of medicines.

ARSU, ARWC and SSSC take out protest rally

HT Correspondent
DHUPDHARA, March 29: All Rabha Students' Union (ARSU), All Rabha Women Council (ARWC) and Sixth Schedule Demand Committee (SSDC) took out a protest rally, whereas Kamrup district committees started from Kendugiri village of Boko to Dhupdhara through National Highway 17 and Goalpara District Committee started from Dudhnoi to Dhupdhara through National Highway 17 on Wednesday. Kamrup District's movement was led by Nripen Khanda, president, ARSU and Goalpara district's movement was led by Pradip Rabha, general secretary, ARSU.

It needs to be mentioned that ARSU and other sister organisations demonstrated against the BJP-led state government for inclusion of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) areas in Sixth Schedule under the Indian Constitution. Their other demands are to transfer the power and functions to the RHAC as mentioned in the Rabha Accord and create a development council for the Rabha people residing outside of the RHAC area.

"We have the long pending demand to include RHAC areas in the Sixth Schedule. Despite being deprived from the past governments to fully fulfill our demands to save our community along with other communities living in the RHAC area, for equal development to all communities and to save our community's new generation. That is why we started 'Padayatra' to fulfil our demand as soon as possible" said Nripen Khanda, president, ARSU.

"Many times governments promised us to fulfil our



demands but till now they show tremendously deficiencies of goodwill to fulfil our long pending demands," added Khanda.

"We condemn the government for not fulfilling our demands till today. We Rabha community are ready to give assessment in future politically to the BJP party and their workers," said Nripen Khanda.

"If we don't get any fruitful results from the government we will project our own candidates in Guwahati Lok Sabha Constituency Election along with State Assembly Election and Panchayat Election so far," Khanda further said.

More than five thousand people from Rabha, Bengali, Gorkha community and ARSU, ARWS and SSSC members gathered at Dhupdhara and informed that a huge mass gathering protest will be held in Dudhnoi on April 9 and in Boko on April 3.

RHAC executive members Sumit Rabha, Aditya Rabha, vice president Ramakanta Rabha, ZPC vice president Komburam Rabha, ARSU organisation secretary Ankur K Rabha, ARSU Kamrup district president Ananda Rabha and many other leaders took part in the mass movement.

K Arul Jothi takes charge as principal chief security commissioner of NFR

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 29: K Arul Jothi took charge as the inspector general cum principal chief security commissioner (IG-cum-PCSC) of Northeast Frontier Railway on March 24 last. He is an officer from the 1995 batch of Civil Services Exam. As IG-cum-PCSC he will be the security custodian of all railway assets, structures including track and fixtures, rolling stock, signalling gears and railway buildings and establishments like station premises, booking offices, administrative headquarters, etc., within the jurisdiction of NF Railway i.e., all north-eastern states including Sikkim and parts of West Bengal and Bihar.

Jothi has wide experience of working in the field over many zonal railways. He has worked in many sensitive areas such as Mughal Sarai, Danapur, Malda, Sealdah and Secunderabad. Earlier in the year 2017-2019 he was posted as deputy inspector general cum chief security commissioner of NF Railway. Before joining as the IG-cum-PCSC of Northeast Frontier Railway, he was posted as the IG-cum-PCSC of Rail Wheel Factory based at Yelahanka, Bangalore.

Street play on prevention of child marriage in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, March 29: A street play on prevention of child marriage was organised by District Child Protection unit under the supervision of Social Welfare Department in Dibrugarh on Wednesday.

The street play was done at Thana Chariali, Pachali and Lahowal to create awareness on child marriage. The street play was about 15 minutes long and the actors of the play tried to reflect the different types of harassments a child faces after child marriage occurs through their drama.

A good number of people watched the street play and even interacted with the media appreciating the efforts and simultaneously also projected the need for awareness of these types of activities.



ADC Jitu Kumar Das, child protection officer Sangeeta Das, district information and public relations officer, Snigdha Rani Das, employees of social welfare were present during the programme.

64 students re-wild in rhino abode of Pobitora WLS

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 29: Firsthand field experience is always much more enlightening than what is taught inside the classroom. Exposing a young student to the richness of a protected biodiversity area is bound to be more attractive to learn about nature and acquire a deep liking for nature than sitting in the class listening to their teacher talking about nature and its resources.

Rewilding, is what the premier biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak has attempted when it took 64 high school students in two groups on an education tour inside Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) on March 28 and 29 and also engaged them in nature-oriented exercises and interactions with conservation educators, forest officials, wildlife biologists, wildlife photographer/filmmakers.

"All these 64 students belong to six different schools located close to Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary and they have grown up in this biodiversity-rich area without getting an opportunity so far to visit Pobitora WLS. We have facilitated a trip inside the sanctuary so that they can see and feel for them-



selves the rich biodiversity. It will definitely create a lasting impression on young minds and inspire them to conserve the natural heritage," said Jayanta Kumar Pathak, senior environment educator of Aaranyak.

The students were engaged in various exercises and games like brain mapping session, tree hugging, landscape observation and expression, leaf album making, Jeep Sa-

fari and creative leaf collage making. Effectiveness of Forest Therapy also introduced in the programme. Aaranyak organised the programme in collaboration with the Authority of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Pobitora Ecotourism Development Society (PETDS) under the sponsorship of LEA Associates South Asia Pvt. Ltd (LASA).

Nayanjyoti Das, Range officer of Pobitora

WLS, wildlife photographer and filmmaker Champak Deka who is also President of PETDS and Dr Ruby Das, Consultant of LASA interacted and spent substantial time with the students as external resource persons besides the Aaranyak team of resource persons comprising Jayanta Kumar Pathak, Dr Alolika Sinha, Wasima Begum, Sultana Sharmin and Ankita Sarma.

Two senior officials of LASA, Deputy General Managers Gautam Patnaik, Basanta Bezbaruah too interacted with the students participating in the 'rewilding' programme.

The tiny Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary is located about 40 kilometers away from Guwahati city boasts of the highest density rhino population on this planet.

The 38.81 sq. km. sanctuary, has very rich biodiversity in its about 16 square kilometer core area that houses 107 one-horned Indian rhinoceros besides Asiatic water buffaloes, wild boars, a wide range of bird species, amphibians and reptiles, dominating habitats of grassland, woodland and wetland. There can't be a much more suitable place close to the bustling Guwahati for the students to enjoy the warmth of nature and its richness.

Work on reducing maternal mortality rate: Jorhat DC to ASHAs

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, March 29: A district level convention of ASHA workers was held at the Sri Sri Pitambar Deva Goswami auditorium hall at the District Library here on Wednesday. Addressing the convention, Jorhat deputy commissioner Pulak Mahanta said that ASHAs had an important role to play in reducing the maternal and infant mortality rates. Asking them to carry on their dedicated services with renewed zeal, Mahanta complimented them for their earnest services during the Covid vaccination drives.



Dispur Press Club observed its 8th annual foundation day and felicitation program in Guwahati on Wednesday. HT Photo

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The more things change, the more they are the same.
- Alphonse Karr

Common man to be hit hard

From April 1, 2023, the existential crisis for poor patients is further going to worsen on account of a 12.12 percent rise in prices of essential drugs, which was also increased by 10.76 percent from April 1, 2022. The price difference in 12 months has thus turned to be 24.18 percent. Such a steep hike in drug prices has been allowed by India's National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) which is bound to create havoc for millions of poor patients who have already been severely affected by the general rise in prices of all commodities, especially in food items and food inflation in addition to reduced earning and joblessness. It is worth recalling that drug prices were allowed to increase by only 1.97 percent in 2017, 3.43 percent in 2018, 4.26 percent in 2019, and 1.88 percent in 2020. Then suddenly the rise in prices of essential drugs was allowed to be increased by over 10 percent in 2021. This is the third year in a sequence when essential drug prices have increased above 10 percent. From April 1, 2022, the hike would be highest at 12.12 percent. These years combined, the effective price rise would be above 36.60 percent.

The essential medicines to be affected by this price rise would include but are not limited to painkillers, anti-infectives, cardiac drugs, and antibiotics. The annual change in WPI, as notified by the government, works out to be 12.12 percent during the year 2022, based on which NPPA has allowed pharmaceutical companies to increase the prices of essential drugs. The Centre is all set to allow this which would push up the prices of 384 molecules, which correspond to over 1,000 drug formulations across 27 therapies. These are scheduled or essential drugs that fall under the price control mechanism of the government via inclusion in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM). Since such listed drugs are used to treat common conditions such as fever, infection, heart disease, hypertension, skin diseases, and anemia, among others, steep hike in prices directly affects the general well-being of the people. The rest non-scheduled drugs which are outside the purview of the national price control mechanism are allowed an annual increase of 10 percent every year. These drugs are already out of reach of poor people due to their costs being too high for common people.

Drug manufacturers have welcomed the NPPA decision to allow them to increase their prices. They have been demanding an immediate increase of 10 percent in prices to ease their struggle with surging input costs in drug manufacturing. They have been saying that prices of all raw materials, active pharmaceutical ingredients, plastic and packaging material, and also freight costs have increased the cost of production and supply to the consumer end. The Centre must put a brake on the greed of drug manufacturers engaged in money-making through selling drugs at very high margins of profit through numerous ways and means including manipulation in specifications and quantity of constituents of drugs to go beyond the price control mechanism. It is therefore imperative for the government to come out with a price control policy for all drugs and medical equipment to save people from unfair levels of prices reportedly from above 10 percent up to 800 percent profit margin.

Labour Party leader Keir Starmer has started a war against British Left



By: Ben Chacko

British Labour Party's national executive (NEC) is due to consider a motion in Keir Starmer's name on Tuesday confirming that Jeremy Corbyn will not be endorsed as a candidate for the party at the next election. Nobody will be surprised at this long-trailed development. From Corbyn's first, unjustifiable, suspension from the party in autumn 2020 and Starmer's subsequent refusal to restore the whip once his membership status was reaffirmed by the NEC, the left has responded hesitantly and incoherently. Corbyn himself and key union allies appeared to put faith initially on a behind the scenes deal with Starmer: this fell apart because Starmer's private assurances could not be trusted, as several union leaders have confirmed. What looked — briefly — like a surge of anger in constituency parties was suppressed. Starmer's Labour decreed that discussion of the matter was prohibited, and some constituency party officials who allowed motions on the topic to be heard were made an example of through expulsion.

The Covid lockdowns were a backdrop that made it easier for the party centre to silence the membership. Over the years since, the hints that Corbyn would never regain the whip became louder. Each reiteration prompted a briefer, smaller uproar. The fact that Corbyn himself had not specified a fightback strategy was used to absolve others of the responsibility of solidarity. Unions, hands full organising the biggest upsurge in industrial action in decades, ceased to see the former leader's status as a priority, even while their leaders continued to speak regularly alongside Corbyn at strike rallies Starmer wouldn't deign to attend. It is this last point that should alert all fighting trade unionists to the dilemma we face. Starmer's vendetta against Corbyn is not some act of personal revenge. It is the focal point of a war on socialists in the party which aims at eliminating Labour's potential as a vehicle for radical change.

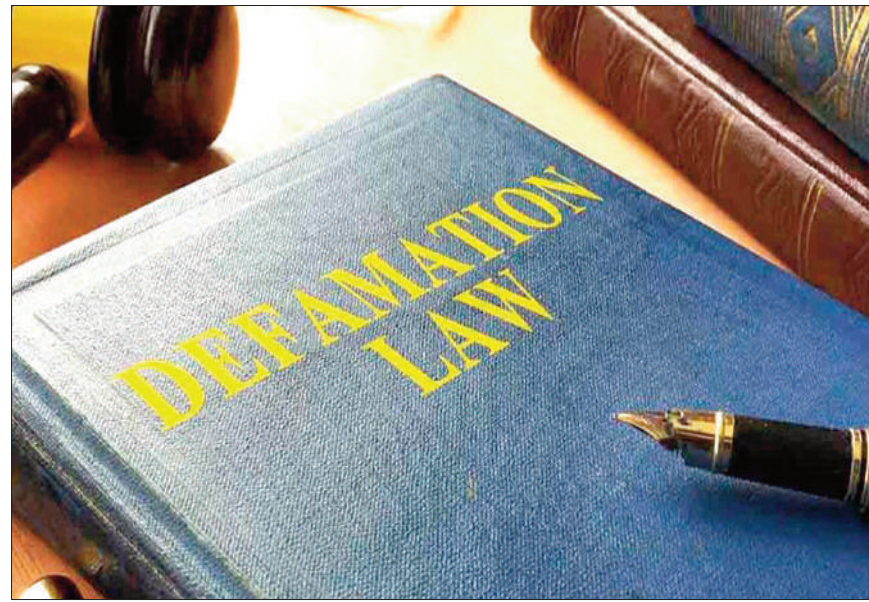
The motion Starmer and Shabana Mahmood bring to the NEC does not talk about policies. It does not even mention the smears around tolerance for anti-semitism that surrounded Corbyn's initial suspension. It's a duplicitous document that states simply that the 2019 election result was dreadful and that therefore the party's electoral prospects are "significantly diminished" should Corbyn be endorsed as a candidate in Islington North. The fact that Corbyn also led the party to its biggest increase in vote share in 70 years two years earlier is of course not mentioned. Nor that, while admittedly disastrous, the 2019 election still saw Labour receive a bigger share of the vote than under Ed Miliband in 2015, or under Gordon Brown in 2010. And the overriding reason for Labour's reverse in 2019 isn't mentioned either — namely, the support for a second EU referendum, with 52 of the 54 seats it lost to the Tories being Leave-voting. Starmer was the foremost champion of that suicide-note policy; and it was supported by many unions too. The 2019 result was more a verdict on the gulf between much of the Labour movement and large sections of the working class than it was on Corbyn.

The current strike wave is an opportunity to close that gulf. But it does need to be recognised. So does the real target of Starmer's crackdown: the transformative economic agenda that millions of union members want. It is impossible — as union leaders frequently point out — to address the crisis in the NHS, the rigged energy market or the causes of disputes from mail to rail without looking at the longer-term causes in privatisation, marketisation and outsourcing. Corbyn is being exercised for having demonstrated how popular these solutions are. If Left movement is serious about changing this country and the rotten deal it forces on workers, Starmer's attacks on Corbyn are not an unfortunate aside. They are part of the class war being waged against the Left. (IPA Service)

Sanskardhani should be evidence of loss of reputation

Defamation means to hurt or damage the reputation of a person. The term defamation is derived from the Latin word defamatory which means to broadcast or spread information about a person that may damage that person's reputation. Therefore, defamation is nothing but hurting someone's reputation. Defamation is both a civil and criminal offense. The criminal law of defamation is codified, but the civil law of defamation is not. In civil law, defamation is covered by tort law, but in criminal law, it is covered by sections 499 to 502 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. As per section 500 of the IPC, defamation is punishable with imprisonment of up to two years or with a fine. Defamation cases have increased in India in the last few years. On trivial grounds, government leaders file defamation suits against each other, followed by cross-defamation suits. Many cases have been registered against politicians like Arvind Kejriwal, Rahul Gandhi, and Smriti Irani. This has sparked debate in the media, highlighting the need to revisit India's defamation laws. Defamation laws can be abused in most countries, but India's laws are the worst. Not only are they vague, but they also go the extra step of making defamation a criminal offense.

This is only made worse by the fact that the current legal system is broken enough to allow those with wealth to use defamation to intimidate critics. While the right to reputation may be protected by the Constitution, it should not be at the cost of freedom of expression. Free speech is essential because, among other things, it enables the media to hold government and individuals accountable. Freedom of speech must also protect the right to insult within reasonable



limits, that is, to legitimately criticize the rich and powerful.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Dr Satyawan Saurabh

The Indian Penal Code 1860 lists defamation as a criminal offense, making it punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both. There are many reasons why this is a problem. There is the stigma of being arrested and charged with a crime. The fact that it was made a crime at a time when fighting to protect one's reputation was common. The fact that the IPC does not recognize irony or hold the truth as an absolute defense. The fact that there are both civil and criminal remedies for the same injury forces an already overburdened judiciary to respond to the same matter twice.

One of the most important elements of a

democratic democracy is the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, which enables people to participate fully and efficiently in the social and political processes of the country. Freedom of speech allows people to share their beliefs and political views. This ultimately leads to the betterment of society and the economy. Consequently, freedom of expression provides a framework by which a proper balance between peace and social change can be achieved. But above all is the fact that criminalizing defamation is a wholly unjustified restriction on free speech, while the global norm is that a civil suit for damages is sufficient to protect reputation. This overzealous restriction on free speech fails the constitutional test that such restrictions are "reasonable" and needs to be ended. Its

impact on free speech and democratic accountability is too high a price to pay for protecting the reputation of the individual.

Defamation reform can best be done through the enactment of a new law. Such legislation should decriminalize defamation and reform civil defamation to make it fair and transparent. While enacting a new law, it would be unwise if the law does not take into account the internet and new media while deciding issues such as who can be punished for defamation and how. Limitations must also be set for civil defamation — not only must the harm to reputation be serious, but the evidence must also be substantial. The complainant must demonstrate that his or her reputation has suffered material damage as a direct result of the alleged statement. Truth, opinion, and reasonable inference should also be made viable defenses in defamation suits. Lastly, the courts should be empowered to impose exemplary costs on frivolous litigations that waste their time.

The purpose of defamation law is to protect the reputation of people. Its central issue is how to balance this goal with the conflicting demands for freedom of expression. Since both these interests are highly regarded in our society, the former perhaps as the most cherished quality of civilized human beings, and the latter as the basis of a democratic society. Sometimes, when free speech is contrary to a person's reputation, it becomes appropriate for the State to set a limit, lest free speech becomes a weapon in the hands of a few. There is a dire need for a system that educates and sensitizes people about what to do and what not to do, what is wrong and what is right and what is defamation and what is not defamation. (The writer is a poet, freelance journalist, and columnist, All India Radio and TV panelist, can be reached at satyawnsaurabh3333@gmail.com)

Israeli supreme court 'reform' aims to approve erasure of Palestinians

By: Gershon Baskin

At the demonstrations for saving Israel's democracy, I carry a sign that says, "There is no democracy with occupation." It is not very popular, and at every demonstration, some people feel compelled to tell me that it is not in the right place. My answer is that those words are central to the struggle for Israel's democracy, and if they don't like it, they should deal with it. For me, that is the essence of what I am protesting.

I know that the majority of the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have taken to the streets are not there because of the occupation. Most Israelis still accept the anomaly of the concept of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. I also once believed that it was possible for Israel to be the democratic nation-state of the Jewish people. I don't believe that anymore.

There have been too many years of systemic discrimination against Israel's Palestinian citizens; too many years of Israel occupying and controlling millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; too many years of talking about the Palestinians as a "demographic threat."

Israel is not, and cannot be democratic based on Jewish superiority—meaning preference for Israel's Jewish citizens. The unfortunate reality is that for 75 years we have kept a façade of democracy. We can even convince a majority of Israelis that there is genuine democracy. We can even get a majority of the member states of the OECD countries to believe that Israel is a democracy. But if we are truly honest with ourselves, we all know that democracy and inequality cannot exist together.

No honest Israeli citizen can claim that the Palestinian citizens

of Israel live as equal citizens in the State of Israel. Israel has never even seriously considered passing a Basic Law for the equality of all of its citizens. No honest Israeli can claim that the military control over millions of Palestinians, without the most basic civil, human, and political rights, can really be called a democracy.

No one on the right wing of Israeli politics has any plan for the future of the occupied territories (even if they call them liberated Judea and Samaria) that includes equality and democracy for the Palestinians living there. Most left-wingers still hold onto the probably unviable two-state solution for the territories and do not consider any genuine democratic option, including equality.

Since the founding of Israel in 1948, more than 900 communities (villages, towns, cities) have been built for Jewish Israelis, but none for Palestinian citizens of Israel except for a small number of government-planned towns intended to house Palestinians displaced from their original communities by Israel. There are also dozens of Palestinian villages and communities in Israel, some of which predate the establishment of the state, that are unrecognized by the government; they receive no government services and are not even listed on official maps.

Only about 3% of all land in Israel is under the jurisdiction of Palestinian municipalities, even though Palestinian citizens of Israel make up 21% of the population. The Israeli government directly controls 93% of the land in Israel and systematically discriminates against Palestinian citizens of Israel in its allocation through official agencies, such as the Israel Lands Authority and the quasi-governmental Jewish National Fund. Combined with the discrim-

inatory Admissions Committee Law, approximately 80% of state lands are off-limits to Palestinian citizens of Israel, who face significant legal obstacles in gaining access to this land for residential, agricultural, or commercial development.

Just drive by Palestinian towns and cities in Israel and bear witness to the huge overcrowding. For example, it is so strikingly obvious that something is very wrong when travelling from beautiful and spacious Zichron Ya'acov, south of Haifa, to Fureidis, which resembles a Brazilian favela (a densely populated slum) more than a place that anyone would like to live in.

The Nationality and Entry into Israel [law] prevents Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank and Gaza (including those who were expelled from towns and villages that became Israel in 1948) who are married to Palestinian citizens of Israel from gaining residency or citizenship status. The law forces thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel to either leave Israel or live apart from their spouses and families.

This law has been renewed every few years since the Second Intifada in 2000, even though there is no real security justification for its renewal. It's all about demographics—which means it is all about racism and discrimination.

The Law of Return allows Jews from anywhere in the world to immigrate to Israel and receive automatic citizenship, regardless of their family origin, while denying indigenous Palestinians the right to return to the lands they were expelled from during Israel's establishment, preventing the reunification of many Palestinian families.

This also applies to Palestinians living abroad who want to reside in the West Bank or Gaza, not only in



Israel.

There are also many attempts to systematically erase and deny Palestinian identity and history. This applies to the many readers of my articles in Israeli newspapers who claim that I should use the paternalistic term "Israeli Arabs" and not the term that I use—"Palestinian citizens of Israel." Sorry, but the Arab citizens of Israel are 100% Palestinian, no different from their brothers and sisters in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

The so-called "Nakba Bill," passed in 2011, bans public funding for institutions and groups involved in activities commemorating the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians during Israel's establishment as a Jewish-majority state in 1948.

While hundreds of thousands of Israelis are out on the streets feeling that a rope is about to choke their basic freedoms and destroy their democracy, perhaps we have finally reached a "wake-up moment."

The current Israeli government's ultimate goal of the anti-democracy agenda is not to weaken the

Supreme Court so that it can rule without any interference. The government's goal is to allow it to annex the West Bank and implement policies that have the power to lead to another Nakba—first against the Palestinians in the West Bank, and then, or parallel to, the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The current laws being legislated will give the government the power to pass additional laws that will make it almost impossible for Palestinians to be elected to the Knesset unless they accept the basic fundamentals of Zionism—that the Land of Israel is for the Jewish people and that the Palestinians have no right for collective national identity—not only in Israel proper but even in the West Bank and of course in East Jerusalem.

While so many Israelis have finally awakened to the distortions of our democracy and the threats to all of us, perhaps they will now also wake up to the need to confront the central core of our existence as a modern liberal society in which there must be full equality for all of those who live under the same regime. (IPA Service)

Stray dogs become enemies of life



By: Priyanka Saurabh

Dogs have had a unique relationship of companionship with the evolution of humans. This poses the moral dilemma of humans being responsible for their welfare, but it also has its dangers because the evolution of dogs is linked to wolves and their instincts. It may be an unsolvable conundrum for India, but most of the rest of the world has not recognized the rights of stray animals. If such animals are kept

on a leash and registered, the keepers are bound to take care of them. If it is not, then as a last resort the state is bound to kill them in the interest of public health. Stray dogs are protected under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and the regulations enacted under section 38 of the Act, particularly the Animal Birth Control (Dog) Rules, 2001. It makes it illegal for any person, RWA, or property management to remove or relocate dogs. Only 15% of all stray dogs have been vaccinated. India's stray

population is huge, adoption is slow and limited as many people only want foreign-breed dogs.

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2001 (being updated) aim to limit the population of stray animals but do little to improve public safety. The proposed draft rules, or the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2022, put forward only procedural changes in sterilization and vaccination, allow only "terminally ill and mortally injured" dogs to be killed, and require resident welfare associations to register their cases in their localities. K is considered responsible for feeding stray animals.

The PCA and ABC regulations acknowledge that uncontrolled stray dogs must be stopped, although this does not account for the magnitude of the problem as there is approximately one stray animal for every 100 Indians. At about 21,000, more than a third of all rabies deaths occur in India. For the last five years, more than 300 people - mostly children from poor and rural families - have been killed by dogs. A 2017 study showed that stray dogs in rural areas can also be devastating to wildlife. More than 80 species, of

which more than 30 are on the endangered list, were targeted by dogs in wilderness areas. Dogs that are out alone can cause accidents when they run across the road, injuring themselves and other people.

Stray dogs enjoy opening garbage bags and they can be the cause of littering and spreading litter around the environment and road far and wide. Stray dogs will scavenge neighborhoods for food and may break open garbage cans and damage gardens. People who feed stray dogs can be made responsible for their vaccinations and can bear the cost if someone is attacked by the animal. Each Resident Welfare Association should form a "Guard and Dog Partnership" in consultation with the Police Dog Squad. So that the dogs can be trained and yet be friendly to the residents of the colony. Municipal corporations, residents' welfare associations, and local dog groups should take care of the vaccination and sterilization of animals. Sick animals and aggressive animals have to be put to death. The only long-term solution is to enforce stricter pet ownership laws, prohibit people everywhere from carelessly feeding dogs, and

establish facilities for domestic dogs.

More staff and funds are desperately needed. Apart from sterilization, attention should also be paid to adoption. And we must find some compassion in helping to resolve this crisis humanely. As long as dogs are homeless on the streets, the idea of a rabies-free India with harmonious coexistence between people and dogs would be a utopian dream. Leaving dogs homeless is bad for dogs, bad for people, and bad for wildlife. India lacks infrastructure and mechanisms to ensure that the vulnerable (the poor and their children) have access to treatment. As such, it is a fantasy to expect the number of dogs to decrease with sterilization and vaccination.

India has committed to eliminating rabies by 2030, but until the threat from stray dogs is first recognized as a public health menace, India's poorest people will sacrifice their lives in safe public places at the sacrifice of dull sloganeering. Will continue to be deprived of rights. (The writer is a research scholar in Political Science, poetess, freelance journalist, and columnist, can be reached at priyankasaurabh9416@gmail.com)

'Whose Forest?': Why Indigenous People from Tiger Reserves Across India Gathered at Nagarahole

By: Pranab Doley

“Kaddinnamakalunavene, kaddinnarajurunavene”. “We are the people of the forest, we are the rulers of the forest”. The long day's walk had cast a tired shadow on the faces of graceful and quiet villagers – women, children and youth.

I was walking with them too. We were marching through the forests of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve in southern Karnataka to various villages in the vicinity to celebrate the long standing struggle for local peoples' rights to stay on their own land.

A fire glowed in the middle of the field where the hundred-odd villagers gathered. Thimmana, veteran elder leader of the Nagarahole Adivasi JammapalaHakkuSthapana Samiti (Nagarahole Adivasi Communities Rights Assertion Committee) walked to the middle, whispered in a muffled voice and raised his folded hands in greeting to everyone present in the rally. His smile of courage and reassurance flowed like a wave, washing away the hopelessness from the faces of the gathered crowd. The struggle of the people of Nagarahole has a long history, and is an example of how conservation has gone wrong in India.

There is a clash between varying interests: coffee estate owners (Nagarahole is located in the districts of Mysore and Kodagu, and there are coffee estates both within and around the Park), profit-centric wildlife lobbies and the colonial Forest Department are pitted against the JenuKurubas, Beta Kurubas, Paniyas, Yaravas and other original inhabitants of the forest. Known as the Rajiv Gandhi or Nagarahole National Park, the lands were also declared a tiger reserve in 1999.

The struggle of local communities here is rooted in the very basic principle of people's right to live on their own lands.

The Adivasis, and their ideologies and practices of living with the forests, are best suited to protect the forest and know the most about the lives of flora and fauna. This is embedded in the community's call for their right to live in their own homes, which the Forest Department repeatedly violates through the creation of a national park and tiger reserve. The struggle has seen brutal repressions and also killings of people in the name of conservation. This is a result of the militarised

conservation practised by the forest department with increasing impunity in India.

The unbroken history of displacement of its original inhabitants started in Nagarahole in 1978-80 and the saga continues unabated despite people's continuous struggle for their rights to live in Nagarahole. The number of villages displaced stands at 47 since the inception of Nagarahole as a Protected Area. But the forest regime has not stopped here. Locals say forest officials have killed eight people and permanently injured many more. They say that this is part of their strategy to invoke fear.

In 2021, Basava, a jenukuruba tribe member, was allegedly shot by forest officials in retaliation because he defended his sister who was being harassed by them. In 2022, Cariappa, another tribe member, was allegedly tortured and killed by the officials of the Forest Department, say locals. These versions, which forest officials have not confirmed, point to a denial of the dignity of life to people. With such an outlook, how can India aim to be a 'Vishwa Guru'?

In solidarity and support with the Adivasis of Nagarahole, forest dwellers from across India joined the foot rally organised between March 15 and 21 by the Nagarahole Adivasi communities. Representatives arrived from places as far as Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, which epitomises the model of militarised fortress conservation in India: Gir National Park, Simlipal National Park, Dudhwa National Park, Achanakmar National Park, and more. Different communities separated by language and culture came together. They walked through the forests of Nagarahole and stayed in the villages, united by their collective memory and the history of having their basic human rights violated.

A young woman leader from a forest dwelling community, who is a lawyer now, spoke to the people about the plight her family has had to go through as a part of her community's great fight for their land.

A Tharu leader, who had arrived from Dudhwa, shared how her father was brutally tortured. In the starlit meeting, streaks of tears rolled down people's cheeks into the lands of Nagarahole, uniting all in pain and struggle.

Rajni, working under the banner of the Mahila-



MajdoorKissan Manch, has been part of the long struggle of Tharu Adivasis in Uttar Pradesh's Dudhwa National Park. He says that wherever there is an abundance of natural resources, be it jungles, coastal areas, hill areas, or mining areas, "You will find state repression."

The experience of the Nagarahole Adivasis, however, paints a different picture. Locals believe that land grabbing private coffee estate owners are the stronger force here.

"The Forest Rights Act was to be implemented from December 31, 2007, but just 11 days before that Nagarahole was hastily declared a tiger reserve, that too with the official notification not mentioning the Forest Rights Act. The intentions of the Forest Department and the state government are clear – to stop the Nagarahole Adivasis from exercising their rights under the Forest Rights Act. We are with the Nagarahole struggle. From Dudhwa to Nagarahole, the struggle is one. We will fight together," Rajni said.

The rally, which spread like a wildfire through

the forests of Nagarahole and was joined by the young and elderly, women and men alike, concluded with a huge meeting of local villagers in one of the villages inside the park boundary. The rally has a charter of demands which locals submitted to the Divisional Forest Officer of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve in the presence of many local leaders and protesters joining from various forest and tiger parks.

The charter of demands are as follows:

1. Indigenous Adivasi communities of Nagarahole must be brought under the FRA of 2006.
2. The community has to have resource rights, cultural rights, and habitation (housing) rights within the forest according to the FRA. The Gram Sabha does not recognise Nagarahole as a tiger reserve, hence it is a violation of the wildlife act to impose it.
3. Stop forceful resettlement of people in the name of tiger conservation.
4. All communities that have been evicted before the FRA of 2006, must be given the right to

go back to their lands and have their rights recognised.

5. Whatever decisions are taken need to be for the needs of the people of the forest and the wildlife concerns of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have laws and provisions in the Indian constitution (and international laws) that clearly state that they are the people who will decide what happens to their lands and what happens to their forests. By completely violating that, people in government offices, sitting in cities and making decisions for indigenous peoples are stepping on our agency.

6. Forceful evictions must stop and whatever is the law of the land has to be implemented and followed.

7. Our lands and our forests cannot be declared as a tiger reserve area or a protected area without our consent. The constitution states that wherever indigenous communities live, that is a scheduled area.

8. Under the 5th schedule of the constitution every scheduled area will have a minister from a Scheduled Community representing it in the government. But in the last 15 years, this law has been changed so that now somebody who is not a native of this place can also become a minister. This has to change. This is entirely wrong because whoever has come and settled here will not understand our pain or our connection to the forest. The minister should come from the native communities of this land. Interestingly, this year marks 50 years of Project Tiger in India. The events conducted to celebrate this take no cognisance of the role of Adivasi and forest dwelling communities in tiger conservation and the sacrifices they have made to protect wildlife. While the decisionmakers of conservation gather in the safe confines of Dehradun, a rallying cry for peoples' rights by communities from protected areas across India took place in Nagarahole.

The walk witnessed indigenous people holding hands through days and nights. Songs of freedom and cries for rights reverberated through the forest. Young people learnt from their elders lessons on discipline and resilience in times of precarity, they learnt of dignity and justice. A united democratic voice for all the people in the country was raised in the beautiful lands of Nagarahole. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Are you contributing to electronic waste?

By: Sakshi Sethi

E-waste is a growing concern not only in India but also globally. With the launch of newer devices, our greed leads us to buy the latest ones.

Christian Lous Lange says "technology is an effective servant but a dangerous master". There is no denying everyone is addicted to technology in some way or another. Everyone has seen the transition from a wired telephone to the first cell phones followed by the latest, lighter and better version of cell phones. However, have we ever thought that today's technology will be obsolete someday? Today, technology has affected almost every aspect from advancements in education, medicine or transport to easy access to socialization, food, healthcare and productivity.

Every year, big tech companies come up with new versions of their devices. This leads to the market to shift to its updated version. As a result, many individuals replace their phones or gadgets with new ones, causing a lot of E-waste. Today, almost 10 billion people have smartphones, and in 3-4 years without access to repair these devices will add to an enormous amount of e-waste that already exists.

Though buying latest gadgets keeps an individual updated, in the long run their constant use will affect our planet's health severely. Ac-

ording to a research, India is the 3rd largest E-waste producer after China and the USA. E-waste or electronic waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world. It includes discarded electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets, notepads, computers, radios and televisions. Computer devices account for nearly 70% of e-waste, followed by the telecom sector, medical equipment and electrical equipment. Unfortunately, these devices end up in landfills, where they release hazardous gases into the atmosphere. The toxic components so released affect human health in terms of skin irritation, lung infections, kidney problems, nausea and others. They also contribute to soil contamination, polluting the environment and most importantly harm and threat to wildlife. According to a recent study, E-waste has reached alarming levels with 5.3 billion phones thrown away every year. Since the last 5 years, waste has grown by 21% and is expected to reach 74.2 MT by 2030. If not recycled or disposed of properly, heavy metals in e-waste emit toxic substances causing serious environmental concern.

At the individual level, there are several solutions that can help reduce e-waste such as considering repairing a smartphone instead of buying a new one or preferring to donate old devices such as laptops, computers or notepads to schools or charitable organisations that can

find a use for the product. Educating high-school students about e-waste's harmful effects has a greater impact on stopping its spread. Adopting changes in technology such as cloud computing and the internet of things can even help with dematerialization. In India, many e-waste recycling startups such as Cashify, Aterro recycling, Namu E-waste, Binbag and many more have come up with the objective of conserving resources by adopting economical and responsible disposal techniques of e-waste.

These startups are working day and night to create opportunities to transfer waste into socially and industrially beneficial raw materials such as valuable metals, plastics and glass. They are using simple, cost-efficient and environmentally friendly technologies suitable for Indian conditions. As climate change effects grow, it becomes the responsibility of its citizens to help the planet and prevent e-waste issues. Also, with the 5G revolution, it is imperative to recycle old smartphones. It is important to understand that a difference can only be made at the individual level.

E-waste is a growing concern not only in India but also globally, as the moment electronic devices get introduced, an individual's greed leads them to buy the latest one while the old ones take space in the cupboard drawers. We need a safe channel for recycling obsolete equipment. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

'It can be done, it must be done': IPCC report on climate change

By: Frank Jotzo & Mark Howden

The world is in deep trouble on climate change, but if we really put our shoulder to the wheel we can turn things around. Loosely, that's the essence of today's report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC is the world's official body for assessment of climate change. The panel has just released its Synthesis Report, capping off seven years of in-depth assessments on various topics. The synthesis report confirms humans are unequivocally increasing greenhouse gas emissions to record levels. Global temperatures are now 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. They're likely to reach 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels in the early 2030s.

his warning has driven widespread and rapid global changes, including sea level rise and climate extremes – resulting in widespread harm to lives, livelihoods and natural systems. It's increasingly clear that vulnerable people in developing countries – who have generally contributed little to greenhouse gas emissions – are often disproportionately affected by climate change.

The world is up the proverbial creek – but we still have a paddle. Climate change is worsening, but we have the means to act.

So Much at Stake

Over the past week in Interlaken, Switzerland, several hundred representatives from most of the world's governments scrutinised the IPCC report's 35-page summary. The scrutiny happens sentence by sentence, often word by word, and number by number. Sometimes it's subject to intense debate. We were both involved in this process. The role of the reports' authors and IPCC bureau members is to stay true to the underlying science and chart a way between different governments' preferences. It is a unique process for scientific documents.

The approval process usually goes right to the wire, in meetings running through the night. This Synthesis Report was no exception. The scheduled time for the meeting was extended by two days and nights, wearing down government representatives and the IPCC teams.

The process reflects how much is at stake. The IPCC's assessments are formally adopted by all governments of the world. That in turn reverberates in the private sector – for example, in the decisions of boards of major companies and investment funds.

The Latest on Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The Synthesis Report confirms both emissions and atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases are now at record highs.

This is a very tall order in light of emissions trajectories to date. Annual global emissions in 2019 were 12 percent higher than in 2010, and 54 percent higher than in 1990.

But success in reducing emissions has been demonstrated. The IPCC says existing policies, laws, technologies and measures the world over are already reducing emissions by several billion tonnes of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, compared to what would otherwise be the case.

Most importantly, it's clear global emissions could be reduced deeply if existing policy instruments were scaled up and applied broadly. The report shows large potential for emissions-reduction options across all parts of the world economy.

Many of these come at low cost. And many bring side benefits, such as reduced air pollution. If all technically available options were used, global emissions could be at least halved by 2030, at manageable costs.

We have the collective experience to turn the corner. As the report spells out, a great many regulatory and economic policy instruments have been used successfully. And we know how to design climate policies to make sure they're politically acceptable and do not disadvantage the poorer parts of society.

The report also draws out the importance of good institutions for climate change governance – such as laws and independent bodies – and for all groups in society to be meaningfully involved.

Adaptation Falls Short

Rapid action on climate change is the economically sensible thing to do. If we fail to rein in emissions, adapting to the damage it causes will be more difficult and expensive in future. What's more, our existing adaptation options will become less effective.

Every increment of warming will intensify climate-related hazards such as floods, droughts, heatwaves, fires and cyclones. Often, two or more hazards will occur at the same time.

Unfortunately, overall global adaptation has not kept up with the pace and degree of increasing impacts from climate change. Most responses have been fragmented, incremental and confined to a specific sector of the economy. And most are unequally distributed across regions and vary in their effectiveness.

The barriers to more effective adaptation responses are well-known. Chief among them is a widening gap between costs of adaptation and allocated finance. We can, and should, do a lot better.

As today's IPCC report confirms, there are ways to make

adaptation more effective. More investment in research and development is needed. So too is a focus on long-term planning as well as inclusive, equitable approaches that bring together diverse knowledge.

Many adaptation options bring significant side benefits. Better home insulation, for instance, can help us deal with extreme weather as well as reduce heating and cooling costs and related greenhouse gas emissions. Moving people off flood-prone areas and returning these areas to more natural systems can reduce flood risk, increase biodiversity and store carbon dioxide in plants and soil.

And climate adaptation policies that prioritise social justice, equity and a "just transition" can also help achieve other global ambitions, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

We Can Close the Gap

On both climate change mitigation and adaptation, a massive gap remains between what's needed and what's being done.

Countries' current climate commitments do not add up to the shared ambition to keep temperature rise to below 2°C. And for many countries, current trajectories of emissions would also overshoot their targets.

Likewise, on the whole not nearly enough effort is being made to understand, prepare and implement measures to adapt to climate changes. The gaps are generally biggest in developing countries, which can much less afford to invest in climate change action than rich parts of the world. Developing countries are calling for large-scale climate finance to be provided by developed countries, and this is not happening to anywhere near the extent needed.

Predictably, issues of international equity and justice were among the thorniest in the approval of the Synthesis Report. The final version of the report frames the issue not as an irresolvable conflict, but as the opportunity for "shifting development pathways towards sustainability".

The vision of most governments is for all the world to attain high standards of living, but to do so with "climate neutral" technologies, systems and patterns of consumption. And systems must be built so they're robust to future climate change, including the nasty surprises that may come.

It must be done. It can be done. By and large, we know how to do it – and it makes economic sense to do so. In this report, the governments of the world have acknowledged as much. (Courtesy: The Quint)

'The Elephant Whisperers' made me think about my role in wildlife conservation

By: Srilekha Mitra

The Elephant Whisperers depicts a divine bond among human, natural and animal world echoing with the philosophy of Pre-Romantic and Romantic poets in English Literature.

The 41-minute documentary directed by KartikiGonslaves and produced by Sikha entertainment which won the Oscar in the Best documentary film category this year, making all the Indians proud across the world, preaches mankind's vital responsibility to safeguard the flora and fauna of their environment.

Set in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, located in the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu, the film represents a heavenly abode wrapped in the greenery exuding the beauty of nature at its peak. "The Elephant Whisperers" echoes with the view of the Pre-Romantic and Romantic poets in English Literature who believed nature to be mankind's haven, an universal spirit which guides them. Nature for profound Romantic Poets like Wordsworth was a source of love, perpetual joy, soothing and healing power, knowledge and spirituality. He considered Nature equivalent to God like in the film Bomman asserts his pride being both a priest and a mahout since he considered serving the elephants equal to serving Gods as in Hindu Mythology, elephants symbolize Lord Ganesha.

The plotline of the film re-

volves around a tribal couple Bomman and Bellie who raise two orphan baby elephants Raghu(a fragile injured infant who grows up to be a healthy juvenile) and Ammu, Bomman and Bellie represent the tribal community of Kattunayakam who has been entrusted with the responsibility to look after such orphan, injured and displaced elephants' generations after generations which shows how tribes are more rooted in nature compared to people residing in cityscape. These tribal people represent Wordsworth's religious perception where he spoke about the holy trinity between Man, God and Nature.

Throughout the film we see how like parents Bomman and Bellie rear two baby elephants, understanding them, feeding and bathing them. The elaborate scenes of Bomman bathing with the elephants especially the shots from above which captured Bomman with the elephants in the river amidst the lap of nature, almost seemed paradisaal and were very soothing to the eyes. Bellie, a widow who lost both her daughter and husband is the only woman in Tamil Nadu who is selected to look after baby elephants and this helps her to cope up with the grief of losing her loved ones. Thus the motherhood of nurturing these elephants which Bellie thoroughly enjoyed gave her a new identity, a meaning to her life and a reason to live – "Everyone now calls me the mother of elephants and that

makes me proud"(Bellie).

The elephants united Bomman and Bellie through the medium of marriage and their wedding ceremony reflected the simplicity of tribal life, it wasn't any grand wedding, but a wedding embedded in their rituals emanating peace and happiness.

Even after the launch of several movements in India like Chipko Movement, Bishnoi Movement which centred around afforestation, human beings kept on ravaging the environment for their own benefits, a short glimpse of this is presented in the film through the barren landscape of leafless trees scorched by the burning sun which made Elephants rush out to villages in the search of food and water resulting in baby elephants getting lost from their herd. This intense rise in temperature is due to global warming, consequential of the evil actions of human beings yet unfortunately there's no sense of guilt in them.

The fleeting clouds, beautiful sunrise and sunset amidst the Nilgiri hills, the glimpses of tigers, leopard, bison, different kinds of birds like vulture, cries of peacock, species of monkeys sitting on a tree, all these elements of nature and Bomman and Bellie residing among these elements with their two baby elephants depict the peaceful coexistence among human, natural and animal world.

Elephants are considered to be wild animals but this documentary shows how humane elephants are

– "Everything about him is like a human, except that he cannot talk." When Raghu's responsibility was shifted to a different caretaker, the way it impacted both Ammu and Raghu along with Bomman and Bellie is the most heart-rending part of the film for me. It's like a son and a brother being snatched away from a family despite them pleading not to take him away. However, the film ends on a positive note where youth is seen taking care of elephants evident in the scene where the local tribal boys scrub Raghu, bathing him that which portrays a hopeful future where after Bomman and Bellie, maybe these young boys who will be adults one day, will be shouldering the responsibility of looking after these elephants.

The Elephant Whisperers very subtly delves deep into our psyche, making us contemplate about our role in wildlife conservation especially in conserving the animals like elephants which are on the verge of extinction.

The film also explores the life of tribal people and their harmony with nature. In all it represents a divine bond shared between human and animal world with the hope that humans beings who are placed at the top of the Great Chain Of Beings for their hierarchy of intellect will undertake necessary steps to maintain the peaceful coexistence among the natural, animal and their own world as shown in the film. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Biden starts democracy summit with \$690M pledge for programmes

WASHINGTON, March 29 (AP): President Joe Biden is opening his second Summit for Democracy with a pledge for the U.S. to spend \$690 million bolstering democracy programs around the globe.

The Biden administration wants to use the two-day summit that begins Wednesday to zero in on making "technology work for and not against democracy," according to a senior administration official.

Some 120 global leaders have been invited to participate.

Biden frequently speaks of the U.S. and like-minded allies being at a critical moment in which democracies need to demonstrate they can out-deliver autocracies.

The summits, something Biden promised as a Democratic 2020 presidential candidate, have become an important piece of his administration's effort to try to build deeper alliances and nudge autocratic-leaning nations toward at least modest reforms. The new funding will focus on programs that support free and independent media, combat corruption, bolster human rights, advance technology that improves democracy, and support free and fair elections.

The official, who previewed the summit on the condition of anonymity, said the administration has also come to an agreement with 10 other nations on guiding principles for how the governments should use surveillance technology.

The surveillance tech agreement comes after Biden signed an executive order earlier this week restricting the U.S. government's use of commercial spyware tools that have been used to surveil human rights activists, journalists and dissidents around the world. The world has had a tumultuous 15 months since Biden's first democracy summit in December 2021.

Countries emerged from the



coronavirus pandemic, and Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, the largest-scale war in Europe since World War II. Biden has also tangled with Beijing, speaking out repeatedly about China's military and economic influence in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

"Worldwide, we see autocrats violating human rights and suppressing fundamental freedoms; corrupting — and with corruption eating away at young people's faith in their future; citizens questioning whether democracy can still deliver on the issues that matter most to their lives and to their livelihoods," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said at a pre-summit virtual event on Tuesday. The U.S. hosted the last summit on its own.

This time, it recruited four co-hosts — Costa Rica, the Netherlands, South Korea and Zambia — after ambassadors from China and Russia criticised the first summit and accused Biden of causing a global divide with a Cold War mentality. Still, some countries would rather not get between Washington and Beijing. Pakistan announced, as it did in 2021, that it received an invitation but would skip the summit,

a move seen in part as an effort by the impoverished Islamic nation to assuage longtime ally China, which was not invited. The Biden administration has also expanded its invitation list. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Gambia, Honduras, Ivory Coast, Lichtenstein, Mauritania, Mozambique and Tanzania were extended invitations to this year's summit after being left off the list in 2021.

The first day of the summit will be a virtual format and will be followed on Thursday by hybrid gatherings in each of the host countries, with representatives from government, civil society and the private sector participating. Costa Rica will focus on the role of youth in democratic systems. The Dutch are taking on media freedom. South Korea is looking at corruption. Zambia is centering on free and fair elections.

The U.S. is no stranger to the challenges facing democracies, including deep polarisation and pervasive misinformation.

Lies spread about the 2020 presidential election by then-President Donald Trump and his supporters have convinced a majority of Republicans that Biden was not legitimately elected, normalised

harassment and death threats against election officials, and been used to justify efforts in Republican-controlled legislatures to adopt new voting restrictions.

Later this year, the U.S. Supreme Court will rule in a racial gerrymandering case from Alabama that voting rights advocates fear could virtually dismantle the nearly 60-year-old Voting Rights Act. Congressional efforts to shore up that federal law and increase voting access have failed. Biden came into office vowing that human rights and democracy would play significant roles in his approach to foreign policy. But he's faced criticism from some human rights activists for being too soft on Saudi Arabia and Egypt over their human rights records. The administration sees both nations as important partners in bringing stability to the Middle East.

More recently, Biden administration officials have been at odds with close Mideast ally Israel, as conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tries to push forward a far-reaching judicial overhaul that the administration worries will diminish Israel's democracy.

Marti Flacks, the director of the Human Rights Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said "there's been a disconnect" between the Biden administration's messaging and actions on human rights. The administration may get higher marks from allies for how it has approached stresses on democracy at home. "The fact that the Biden administration has been very open and transparent about the challenges that the U.S. is facing domestically on the democracy front has increased their credibility on these issues externally," said Flacks, a State Department and National Security Council official during the Obama administration.

38 dead in Mexico fire after guards didn't let migrants out

MEXICO CITY, March 29 (AP): When smoke began billowing out of a migrant detention centre in the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juarez, Venezuelan migrant Viangly Infante Padrón was terrified because she knew her husband was still inside.

The father of her three children had been picked up by immigration agents earlier in the day, part of a recent crackdown that netted 67 other migrants, many of whom were asking for handouts or washing car windows at stoplights in this city across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas. In moments of shock and horror, Infante Padrón recounted how she saw immigration agents rush out of the building after fire started late Monday. Later came the migrants' bodies carried out on stretchers, wrapped in foil blankets.

The toll: 38 dead in all and 28 seriously injured, victims of a blaze apparently set in protest by the detainees themselves. "I was desperate because I saw a dead body, a body, a body, and I didn't see him anywhere," Infante Padrón said of her husband, Eduard Caraballo López, who in the end survived with only light injuries, perhaps because he was scheduled for release and was near a door.

But what she saw in those first minutes has become the centre of a question much of Mexico is asking itself: Why didn't authorities attempt to release the men — almost all from Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela and El Salvador — before smoke filled the room and killed so many?

"There was smoke everywhere. The ones they let out were the women, and those (employees) with immigration," Infante Padrón said. "The men, they never took them out until the firefighters arrived." "They alone had the key," Infante Padrón said. "The respon-



sibility was theirs to open the bar doors and save those lives, regardless of whether there were detainees, regardless of whether they would run away, regardless of everything that happened. They had to save those lives." Immigration authorities said they released 15 women when the fire broke out, but have not explained why no men were let out. Pope Francis on Wednesday offered prayers at the end of his general audience for the victims who died in the "tragic fire."

Surveillance video leaked Tuesday shows migrants, reportedly fearing they were about to be moved, placing foam mattresses against the bars of their detention cell and setting them on fire.

In the video, later confirmed by the government, two people dressed as guards rush into the camera frame, and at least one migrant appears by the metal gate on the other side.

But the guards don't appear to make any effort to open the cell doors and instead hurry away as billowing clouds of smoke fill the structure within seconds. "What humanity do we have in our lives? What humanity have we built? Death, death, death," thundered Bishop Mons. José Guadalupe Torres Campos at a Mass in memory of the migrants. Mexico's National

Immigration Institute, which ran the facility, said it was cooperating in the investigation. Guatemala has already said that many of the victims were its citizens, but full identification of the dead and injured remains incomplete.

U.S. authorities have offered to help treat some of the 28 victims in critical or serious condition, most apparently from smoke inhalation.

For many, the tragedy was the foreseeable result of a long series of decisions made by leaders in places like Venezuela and Central America, and by immigration policymakers in Mexico and the United States, as well of residents in Ciudad Juarez complaining about the number of migrants asking for handouts on street corners.

"You could see it coming," more than 30 migrant shelters and other advocacy organisations said in statement Tuesday. "Mexico's immigration policy kills." Those same advocacy organisations published an open letter March 9 that complained of a criminalisation of migrants and asylum-seekers in Ciudad Juarez. It accused authorities of abusing migrants and using excessive force in rounding them up, including complaints that municipal police questioned people in the street about their immigration status without cause.

Group: Oil tanker tied to US-traded firm receiving Iran oil

DUBAI, March 29 (AP): An oil tanker owned by a major US-traded transportation company appears to be taking on Iranian crude oil in a key Asian maritime strait in violation of American sanctions, an advocacy group alleges. The firm allegedly involved, Euronav, said Wednesday it will "take appropriate action when necessary." Satellite photos and maritime tracking data analysed by The Associated Press put the Belgian-flagged crude oil tanker Oceania just next to the Vietnamese-flagged tanker Abyss for a possible ship-to-ship transfer. The group United Against Nuclear Iran has warned the Oceania's owner, the Antwerp-based Euronav, that it believes the Abyss took on Iranian crude oil in late February. The suspicion comes as Iran remains able to trade its crude oil at sea despite American sanctions snapping back into place after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018.

Now nearly five years later, Iran enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels while continuing to sell its oil and supplying bomb-carrying drones to Russia to fuel Moscow's war on Ukraine.

Brian Gallagher, a spokesman for Euronav, told the AP in a statement that the company "has and always has taken all the appropriate measures and protocols to ensure we are in compliance with all regulations."

"All cargoes within our system have passed these requirements," Gallagher wrote. "Euronav will continue to monitor any specific shipments and take appropriate action where necessary." Gallagher said the Oceania was a storage vessel and the cargo from the Abyss was for "a third party NOT directly with Euronav." He added if the allegation the oil is Iranian is proven, "the cargo will be returned to the third party who delivered it." Euronav trades on the New York Stock Exchange. The Abyss' manager did not immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday. Satellite images from Planet Labs PBC and data from the ships' Automatic Identification System trackers put the vessels Tuesday and Wednesday in the Malacca Strait, one of the world's busiest waterways between Indonesia and Malaysia. In an image Tuesday, tug boats were pushing the Abyss toward the Oceania.

Tracking data from MarineTraffic.com showed the vessels alongside each other Wednesday. At sea, oil tankers can funnel crude between each other in a ship-to-ship transfer that typically sees boats in a similar position. In a letter dated Tuesday to Euronav, United Against Nuclear Iran said it believed the Abyss took on crude oil at the Iranian port of Bandar Mashahr, some 600 kilometre (370 miles) southwest of the capital, Tehran, on the Persian Gulf.

Taiwan leader's US meeting plans draw Chinese threat

BEIJING, March 29 (AP): China threatened "resolute countermeasures" over a planned meeting between Taiwan's president and the United States House speaker during an upcoming trip through Los Angeles. Diplomatic pressure against Taiwan has ramped up recently, with Beijing poaching Taipei's dwindling number of diplomatic allies while also sending military fighter jets flying toward the island on a near daily basis. Earlier this month, Honduras established diplomatic relations with China, leaving Taiwan with only 13 countries that recognise it as a sovereign state.

President Tsai Ing-wen framed the trip as a chance to show Taiwan's commitment to democratic values on the world stage, as she left Taiwan on Wednesday afternoon to begin her 10-day tour of the Americas.

"I want to tell the whole world democratic Taiwan will resolutely safeguard the values of freedom and democracy, and will continue to be a force for good in the world, continuing a cycle of goodness, strengthening the resilience of democracy

in the world," she told reporters before she boarded the plane.

"External pressure will not obstruct our resolution to engage with the world."

Tsai is scheduled to transit through New York on March 30 before heading to Guatemala and Belize. On April 5, she's expected to stop in Los Angeles on her way back to Taiwan, at which time the meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is tentatively scheduled.

The US stops are the most closely watched of her trip.

Spokesperson for the Cabinet's Taiwan Affairs Office Zhu Fenglian at a news conference Wednesday denounced Tsai's stopover on her way to diplomatic allies in Central America and demanded that no US officials meet with her.

"We firmly oppose this and will take resolute countermeasures," Zhu said. The US should "refrain from arranging Tsai Ing-wen's transit visits and even contact with American officials, and take concrete actions to fulfill its solemn commitment not to support Taiwan independence," she said. Speaking later on Wednesday, Chi-

nese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said China would "closely follow the development of the situation and resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"The United States should stop claiming to set up guardrails for China-US relations while conducting dangerous activities that undermine the political foundation of bilateral ties," Mao told reporters at a daily briefing.

Transit visits through the United States by Taiwanese presidents have been routine over the years, senior US officials in Washington and Beijing have underscored to their Chinese counterparts.

In such unofficial visits in recent years, Tsai has met with members of Congress and Taiwanese-American civic groups, and has been welcomed by the chairperson of the American Institute in Taiwan, the US government-run nonprofit that carries out unofficial relations with Taiwan. Tsai transited through the United States six times between 2016 and 2019 before slowing international travel with the coronavirus pandemic.

Sweden summons Russian envoy over 'retaliation' remark

COPENHAGEN, March 29 (AP): Sweden's Foreign Ministry summoned Russia's ambassador Wednesday after Moscow's diplomatic mission in Stockholm said the Scandinavian country would become a "legitimate target for Russia's retaliatory measures" if it joined NATO.

Foreign Minister Tobias Billström called the statement posted on the Russian Embassy's website an "obvious attempt at influence." Sweden's security policy is determined by its government and no one else, he told Swedish news agency TT. It's unclear if or when the Russian ambassador will appear at the Foreign Ministry. Sweden and neighbouring Finland jointly applied for NATO membership in May 2022, abandoning decades of non-alignment in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Approval of Sweden's bid has stalled due to opposition from Turkey and Hungary. The Turkish government has accused Sweden of being too soft on groups that it deems to be terror organisations. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said Ankara needs further assurances before it will give its final approval.

Asked about Sweden's NATO membership on Wednesday, Erdogan told reporters: "There are certain things we expect of them. They must be fulfilled first." On Monday, Hungarian lawmakers ratified Finland's request to join NATO, but it remained unclear when they ratify Sweden's accession to the Western military alliance.

Russia launches drills of its nuclear missile forces

MOSCOW, March 29 (AP): The Russian military conducted drills of its strategic missile forces Wednesday, deploying mobile launchers in Siberia in a show of the country's massive nuclear capability amid the fighting in Ukraine.

As part of the drills, the Yars mobile missile launchers will maneuver across three regions of Siberia, Russia's Defence Ministry said.

The maneuvers will involve measures to conceal the deployment from foreign intelligence assets, the ministry said. The Defence Ministry did not mention plans for any practice launches.

The Yars is a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile with a range of about 11,000 kilometers (over 6,800 miles). It forms the backbone of Russia's strategic missile forces. The Defence Ministry released a video showing massive trucks carrying the missiles driving out from a base to go on patrol. The maneuvers involve about 300 vehicles and 3,000 troops in eastern Siberia, according to the ministry.

Wait time for US visitor's visa interview in India reduced by 60 per cent this year: official

WASHINGTON, March 29 (PTI): The wait time for a US visitor's visa interview in India has been reduced by 60 per cent this year, a senior official has said, attributing it to the slew of measures taken by the Biden administration, including opening more diplomatic missions in India and abroad to process these applications.

India was one of the very few countries where applications for US visas saw a major upswing after coronavirus-related travel restrictions were lifted.

There have been growing concerns in India over the long waiting period for first time visa applicants, especially for those applying under B1 (business) and B2 (tourist) categories. The waiting period of first time B1/B2 visa applicants in India was close to 1,000 days in October last year.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Visa Services Julie Stufft told PTI that the goal of the State Department is to get to 1 million visas issued this year, which would be above the pre-pandemic number.

"We have increased the number of officers going to India. We have set up arrangements, which is unprecedented, with other embassies in the world like Bangkok to take Indians who are seeking visas. We are opening a new consulate in Hyderabad... and we're just focused on making sure that we can bring the wait time down in India," she said.

Stufft noted that Frankfurt, London and Abu Dhabi have taken a lot of Indian citizens who are seeking visas. "We have asked these missions to take Indians as if they were from their own host country. Especially in places like Bangkok where there is no visa required for Indians



and it is a relatively short flight. Obviously this is not ideal. We want Indians to be able to apply in India, and that's where we'll get to," she said. More than 100 US diplomatic missions have been issuing visas to Indians.

"As a result of all of these efforts, the visitor visa interview wait time has decreased by 60 per cent just in the last couple of months. This is a result of all the work that we've put into making sure that Indians who wish to travel to the US can do so,"

she explained. The US Embassy in India has said that with the lifting of Covid-related travel restrictions, the mission has made it a priority to facilitate legitimate travel and adjudicated over 8,00,000 non-immigrant visas in 2022, including record numbers of both student and employment visas. "In every other visa category, interview wait times in India are at pre-pandemic levels or lower," the embassy said in a statement in January this year.

Stufft said that currently "visa production in India is 40 per cent higher than what it was before the pandemic", asserting that the State Department was working hard to bring down the wait time.

In February, the US had the highest on-record production of visas in India. "Our team there is working very hard and they're well on their way to accomplishing the 1 million

visa goal," Stufft said. In addition to the visitor's visa, the State Department official said they are working on other types of visas including student visas.

"Because we have been able to expand interview waivers, meaning fewer Indians need to come to the embassy or consulate for an interview, we can process that without seeing the applicant. That has helped us tremendously because we have had consular officers in dozens of countries who are actually remotely processing these Indian visas," Stufft said.

This has made it possible for people who don't need an interview and those who have travelled to the US before to get their visa in a record time of less than two weeks, she said.

"It really is a global effort. Because we have such strong ties with

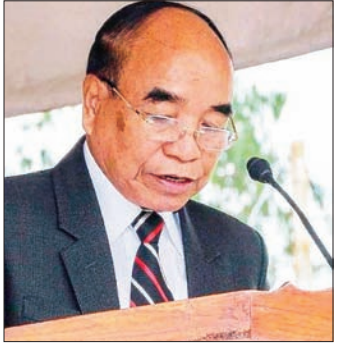
India and the relationship between our two countries means that the categories of visas are the highest in India... students, tech workers, and crew members. It's a high cultural, educational and work relationship between our countries," Stufft said.

She said anyone who has to travel to the US urgently for any sort of humanitarian matter, those cases will also be expedited.

"But make your appointment, find the place that you can go in India or outside of India where it's possible. And bear with us as we bring these wait times down. We're very happy to be hitting records every month with the number of visas that we're issuing in India," she said.

Stufft also said that the State Department is excited about launching a pilot project on domestic renewal of visa soon.

Mizoram CM reiterates his party will retain power



AIZAWL, March 29 (PTI): Mizoram chief minister and ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) president Zoramthanga reiterated that his party will retain power in the next assembly polls.

Elections to the 40-member Mizoram Assembly are due later this year.

"Our arch-rival Congress has declined (in strength) and the number of constituencies it can win are fewer. Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), on the other hand, can no longer use its previous planks. So, there is no doubt that MNF will retain power in the next assembly polls," Zoramthanga said while addressing the party block conference at Kolasib town, on the border with Assam.

In the present assembly, the MNF has 28 members, while the main opposition party ZPM has six MLAs. Congress has five and the BJP has just one.

Last month, Zoramthanga had said that his party will win the next assembly polls as they have efficient MLAs who are constantly monitoring and taking care of their respective constituencies.

He also claimed that the MNF will win the first Lunglei Municipal Council (LMC) polls to be held on Wednesday.

The three-term chief minister said that his government has been constantly making efforts to usher in developments despite many hurdles. He said that the MNF during its previous rule (1998-2008) had experienced famine triggered by bamboo flowering and the present government has

also been plagued by COVID-19 pandemic and other problems.

"Despite all these hurdles, the government has been making efforts for the welfare of the people and was able to distribute financial assistance under Socio-Economic Development Policy (SEDP)," Zoramthanga said, adding that the assistance will continue to be distributed.

The SEDP is the state government's flagship programme, which aims at bringing sustainable development by accelerating progress in key sectors through judicious use of resources and maintaining equality and equity among the citizens.

During fiscal 2022-23, the government provided financial assistance of ₹ 25,000 each to 60,000 beneficiaries.

Out of ₹ 595 crore allocated for the implementation of SEDP in 2023-24 fiscal, ₹ 300 crore was earmarked for family-oriented programmes or financial assistance.

Zoramthanga also claimed that his government has been taking "sincere measures to protect the territorial integrity of the state and extend help to Mizo communities living even outside the country".

Speaking of the border clashes with Assam, he said that Mizoram did not lose even a single policeman during the border dispute with neighbouring Assam.

"They (Assam) urged us to withdraw. But they stopped asking when I told them that I would resign first if we were to retreat from the inter-state boundary. In the assembly, we also passed a resolution to extend humanitarian aid to our Mizo ethnic refugees despite the Centre's directive to push them back to their countries," the former rebel leader-turned-chief minister said.

More than 30,000 refugees from Myanmar and over 500 from Bangladesh are currently taking shelter in Mizoram.

The northeastern state shares a 510-km-long international border with Myanmar and 318-km border with Bangladesh.

Meghalaya HC directs govt to identify land for construction of greenfield airport

At present only ATRs and smaller aircraft like Bombardiers can be landed at the existing airport

SHILLONG, March 29 (PTI): The Meghalaya High Court has directed the state government to identify few pockets of land for construction of a greenfield airport as the Shillong airport cannot be extended to accommodate landing of bigger aircraft.

A High Court division bench headed by chief justice Sanjib Banerjee said this while a PIL on the matter on Tuesday.

"The state, in consultation with AAI or even the officials stationed at the Umroi airport, should make an attempt to identify a few pockets of land and, thereupon, AAI may be invited to give a preliminary opinion as to whether any of such pockets would be feasible for a greenfield airport project," the bench said in an order.

The bench said that once a land pocket have been identified as feasible then acquisition exercise be taken up, adding that the exercise has to also be done discreetly to avoid middlemen jacking up the land prices.

The court, however, made it clear that it will not interfere or impose its will if both the state and the union governments are reluctant to set up a new airport but stated that a new airport close to



Shillong may give a fillip to the state and its development initiatives. At present ATRs and smaller aircraft like Bombardiers are landing at the existing airport and the surrounding hills do not make it feasible for wide-bodied aircraft to call at Umroi, the court observed.

The Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport at Guwahati is about 140 km away and over 3 hours drive, whereas Shillong Airport is about 30 minutes from the city, it added.

The court also observed that though Meghalaya is a hilly state but it also has large tracts of plains and the closest place that can have

a bigger airport appears, possibly to be Ri-Bhoi district or in the West Khasi Hills.

The AAI had in its reports indicated that Umroi where the Shillong Airport is located may not be the ideal location for expansion of the airport to receive bigger aircraft since the extension of the runway involve felling hills at a high cost.

Also, taking into consideration that clouds and fog engulf the airport and its surroundings in the monsoon, the bench suggested to the state to explore whether land was available for a greenfield airport project to be started.

An effort was made by the state

towards the middle and end of the last year to invite offers from landowners for selling land for the proposed new airport where only one major offer came and the pre-feasibility study conducted by AAI indicated that the cost would be too high to level the land for the construction of a runway since the difference in height from the lowest point in the relevant land to the highest was about 180 metres, the court stated.

The AAI later suggested that instead of seeking offers from landowners for the project, the state and AAI could jointly identify certain pockets where it may be feasible to put up a new airport to receive wide-bodied aircraft.

Feasibility studies could be conducted at two or three places to identify one or two of the proposed sites for the state to acquire the requisite land and make it over to AAI, it added.

The court said it appears that in the development trajectory that Meghalaya seems to have embarked on, a better serviced airport is an absolute necessity for the further prosperity of the state, including as a tourist hub.

The next hearing of the case will be held on May 9.

Meghalaya: Sohiong assembly bypoll on May 10

SHILLONG, March 29 (PTI): The by-election to Sohiong assembly constituency in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills district will be held on May 10, chief electoral officer F R Kharkongor said on Wednesday. The election to the seat, which was scheduled on February 27 along with the rest of the state, was not held due to the demise of former home minister HDR Lyngdoh, who was also a United Democratic Party (UDP) candidate. The notification with regard to the bypoll will be issued on April 13 and the last date for filing of nominations by a UDP candidate is on April 20, he said.

The counting of votes will take place on May 13.

The UDP is fielding Synshar Lyngdoh Thabab, the nephew of Lyngdoh.

In all, six candidates are in the fray, including sitting MLA Samlin Malngiang who is contesting on a National People's Party ticket.

Elections to the remaining 59 assembly constituencies in the state were held on February 27, with the National People's Party winning 26 seats. The UDP won 11 seats while the BJP, HSPDP and the PDF won two seats each and two Independent legislators also emerged victorious. Chief minister Conrad K Sangma has returned to power, with the backing of BJP, UDP, HSPDP, PDF and Independent legislators.

Students protest against killing of their colleague, demand justice

IMPHAL, March 29 (NNN): A protest staged by students of Damdei Christian College outside their college campus on Wednesday demanded justice for their colleague who was recently killed by two armed persons in Motbung in Kangpokpi district. Seignul Misao, a class-XII student studying at Damdei Christian College, was shot dead by two motorcycle-borne miscreants at Motbung on Saturday night. During the protest, the students chanted various slogans demanding booking of the culprits and punishing them as per law.

The students also refuted an allegation hurled by an underground group that the deceased student was a drug peddler. National Revolutionary Front of Manipur (NRFM), a militant group while owning up the responsibility for the killing of the student, accused the deceased student as a 'drug peddler.' Earlier, the joint action committee formed in connection with the killing of the student also refuted an allegation hurled by the militant group at the deceased student.

No.KOK/BLDG/Tech-40/Pt-IV/2018-19/6152 Date 27-03-2023.

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 (ABC) 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 Pm of 04-04-2023 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2-00 Pm.

| 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. | Construction of Latrine with Drinking Water Facility of Runkhata Santipur Samabay Samity Ltd. | Rs.7,61,885.00 | Rs.15,300/= & Rs.7,700/= | Rs.500/= | 4(four) month |

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 03-04-2023 to 04-04-2023 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker cheque/Bank draft/Demand draft duly placed 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)-1438/2022

HYC demands for rectification of roster system

SHILLONG, March 29 (NNN): The Hyniewtrep Youth Council (HYC) on Wednesday demanded the Meghalaya government to rectify an Office Memorandum (OM) which stated that the reservation roster should be prepared retrospectively as it is "illegal". A memorandum in this regard was submitted to the minister in charge of Law, Ampareen Lyngdoh for necessary intervention. "It is also a settled law that any notification in order to have retrospective effect has to be authorized by a statute and in our opinion, the Office Memorandum dated May 10, 2022, has no statute which authorized to prepare the Reservation Roster to be effective retrospectively. Hence, it is illegal and the government must rectify it at the earliest," HYC president Robertjune Kharjhrin said in the memorandum.

He said they have seen various advertisements in government offices, certain reserved categories have got more seats than others because of this faulty and illegal Office Memorandum. "This may lead to deprivation of jobs to the deserving candidates and also leads to unnecessary litigation. Hence, the Office Memorandum needs to be rectified immediately," Kharjhrin said while adding, "Based on the above facts and circumstances, we would like to urge you to take necessary steps for rectification of the Office Memorandum dated May 10, 2022, on the matter relating to the maintenance of reservation roster." Kharjhrin said the HYC is of the opinion that the guidelines for the preparation of the Reservation Roster as per the Office Memorandum dated May 10, 2022, is contradictory to the Resolution dated January 12, 1972.

"The guidelines as per the OM dated May 10, 2022, provide that the Roster shall be prepared since the time the Reservation Policy came into

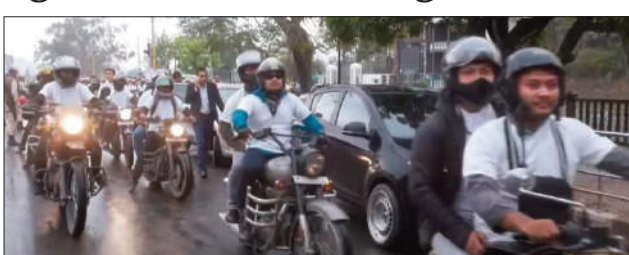
effect i.e. from the year 1972. However, the Resolution stated above, clearly specifies in paragraph 2 that after the expiry of the second year, these reservations shall be treated as lapsed in case of non-filling of reserved category posts in any recruitment year," he added.

The state government in pursuant to the judgment of the Meghalaya High Court dated April 5, 2022, and judgment dated April 20, 2022 - had notified the guidelines for the same vide office memorandum dated May 10, 2022. At point D (1) of the office memorandum, it is stated that "In order to prepare the reservation roster, names of all the candidates holding the post as on the date of notification of this OM starting with the earliest appointee, since the time the Reservation Policy came into effect, subject to information being available, shall be filled up in the Reservation Roster against the point in the roster".

As per the resolution dated January 12, 1972, which provides for the Reservation Policy in the state, it is clearly stated in paragraph 2 that "If a sufficient number of suitable candidates for filling up the reserved vacancies is not available from the respective classes in any particular year, then such vacancies will be available to others. But the deficiency in the number of scheduled tribes and scheduled castes will be carried forward to the next recruitment year and made good in the recruitment of that year, provided that reservation on account of deficiency shall not be carried forward for more than one year. After the expiry of the second year, these reservations shall be treated as lapsed. It has also been decided that at no time shall the number of normally reserved vacancies and the carry forward vacancies together exceed 90 per cent of the total number of vacancies in that year".

The rally was organised jointly by Manipuri Students' Federation (MSF) and All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU)

Over 300 students take part in bike rally against abuse of drugs, intoxicants in Manipur



IMPHAL, March 29 (NNN): Over 300 students took part in a bike rally on Wednesday to mark the launching of "Students' Anti-Drug Task Force" to take part actively in curbing drug menace in Manipur.

The bike rally, calling for an end to abuse of drugs and other intoxicants, was flagged off from the western gate of Kangla fort and converged at KM Blooming School in Thoubal district. The rally was organised jointly by Manipuri Students' Federation (MSF) and All Manipur Students'

Union (AMSU). After flagging off the rally, MSF president Maibam Julesh Singh said that the rally was being organised with the objective of saving the society from the evil impact of the drug menace.

The abuse of drugs and other intoxicants have given a great impact to society today. To save the society from drowning in drugs, the society needs to stand unitedly, he said.

He added that the students' bodies supported the government's 'war on drugs'. The rally aimed to reach out to the public, particularly the students in every nook and corner of the state and make them aware of the evil impact of drugs on society, he said.

He further informed that the task force was formed considering the need for the student community joining the campaign against drugs in the state. Without the involvement of the student community, the campaign against drugs would remain incomplete, he observed. Earlier on Tuesday, the representatives of the newly formed task force had submitted a memorandum to the chief minister, seeking his support to the campaigns to be launched by the task force in the coming days, he said.

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender in F-2 form affixing Court Fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and twenty five paise) only with a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days are invited from Registered APWD (Building) Contractors for the work as detailed in the table below -

| Sl. No | Name of work | Estimated value of work (Approx) | Bid Security/ Earnest money | Cost of tender paper | Date of Application | Date of issue of tender paper | Time & date of receiving/ opening of Tender | Time of completion | Eligibility of contractor |
|--------|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------|--|--|--|----------------------|--|
| 1 | Construction of Open Community Hall in the premises of Sri Sri Gopal Gosai Mandir, Kamarpara Rabhapara, Joji, Kamrup, Assam under Kulshi Constituency of RHAC for the year 2022-23. | Rs. 5.94,196.00 | 2% for general and 1% for reserved category | Rs. 500.00 | 05/04/2023 to 06/04/2023 up to 4-00 PM | 10/04/2023 to 11/04/2023 up to 4-00 PM | Receiving up-to 2-00 PM of 12/04/2023 and opening at 3-00 PM of 12/04/2023 | 90 (ninety) days | Registered APWD (Building) Class-I (A,B,C), Class-II (Under Guwahati Bldg. Circle-I) and Class-III (Under this Division) |
| 2 | Construction of boundary wall of Uttar Bongaon Rabha Students Union under Uttar Bongaon Constituency of RHAC for the year 2022-23 | Rs. 5.93,750.00 | | Rs. 500.00 | | | | 60 (sixty) days | |
| 3 | Construction of Paver Block Road in front of PHC, FRU Medical campus, Boko(near Chamaria PWD Road), Kamrup under Boko Constituency of RHAC for the year 2022-23 | Rs. 9.90,099.00 | | Rs. 500.00 | | | | 45 (forty five) days | |
| 4 | Construction of boundary wall of Pantan High School (Golden Jubilee Celebration)under Gobordhan Constituency of RHAC for the year 2022-23 | Rs. 5.93,750.00 | | Rs. 500.00 | | | | 60 (sixty) days | |
| 5 | Construction of Open Community Hall Jongakhuli Pakharapara Village, Kamrup under Jongakhuli Constituency of RHAC for the year 2022-23. | Rs. 5.94,196.00 | | Rs. 500.00 | | | | 90 (ninety) days | |

- The tender papers will be issued to the contractor /authorised representatives on receipt of application along with registration certificate, GST, PAN card and Labour License on payment of the prescribed cost in the form of Bank Draft/Banker cheque drawn in favour of the Executive Engineer, PWD, Boko, Chaygaon & Palashbari Territorial Building Division payable at SBI Amingaon branch, Guwahati-31 from 08/03/2023 to 09/03/2023 during office hours. The same will be received upto 2.00PM on 10/03/2023 and will be opened at 3-00 PM on the same date. If for any reason the last date of receiving/opening of tender is declared as holiday tender will be received on next working day at the same time as above. The tenderer or his authorised person may be present at the time of opening of tender papers.
- The prospective bidders should have upto date registration under RHAC.
- The prospective bidders may inspect the proposed working site in any working day during office hours with prior intimation to the Asst. Executive Engineer concerned, before submission of the Tender.
- Bids must be accompanied by bid security of amount specified in the table above pledge in favour of the Executive Engineer, PWD, Boko, Chaygaon & Palashbari Territorial Building Division. Bid Security will have to be deposited in the form of TDR/FDR along with the Tender and shall have to be valid for 45 (forty five) days beyond the validity of the Bid or 45 (forty five) days beyond the expiry of Defect Liability Period whichever is later.
- Rate should be quoted in Flat percentage basis above/below/at per Schedule of Rates of CPWD (i) Building (Civil works) for 2021, and as mentioned in the Detailed NIT.
- Rates must be quoted both in figures and words legibly and clearly. If there is any discrepancy found between the rate in figure and rate in word the rate in word will be considered.
- The department will not supply any materials to the Contractor, the Contractor shall have to procure the required materials by himself.
- The undersigned shall have the right of rejecting all or any of the Tenders without assigning any reason will also not be bound to accept the lowest tender.
- The rates should be quoted considering all the taxes, duties and other levies as per Govt rule and the same will be deducted from the bill as per prevailing rates.
- The bidder not be allowed to withdraw his bid after opening of the same and if he/she desires so his/her Earnest Money will be forfeited. If he/she wants to withdraw Tender after submission and before opening, he/she may do so on written request to the undersigned.
- Bidders may modify their bid before opening of the Bid. He/she may do so by submitting his/her modification in sealed cover duly stating the name of the work and name of the Contractor on the cover in the Tender Box before closing of the Tender box.
- For canvassing directly or indirectly will lead the bidder to disqualification including barring him from further participation in any Bid or may even to Black-listing.
- The successful Contractor will have to deposit S.D Money as per office order of C.E, PWD (Building) Assam vide his No. BN/12/82/Pt-1/84 dtd. 15/02/2011.
- Payment is subjected to availability of fund made by the concerned department.
- All other terms and Conditions are as per APWD(F-2) form of Tender.
- The SNIT will form a part of the Contract Agreement.

Sd/- Executive Engineer P.W.D Boko, Chaygaon & Palashbari Territorial Building Division, Palashbari, Kamrup.

Janasanyog/C/24158/22

Moment politicians stop using religion in politics, hate speeches will end, says SC

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): The Supreme Court on Wednesday took serious exception to hate speeches saying these will end the moment politicians and religions are separated and politicians stop using religion in politics.

Terming hate speeches a "vicious circle", the top court said these utterances are being made by fringe elements and people should restrain themselves from doing so.

A bench of justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna referred to speeches of former prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying people from remote areas and every nook and corner used to gather to hear them.

"Major problem arises when politicians mix politics with religion. The moment politics and religion are segregated, this will end. When politicians stop using religion, all this will stop. We have said in our recent verdict also that mixing politics with religion is dangerous for democracy," Justice Joseph said.

Wondering as to how many people can courts initiate contempt action, the bench said why cannot the people of India take a pledge to not vilify other citizens or communities.

"Everyday fringe elements are making speeches to vilify others including on TV and public forums," the bench said while hearing a contempt petition against various state authorities including Maharashtra for failing to register FIRs against those making such speeches. When Solicitor General Tushar Mehta pointed out a derogatory speech made in Kerala by a man against a particular community and questioned that petitioner Shaheen Abdullah has selectively pointed out the incidents of hate speeches in the country, this triggered sharp exchanges between the court and Mehta.

He also pointed out a statement made by a DMK party leader and said why has the petitioner's counsel not made him and those states party in the contempt petition.

The bench referred to those speeches and said



"every action has equal reaction" and emphasised, "We are following the Constitution and orders in every case are bricks in the structure of rule of law. We are hearing the contempt petition because states are not taking action in time. This is because the state has become impotent, powerless and does not act in time. Why should we have a state at all if it is silent?"

Mehta then said, "Can't say that about any state but Centre is not. The Centre has banned PFI. Please issue notice to the state of Kerala so that they can respond to this."

As the court asked Mehta to continue with his submissions, he said, "Please do not do this. This will have wider ramifications. Why are we shying away from looking at the clip? Why can't the court allow me to play the video clip of the speeches? Why Kerala can't be issued notice and made a party to the petition. Let us not be selective. I am trying to show the clip which is in public domain. This court could have taken suo motu cognisance of these speeches."

The bench replied, "Let us not make this a drama. This is legal proceedings" and added, "There is a method to see the video clip. This applies to all equally. If you (Mehta) want, you can include it in your submission."

The hearing of the contempt petition saw some strong observations from the court in

which it said, "Hate speeches are like a vicious circle. One person will make it and then another will make it. When our constitution was founded, there were no such speeches. Now there are cracks coming up in the idea of fraternity. There has to be some restraint. Some mechanism needs to be developed by the state so that we can curb these kinds of statements."

Justice Nagarathna said, "We need to look where we as a country are going? There were orators like Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the midnight speech. People from remote areas and every nook and corner used to come hear these leaders. Now fringe elements from all sides are making these statements and we are now asked to take contempt action against these people."

She said that how can a court curtail "intellectual deprivation" which comes from lack of knowledge and education.

"How much contempt after contempt we can take against these people. That's why I asked the other day, how the apex court will deal with this. Why do you (petitioner) start with the apex court? Should not there be some restraint on speeches else we will not become the India we desire for. Why cannot the citizens of this country take a pledge to not vilify others and what kind of pleasures we are deriving by making these speeches," she said.

The top court, which allowed an intervention application, filed by an organisation "Hindu Samaj", which had held rallies in Maharashtra told its counsel, "Statements are being made by some people, which the vast majority of the community do not subscribe to. They are saying things which are denigrating and demolishing the dignity of others on a regular basis. Statements are made like 'Go to Pakistan'. People of other communities chose this country. They are like your brothers and sisters. We are trying to say that don't go to that level."

The bench chiding the counsel for speeches in such rallies said, "Do you have the right to

break the law of land? If you break the rule of law of the land it will befall on your head like a tumble of bricks. If you want real development of the country and want it to become a superpower, then we need to have respect for rule of law and then only we can make our country a better place to live in."

Advocate Nizam Pasha, appearing for the petitioner, said that hate does not have any religion and he is here for vindication of rights.

"We are not whataboutery and anyone can come with a grievance. Names of hate speech givers are coming again and again. Court can call for a status report on action taken by the states against hate speeches", he submitted and referred to the data and speeches made in different states.

Pasha said that 50 rallies have been conducted in Maharashtra in the last four months where hate speeches have been made.

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the Centre, said that according to the law laid down by this court, if there is a cognizable offence made out, the state cannot object and is bound to register the FIR.

The top court posted the matter for further hearing on April 28 and sought response of Maharashtra government on the plea.

On Tuesday, the top court had said abjuring hate speech is a fundamental requisite for maintenance of communal harmony in the country, and asked the Centre what actions have been taken after the lodging of FIRs in hate speech cases. Observing that merely registering complaints is not going to solve the problem of hate speeches, it reminded the Centre on the need to take action against persons making such statements.

Holding that the Constitution envisages India as a secular nation, the top court on October 21 had directed the Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments to come down hard on cases of hate speech, and register criminal cases against culprits without waiting for a complaint to be filed.

Bypolls to one Lok Sabha, four assembly seats on May 10: EC



NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Bypolls to one Lok Sabha and four assembly seats across four states will be held on May 10 along with the Karnataka assembly polls, the Election Commission announced on Wednesday.

The counting of votes will take place on May 13, it said.

The Jalandhar parliamentary constituency fell vacant following the death of Congress MP Santokh Singh Chaudhary, 76, in January this year following a heart attack while taking part in the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

The poll panel also announced a bypoll to the Jharsuguda assembly seat in Odisha which was necessitated by the death of Naba Kisore Das, who was shot dead by a police officer in January this year.

Bypoll to the Suar assembly seat in Uttar Pradesh was necessitated following the disqualification upon conviction of Samajwadi Party MLA Abdullah Azam Khan.

He was convicted in a 2008 case relating to a 'dharna' on a highway and sentenced to two years in jail. He is son of SP veteran Mohd Azam Khan, who also stands disqualified in another case.

Chhanbey is the other Uttar Pradesh assembly seat going for a bypoll, necessitated by the death of sitting Apna Dal MLA Rahul Prakash Kol due to cancer.

Bypolls will also be held in the Sohing assembly seat of Meghalaya where election was adjourned due to the death of a candidate of the United Democratic Party (UDP).

Addressing a press conference convened to announce the Karnataka assembly elections, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said there was no hurry to declare bypolls to the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat as the trial court has given Rahul Gandhi, who was disqualified as MP, one month to file an appeal.

He said the vacancy in the Wayanad parliamentary constituency was notified on March 23 this year and as per the law, a bypoll has to be conducted within six months. Kumar said the law also states that if the remainder of the term was less than one year, then the election will not be held.

The CEC said that in the case of Wayanad, the remainder of the term is more than a year.

There is vacuum that needs to be filled: CEC Kumar on J-K polls



NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Wednesday said the fresh revision of electoral rolls in Jammu and Kashmir does not disturb schedule or conduct part of polls and the poll panel is aware that there is a "vacuum" in the Union territory which needs to be filled.

Kumar said in J-K, the special summary revision took place taking October 1 as the qualifying date, whereas in the rest of the country, January 1 is the qualifying or cut-off date.

"We went for October 1 as the qualifying date there (J-K) as we wanted to complete the process as fast as possible. This process (fresh special summary revision) is to bring them (J-K) at par as far as the voters' list is concerned," he told reporters at a press conference convened to announce the

schedule for the Karnataka assembly polls.

Kumar was responding to a question on the fresh special summary revision of electoral rolls in the Union territory.

"But nonetheless, it does not disturb the scheduled part, the conduct part that depends on various other factors which we will come back to you. We are aware that there is a vacuum that needs to be filled," the CEC said.

A few days ago, the poll panel had ordered a fresh special summary revision of the electoral rolls in Jammu and Kashmir.

While April 1 has been set as the qualifying date for the summary revision, May 10 is the date for publication of the final electoral rolls.

Following a recent amendment in the election law based on the recommendation of the poll panel, there are four qualifying dates or cut-off dates - January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1 - to enrol as voters. Earlier, January 1 was the only cut-off date.

Recently, Kumar had said that assembly polls in J&K will be held keeping in mind various factors, including weather and security concerns. He had noted that the delimitation process in the UT was completed and so was the special summary revision or revision of electoral roll.

The CEC had said returning officers and additional electoral registration officers had also been appointed in the rearranged and new constituencies.

NCP's Mohammad Faizal reinstated as LS member; attends House proceedings

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): NCP leader Mohammad Faizal P P was back in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday as his disqualification from the lower house was revoked after over 10 weeks and hours ahead of the hearing in the Supreme Court on his petition in the matter.

Lok Sabha Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh issued a notification restoring the membership of Faizal, who represents Lakshadweep in the lower house, citing the suspension of his conviction and 10-year jail term by the Kerala High Court in an attempt to murder case.

The decision came against the backdrop of Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha following his conviction in a criminal defamation case with a two-year jail term by a trial court in Gujarat. Gandhi is yet to appeal to a higher court against the verdict.

The NCP welcomed the revocation of Faizal's suspension but expressed strong displeasure over the delay by the Lok Sabha Secretariat.

Faizal was disqualified from Lok Sabha on January 13, after he and three others were sentenced to 10-year rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs one lakh each by a sessions court in Kavaratti for attempting to murder Mohammed Salih, son-in-law of the late Union minister P M Saeed, during the 2009 Lok Sabha elections.

"It was not expected from the Lok Sabha Secretariat. The Election Commission had put the notification on the bypolls on hold after the high court suspended my conviction but the other constitu-



tional body was sitting on the files. This was not fair on behalf of the Lok Sabha Secretariat," Faizal told reporters here.

Faizal, who was present in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, said he had to approach the Supreme Court to get himself reinstated. He also met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla along with NCP floor leader Supriya Sule.

"In view of order dated 25.01.2023 of the High Court of Kerala, the disqualification of Shri Mohammed Faizal P. P., notified vide Gazette Notification no. 21/4(1)/2023(TO(B) dated the 13th January, 2023 in terms of the provisions of Article 102(1)(e) of the Constitution of India read with Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, has ceased to operate subject to further judicial pronouncements," the Lok Sabha Secretariat notification said.

Faizal had moved the Supreme Court on Tuesday seeking revoca-

tion of his disqualification from Lok Sabha contending that the Kerala High Court stayed his conviction in the attempt-to-murder case.

"The disqualification should have been revoked immediately after the Kerala High Court passed an order on January 25 suspending his conviction and sentencing, though late, this is a welcome move," said NCP national spokesman Clyde Crasto.

NCP chief Sharad Pawar had met Birla on January 30 and requested him to revoke the suspension of the two-term member from Lakshadweep.

After the disqualification, the Election Commission had on January 18 announced byelections to the Lakshadweep parliamentary seat.

However, on January 30, it decided to "withhold the bye-election" after the Kerala High Court decision.

Lok Sabha approves amendments to competition law

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022, more than seven months after it was introduced in the Lower House in August last year.

The bill provides for the Competition Commission of India (CCI) to impose penalties on entities based on their global turnover instead of the current practice of considering only relevant market turnover.

Amid din in the Lower House, corporate affairs and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman moved the bill for consideration and passage. The bill was passed without a debate.

The corporate affairs ministry has made certain amendments to the original bill.

One of the changes is with respect to the turnover that will be considered for the imposition of penalty in case of competition law violations.

"... turnover means global turnover derived from all products and services by a person or an enterprise," as per the amendments that were approved by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

Another amendment is that the CCI has to form a prima-facie opinion about a filing related to a combination within 30 days of receiving the filing.

Currently, the regulator can form a prima-facie opinion within 30 days working days of receiving a combination filing.

In competition law parlance, combinations refer to mergers and acquisitions, and deals beyond a certain threshold require the approval of CCI.

Avaantika Kakkar, Partner &

head - Competition at law firm Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas, said that in terms of merger control, the bill has introduced a deal value threshold, which will enable the CCI to review transactions depending upon the value of a transaction alone, provided that the target enterprise has 'substantial business operations in India.'

However, she noted that some of the more debatable aspects of the bill include the imposition of enforcement penalties based on the global turnover of an entity, implying that the total turnover from all products and services globally, will be considered instead of the previously used methodology of considering only the relevant Indian turnover.

From a business point of view, she said, the consideration of total turnover may lead to 'unfair and punitive' outcomes and would also lead to discrimination between enterprises who commit a similar contravention but are penalised differently depending on the expanse of their business.

"Further, an intention to actively participate has been introduced for assessing hub and spoke cartels. Such an inclusion not only increases the number of parties that can be included in a hub and spoke cartel investigation, but also increases the level of subjectivity and discretion of the investigating authority," Kakkar noted.

The Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022, was introduced in Parliament on August 5 last year. Then, it was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance chaired by BJP member Jayant Sinha.

Cheetah from Namibia gives birth to four cubs at Kuno National Park in MP

One of the Namibian cheetahs, Sasha, died due to a kidney-related ailment on Monday

BHOPAL/SHEOPUR, March 29 (PTI): A cheetah translocated from Namibia to Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh has given birth to four healthy cubs, officials said on Wednesday.

The happy news came in the wake of the death of another relocated female cheetah at the Park two days ago.

Union environment minister Bhupender Yadav described the birth of four cubs as a momentous event in India's wildlife conservation history during 'Amrit Kaal'.

"I am delighted to share that four cubs have been born to one of the cheetahs translocated to India on 17th September 2022, under the visionary leadership of PM Shri @narendramodi ji (sic)," he tweeted.

The minister congratulated the entire team of Project Cheetah for their relentless efforts in bringing back the large carnivore to India and for their efforts in correcting



an ecological wrong done in the past. Under the ambitious Cheetah reintroduction programme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the first batch of eight spotted felines -- five females and three males -- from Namibia into a quarantine enclosure at Kuno on his 72nd birthday on September 17 last year.

One of the Namibian cheetahs,

Sasha, died due to a kidney-related ailment on Monday.

Twelve more cheetahs were flown in from South Africa and released into Kuno in Sheopur district on February 18 this year.

Cheetah is the only large carnivore that got completely wiped out from India due to over-hunting and habitat loss.

The last cheetah died in Koriya

district of present-day Chhattisgarh in 1947 and the species was declared extinct in 1952.

A senior official at Kuno National Park said the cubs were believed to have been born five days ago, but they were spotted by officials on Wednesday.

"Siyaya", their mother, and the cubs were fine and healthy, said Sheopur divisional forest officer P K Varma. In fact, Siyaya has killed two animals since she became a mother, officials said.

She has been kept in a big enclosure at the park as of now.

A female cheetah generally gives birth 90 to 93 days after mating. As Namibian cheetahs were brought here in September, Siyaya would have mated after her arrival in India.

The twelve cheetahs brought from South Africa in February are housed in a quarantine enclosure and are healthy and active, officials said.

Govt introduces Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill in Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Environment minister Bhupender Yadav introduced an amendment bill in Lok Sabha on Wednesday that seeks to bring clarity to the country's forest conservation law and exempt certain categories of lands from its purview to fast-track strategic and security-related projects of national importance.

Yadav introduced the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023, amid slogan shouting by opposition members demanding a joint parliamentary committee probe into the Adani issue.

The bill was then sent to a joint committee of both the Houses for discussion. The committee consists of 19 Lok Sabha members, 10 Rajya Sabha members and two members to be nominated by the Lok Sabha speaker.

According to the government, the bill seeks to clarify the scope of applicability of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, on various lands. It seeks to broaden the horizons of the Act, keeping in view India's aim to increase forest cover for creation of a carbon sink of additional 2.5-3.0

billion tons of CO2 equivalent by 2030.

It also proposes to exempt certain categories of lands from the purview of the Act to fast track strategic and security-related projects of national importance, to provide access to small establishments, habitations on the side of public roads and railways, and to encourage plantation on non-forest land.

The bill proposes to insert a pre-amble to the Act to encompass the country's rich tradition of preserving forests, their bio-diversity and tackling climate change challenges within its ambit.

It provides for terms and conditions including the condition of planting trees to compensate for felling of trees undertaken on the lands while considering the proposed relaxations under the Act.

It seeks to include more activities for the cause of conservation of forest and wildlife into the array of forestry activities and bring uniformity in the applicability of the provisions of the Act in respect of government and private entities.

RS proceedings adjourned for the day till Monday amid oppn uproar over Adani issue

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned till Monday amid uproar with Opposition members raising slogans demanding a JPC probe into the allegations against the Adani Group. Soon after the Upper House reassembled at 2 pm, following an adjournment in the pre-lunch session, Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar gave the floor to Secretary General PC Mody to inform the members about a message from Lok Sabha that the Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022 has been passed and laid a copy of the bill amid slogan shouting by the opposition MPs. The chairman then took up the motion for nomination to the Joint Committee on the Forest Conservation Amendment Bill, 2023 and asked environment minister Bhupender Yadav to move it. Yadav moved the motion to nominate Rajya Sabha members Ashok Bajpai, Anil Baluni, Samir Oraon and CM Ramesh (all BJP), Jawhar Sircar (AITC), Prashanta Nanda (BJD), Hishay Lachungpa (SDF), Birendra Prasad Baishya (AGP) in the committee besides two members to be nominated by the chairman.

Modi govt scared of JPC probe into Adani issue, alleges Cong 'MVA intact despite differences on Savarkar'

MUMBAI, March 29 (PTI): The Congress on Wednesday reiterated its demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the Adani issue and alleged that the Modi government was scared of this inquiry.

Addressing a press conference here, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera also said the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance in Maharashtra, comprising his party, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), is united despite differences over late Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar.

"The Congress has demanded that the Adani scam be investigated by a JPC. But the Modi government is scared of it. Why is the Modi government afraid of a JPC inquiry into the Adani scam?" he asked. "Who has invested ₹ 20,000 crore in Adani Group of industries? This investment involves a citizen of China. Who is that person? Rahul Gandhi had raised this issue so that the people of the country should be informed about it," he said.

Khera accused the Modi government of showing a special favour to the Adani group.

"Adani was given a loan from the SBI (State Bank of India). Prime Minister Narendra Modi pressured the Sri Lankan government to award power sector contracts in that country to him. Modi lobbied for Adani to get the power supply contract in Bangladesh. LIC (Life Insurance Corporation) investors were forced to invest their money in Adani's company," the Congress leader claimed.

He said by questioning the relationship between Adani and Modi, Rahul Gandhi put the



central government on edge.

A large part of Rahul Gandhi's Lok Sabha speech was expunged. Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's question on Adani was also removed from the proceedings of Parliament, Khera said.

"Why is the Modi government so afraid of the Adani issue? Rahul Gandhi raised the issue of Adani-Modi relationship in Parliament on February 7, and nine days later the old Surat court case was opened for action faster than the speed of a bullet train," he added.

US short seller Hindenburg Research has alleged in its report that the Adani group was "engaged in a brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud", and used offshore shell companies to inflate stock prices. The group has denied all Hindenburg allegations, calling them "malicious", "baseless" and a "calculated attack on India".

The Congress has been persistent in its attack on the government weeks after Adani Group stocks took a beating on the bourses after Hin-

denburg Research's allegations.

Khera said that on March 23, Rahul Gandhi was sentenced to a two-year jail term and he was disqualified from the Lok Sabha within 24 hours. The Modi government did not stop there, but also sent a notice to him to vacate the government house in Delhi. Gandhi has made a home in the hearts of 140 crore people of the country, and therefore he is not afraid of asking direct questions to PM Modi.

"The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is making false and ridiculous allegations that Rahul Gandhi has insulted OBCs (through his Modi surname remarks)," he said.

When asked about the MVA, Khera said the alliance of Congress, NCP and Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena is united. "There is no truth in the allegations that there is a split in the MVA over the Savarkar issue. This alliance is strong. Each party has its own views, everyone is free to express their views," he said.

Communication is important in democracy and that communication is still present in the MVA. The issue of Savarkar is being used by the BJP to divert public attention from the burning issues of the country. Does BJP accept what Savarkar had made disparaging remarks about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Sambhaji Maharaj," he asked.

During a rally on Sunday, Uddhav Thackeray had slammed Rahul Gandhi for his attack on Savarkar and said his outfit will not tolerate any insult of the freedom fighter. The Thackeray faction had skipped the meeting convened by Kharge as a mark of protest against Gandhi's remarks targeting Savarkar.

Medical services take a hit as Rajasthan doctors protest against Right to Health Bill

JAIPUR, March 29 (PTI): Medical services were affected in parts of Rajasthan on Wednesday after government doctors and faculty members in medical colleges went on a one-day strike in solidarity with private doctors agitating against the Right to Health Bill. However, many government doctors attended to patients in OPDs at places like Bharatpur, Alwar and Udaipur.

Emergency services and ICUs were exempted from the strike. There was not much impact of the boycott in Sawai Mansingh (SMS) hospitals, the largest state-run hospitals in the state. Similarly, the services remained unaffected in Dausa, the hometown of state health minister Parsadi Lal Meena.

In Rajasthan, private doctors are demanding withdrawal of the Bill passed in the state assembly last Tuesday. According to the Bill, every resident of the state will have the right to emergency treatment and care "without prepayment" at any "public health institution, health care establishment and designated health care centres".

Iqbal Khan, joint secretary, health department, had on Tuesday issued an order to medical college principals directing them to ensure that medical services in OPD, IPD, ICU, emergency and maternity wards were not affected and to take disciplinary action against the doctors going on leave without approval.

Meena said the strike was "unfair" and "unjustified" and that the doors of the government were always open for any negotiation.

Taking a tough stand, the state government warned of disciplinary action against the government doctors for going on leave without approval. As a result, some of the doctors returned to work after boycotting work for two hours in Alwar, Bharatpur, Udaipur and Durgapur. Amid the protest, Bundi collector Ravindra Goswami, who is also an MBBS doctor, attended to a few patients in the district hospital.

The management of OPD in SMS hospital was handled by an additional principal, additional superintendent and other doctors engaged in administrative work. "We are trying our best that no patient returns without consulting the doctor. Nursing staff is coop-



erating with us," Rajeev Bagarhatta, principal of SMS medical college, said.

Meanwhile, many people from neighbouring states were caught off guard as they were unaware of the strike. "I came from Haryana today to consult a doctor for my cousin who is facing weakness and problems in the nervous system. I was not aware of the strike," Nasruddin said. He, however, managed to consult a doctor later.

Another patient Surendra Meena said he came to the hospital due to abdomen pain and was able to see a doctor after waiting for an hour.

Earlier in the day, Ajay Chaudhary, president, in-service doctors association, said the association had given a call for one-day mass leave on Wednesday to boycott work in support of the movement against the Right to Health Bill (RTH).

Private doctors continued to protest against the Bill. They pulled "thelas" (hand carts) while placing banners like "Dr Agrawal Namkeen Bhandar" on them, claiming that the ruling dispensation does not want them to serve as medical practitioners and therefore they were selling 'namkeen' (snacks), juice and potatoes on the carts.

Dr Gautam, who runs a hospital, said there was no need for the Right to Health Bill as he said the medical institutes were already providing services to the people. He said through the Bill, 'inspector-raj' will increase because the local authorities will create pressure on them in the name of inspection and action like seizure can be taken.

Over 19,000 SC, ST and OBC students dropped out higher ed institutions in 5 years: Centre

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): More than 19,000 students from OBC, SC and ST categories dropped out from central universities, IITs, and IIMs during the period, 4,444 students dropped out from IITs, and 366 from IIMs, the minister said.

"In the Higher Education sector students have multiple options and they choose to migrate across institutions and from one course or programme to another in the same institution. The migration or withdrawal, if any, is mainly on account of securing seats by the

students in other departments or institutions of their choice or on any personal ground," Sarkar said.

"The government has taken various steps like fee reduction, establishment of more institutes, scholarship, priority access to national level scholarships to aid the students with poor financial backgrounds to pursue their education.

"For the welfare of SC and ST students the schemes like 'waiver of tuition fees in IITs', grant of national scholarships under Central Sector Scheme, scholarships in institutes etc. are also there,"

refine joint techniques, tactics and procedures in the conduct of such operations.

The Indian Army said the joint exercise will enable the armies to learn and adopt methodologies and tactics while conducting such operations. Further, the exercise will assist the forces in the correct interpretation of rules of engagement while undertaking peacekeeping operations, it added.

The bonhomie, esprit de corps and goodwill generated during the exercise will go a long way in further strengthening the bonds between the armies by enabling understanding of each other's organisation and methodology of conducting various operations, it said. "This exercise is a harbinger for greater cooperation between Indian and African armies in the future," the Indian Army added.



imibe each other's best practices and promote the ability to operate together while undertaking the execution of Humanitarian Mine Action and Peacekeeping Operations under the UN mandate.

The focus of training on Humanitarian Mine Action has been on education and awareness, casualty evacuation, victim rehabilitation, and land release and re-use techniques, General Pande said in

his valedictory address.

He said the focus of training on peacekeeping operations has been on understanding the mandate of peacekeeping operations, mission organisation, protection of civilians, combat deployment and legal aspects.

Pande said the joint exercises are an unparalleled platform to foster the spirit of friendship and hone military skills and capabilities and

Immediately give national party status to AAP, ensure all 'facilities' during K'taka polls: Sanjay Singh to EC

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): The AAP on Wednesday demanded that the Election Commission recognise it as a national party "immediately" and ensure it gets all the "facilities" during the Karnataka Assembly polls a national party is entitled to.

The poll panel said earlier in the day it was looking into the issue of granting national status to the Aam Aadmi Party.

"The Election Commission announced the schedule for Karnataka elections today but we have a grievance with it," AAP Rajya Sabha MP and national spokesperson Sanjay Singh said at a press conference.

He lamented that the poll panel has not yet taken any decision on the matter even after the AAP fulfilled the conditions required to be declared a national party with its performance in Punjab, Gujarat and Goa polls last year.

"Election Commission has not officially given national party status to AAP despite the party ruling Delhi and Punjab and has two MLAs with over 6 percent vote share in Goa. The party also has five MLAs in Gujarat where it secured about 14 per cent vote share in the assembly polls last year," Singh said.

"Even a class 10 student would give you the answer if you ask whether the AAP should get national status or not as per rules," he said, adding, "I don't know what the Election Commission is doing".

"I urge the Election Commission to immediately give AAP a national party status and also ensure that we get all facilities in Karnataka polls that any national party is entitled to," Singh said.

Singh claimed that the Election Commission had assured him at an all-party meeting that a decision will be taken on AAP's request soon.

"At the meeting, I asked in the presence of the chief election commissioner when we will have national party status. He said a decision was going to be taken very soon and that AAP will be given national party status," Singh claimed.

The AAP leader said the party has submitted a request for this to the poll panel even though it was not required.

"The Election Commission should have taken a decision on its own. There was no need to file any application in this regard but we did and it is pending with the Election Commission," he added.

Radical preacher Amritpal not arrested yet, Punjab govt tells HC

CHANDIGARH, March 29 (PTI): The Punjab government Wednesday informed the Punjab and Haryana High Court that "despite best efforts", radical preacher Amritpal Singh has not been arrested yet.

Justice N S Shekhawat was hearing a habeas corpus petition filed by advocate Imaan Singh Khara, seeking the "release" of the Khalistan sympathiser from alleged police custody.

The habeas corpus plea was recently filed by Khara, claiming Amritpal Singh was in "illegal custody" of police.

During the resumed hearing in the matter on Wednesday, the petitioner sought more time from the court for producing evidence to show that Amritpal was in "illegal custody" of police.

The court on Tuesday pointed out that the state's stand is that Amritpal had not been arrested so far and had asked the petitioner to show evidence that the preacher was in "illegal custody".

The state government, through an affidavit of Deputy Inspector General of Police (Border range) Naninder Bhargava filed in the high court, said that Amritpal is absconding from the law.

Contd. from Page 1...

Modi agreed to discuss our

special grant-in-aid for all-round development of the two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong and direct funding from the Central government. After submitting the memorandum, Ronghang told the media that the longstanding demand of the people of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, i.e., autonomous state, is included in the memorandum. "The Prime Minister has given a patient hearing to our request and assured us that the points mentioned in the memorandum will be discussed by the Central government," he said.

A Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) Pawan Kumar Rai, who was contacted over phone, informed that the team met the Prime Minister in Parliament House while a session was going on.

The delegation included Executive Members (EMs), KAAC, MACs, and MLAs from both Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. The KAAC delegation has been advocating for the creation of an autonomous state for the hill districts of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and NC Hills for a long time.

Akhil among 3 MLAs

again trooped to the well. Daimary repeatedly asked Gogoi and others to return to their seats but in vain. The Speaker then suspended Gogoi for the day and ordered Marshals to take him out.

However, Congress MLAs, led by Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Jakir Hussain Sikdar, made a ring to protect Gogoi and the Marshals could take the Independent MLA out of the House after a brief struggle.

Sarma then said, "I propose that Akhil Gogoi and Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha be expelled for this entire session till April 5." The budget session of the Assam Assembly is scheduled to end on that day.

Immediately after that, Daimary suspended Purkayastha and Sikdar from the House for the entire day. The House marshals took all three legislators out of the House.

The Speaker then adjourned the House for 20 minutes again.

As soon as the House resumed, the chief minister urged the Speaker not to accept the Adjournment Motion, asserting that a judicial verdict cannot be criticised and the court is not in Assam.

Sarma said Gandhi is a victim of his own act of tearing the ordinance brought to give relief to elected representatives, who would be convicted of two or more years of imprisonment. Gandhi had opposed the ordinance at that time and tore the ordinance in a press conference as a token of protest.

Sarma said, "I believe he (Gandhi) is the supreme leader of Debabrata Saikia. Rahul Gandhi himself wanted that disqualification should be instant if an MP or MLA is sentenced to two or more years in prison. Are you (Congress MLAs) opposing Rahul Gandhi then?"

"If tomorrow I am convicted, will BJP members wear black dresses? No, they will move to a higher court," the chief minister said. He also criticised the opposition party for taking out a march in the morning from the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition to the gate of the Assembly building.

Reacting to Sarma's statements, Hussain said Gandhi had torn apart the ordinance but never imagined that he himself would be a "victim of a conspiracy" in future. In reply to this, Sarma said Gandhi is an immature politician, which again led to a noisy scene as Congress members protested. Stating that court orders and disqualification from Parliament should not be discussed in the Assembly, the Speaker rejected the Adjournment Motion. Opposing the Speaker's decision and questioning why a resolution was adopted regarding a BBC documentary on Gujarat riots when it was not related to Assam, the entire opposition staged a walkout for the rest of the day. (With inputs from PTI)

Oxygen plant of GMCH inaugurated

Bayer's vice president Rachna Panda said the company has a long-standing reputation as a healthcare pioneer and is collaborating closely with multiple partners to enhance the public health infrastructure of the country.

"As part of this endeavour, we are delighted to support the Assam government's efforts to establish essential health infrastructure such as oxygen plants in public hospitals," she said. The plant, when operated for eight hours a day, can produce 2,02,500 litres of oxygen in a year, equivalent to 1,800 oxygen cylinders.

Guv hails Centre

towards the less fortunate, the Governor said that regardless of caste, creed, or religion, every Indian strives to contribute as much as they can, to bring about a positive change in society. "We understand that true greatness lies not in the abundance of resources, but in the service we render to our fellow human beings," the Governor added. Kataria also said, "It is heartening to see that our Prime Minister has taken a keen interest in the welfare of the Divyangjan community. By coining the term 'Divyangjan', he has helped to promote inclusiveness and create a sense of belongingness for all specially-abled individuals," he further claimed.

The Governor said that the welfare of Divyangjans is a pan-Indian movement that has garnered widespread support and contributed to the betterment of the lives of those with disabilities. Here in Assam, the government is completely dedicated to the welfare of the Divyangjans. Providing a significant portion of the budget on the needs of this community is a positive step towards giving them the necessary support and resources to help them to lead a dignified life.

The Governor further said that the Indian ethos values altruism and philanthropy. The Centre is an exemplary manifestation of sentiment, offering hope and joy to the less privileged and effecting a tangible transformation in the lives of Divyangjan. Kataria wished that the Centre's commitment serves as an inspiration and motivates every person to offer humanitarian services to those in need. Deputy commissioner Kamrup Keerthy Jalli, managing trustee Shubhkanar Jain Bafna along with a host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Himanta launches logo of

keen to take away the key learning's from this exercise which has been initiated by the health department of the state. The Swasthya Sewa Utsav will be conducted in the context of providing quality healthcare services across the state covering 1,252 government health institutions (21 - district hospitals, 16 - sub-divisional civil hospitals, 205 - community health centres and 1,010 - primary health centres). The government health institutions will be assessed on infrastructure, human resources, and service delivery.

The targeted health facilities will undergo internal as well as external assessment. Internal assessment will be conducted by internal evaluators for building facility level capacity for 'Swasthya Sewa Utsav'. They will communicate the gaps to the in-charge of the health institution and will also help in bridging the same.

The team for external evaluators will comprise of two assessors; one the member of parliament/ member of legislative assembly/ IAS officers/ IPS officers/ ACS officers and the other will be faculties/doctors/post graduate students of medical colleges.

Present on the occasion were Keshab Mahanta, health minister; MS Lakshmi Priya, IAS, mission director, National Health Mission Assam; Kamaljit Talukdar, ACS, director of health services (FW); Manoj Kumar Choudhury, executive director, National Health Mission Assam and state officials of NHM Assam.

State announces ₹ 50 lakh for

on social media over Borgohain's performances after the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, where she had won the Bronze medal, he said winning and losing are part of any game.

"Criticising someone for not winning a medal in every game will create obstacles in nurturing new talents. If Sachin Tendulkar scored a double century in one match, he ducked in the other," the chief minister said.

After the Olympic medal, the boxer admitted that she had lost focus due to the endless felicitations and other commitments outside the boxing ring, which affected her performance.

She made an early exit from the last edition of the Women's Boxing World Championships in 2022.

Borgohain was at the centre of controversy at the 2022 Commonwealth Games when she had alleged that her preparations were getting affected due to the "continuous harassment" from her coaches.

Her personal coach Sandhya Gurung, whom she credits for pulling her out of a difficult mental situation before the Tokyo Olympics, was not allowed to enter the Games Village since she did not have accreditation.

Gurung was then given accreditation and also allotted a room in the Games Village. But the result was the same as the World Championship of 2022 - an early exit. However, she then bulked herself up from 69kg to 75kg, which became an Olympic category, and became the World Champion this time.

PUNE, March 29 (PTI): The second edition of the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX-2023), described by Indian Army chief General Manoj Pande as an unparalleled platform to foster the spirit of friendship, culminated on Wednesday at the Foreign Training Node in Aundh here. It saw the participation of 25 African nations. A total of 124 security personnel, including women, participated in the exercise that was held from March 16 to 29. On the Indian side, troops from the Sikh, Maratha and Mahar Regiments took part in the multinational exercise. On Tuesday, an Army chiefs conclave was held here where army chiefs of 10 African nations were in attendance.

The aim of the exercise was to build positive military relations,

JASON MOMOA THINKS 'AQUAMAN' ISN'T GOING ANYWHERE, WILL BE A PART OF NEW DCU

LOS ANGELES, March 29 (AGENCIES): Hollywood star Jason Momoa is confident Aquaman will feature in the revamped DC Universe. The 43-year-old actor is reprising his role as the superhero in 'Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom'.

The actor doesn't think it will be his final outing despite James Gunn and Peter Safran now at the helm of DC Studios as they lead the DCU into a new era with the character not included in the first round of new titles announced in January, reports 'Female First UK'.

He told Total Film magazine: "I absolutely think Aquaman will be involved in the DCU. It's on,

bro - there's no one bigger than Aquaman. But, also, I hope people are excited to see the new one. It's fun. I really enjoy doing comedy. There's some really funny stuff with Patrick Wilson". He said, quoted by 'Female First UK', "I really adore him. We had a great time working together. It's like we're brothers. There's a lot of cool stuff happening in this one." Earlier this year, Momoa confirmed he had met Gunn and Safran after they took over the studios late last year, while there have been rumours he could ditch Aquaman in favour of playing a different superhero called Lobo.



WE NEED MORE INCLUSION: 'THE POWER' STAR JOHN LEGUIZAMO ON CHANGING POWER STRUCTURES IN HOLLYWOOD



NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Actor John Leguizamo, known for his roles in "Moulin Rouge!" and "Carlo's Way", believes his upcoming series "The Power" reflects the changing gender dynamics in Hollywood where more women are taking up leadership roles.

The new Prime Video show is based on author Naomi Alderman's 2016 novel, about teenage girls suddenly developing the power to electrocute people. Leguizamo stars as Rob, whose daughter is among the girls who acquire the superpower. His wife is Margot Cleary-Lopez, the mayor of Seattle, played by Australian actor Toni Collette.

The actor said women in Hollywood have made huge strides despite the many obstacles they encounter every day.

"I mean, look at the women who were nominated as directors this year at the Oscars, non-existent. And yet women are moving into areas of power, more directing, more executives," Leguizamo told PTI in an interview.

It is beautiful to see when women are running things and we need more of it, more inclusion, the 62-year-old actor added.

"Hollywood is grappling with the fact that white people are only 59 per cent of

the population of the US but they have 100 per cent of the roles and the executives... And now they have to start divvying up power and this series encapsulates that.

"You see you teenage girls in South Africa, Atlanta, Seattle and London; white girls, black girls, Latin girls, Asian girls; getting power and being able to take charge of their lives in a way that needs to exist in the real world, but doesn't really exist in the real world yet."

Leguizamo's character of Rob is a "new type of male", said the actor, known for featuring in movies such as "Romeo + Juliet", "Chef" and "John Wick" franchise.

"We all crafted this character to create this new type of male. What a lot of guys are going through and should be going through is being able to give up a little bit of power because men have had privilege.

"Also to be a man who can support a woman who's more powerful than him, more ambitious than him, whose career is more important than his and still be okay with himself. I think that's a wonderful type of new masculinity that we all need to start embracing," he added.

The actor said there are many men who are happy to play the role of "Mr Moms" in their households.

"I'm the moneymaker in my house, but I have friends

who aren't the money makers and they're the Mr. Moms and they're very content. They're very happy and they're cool, not jealous of their wives' power or anything. They think they can do what they want, they can achieve as well," he added.

Leguizamo said he was glad to work on a series that had women working in different departments.

"It's amazing because the show is about women getting power. But it's a metaphor for women having real power. And then the production side was all women. And it was incredible because all the directors were women, all the writers were women, most of the producers were women.

"You're surrounded by female empowerment. And yet, you're treated with great respect. It's no different. It was a beautiful experience all around, inside the story and outside the story," he added.

Produced by Amazon Studios and SISTER, "The Power" also stars Auli'i Cravalho, Toheeb Jimoh, Josh Charles, Eddie Marsan, Ria Zmitrowicz, Zrinka Cvitecic and Halle Bush.

The first three episodes of the series will premiere exclusively on Prime Video on March 31, with new episodes available each Friday, leading up to the season finale on May 12.

'Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar' worldwide box office score breaches ₹ 200 crore mark



MUMBAI, March 29 (PTI): Ranbir Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor-starrer romantic-comedy "Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar" has crossed ₹ 200 crore mark at the global box office, the makers said on Friday. In a post on Twitter, Luv Films said the Luv Ranjan-directed movie has raised a total ₹ 201 crore worldwide since its release on March 8. "#TuJhoothiMainMakkaar crosses a love worth more than

200 Crore! Thank you for your immense support," the studio tweeted.

In a press note, the makers said the film's nett domestic collection stood at ₹ 161 crore. "Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar" is produced by Luv Films and Ankur Garg and presented by Gulshan Kumar and Bhushan Kumar of T-Series.

The movie also features Dimple Kapadia, Boney Kapoor and stand-up artist Anubhav Singh Bassi.

'Game of Thrones' star Maisie Williams on India visit, says 'losing my mind a little bit'

MUMBAI, March 29 (PTI): "Game of Thrones" star Maisie Williams is in India on a professional visit. The actor, who became famous world over for her role of Arya Stark in the HBO's epic fantasy series, took to her Instagram Stories to share the update with her fans and followers about her trip to Mumbai on Wednesday.

In a brief video, Williams excitedly said she couldn't believe she was in Mumbai.

"I just got to Mumbai, and I am losing my mind a little bit," she said.

The 25-year-old actor is in the country for fashion brand Dior's Fall '23 show on Thursday.

In the clip, Williams also showed fans around her hotel room which was decked up with flowers and gifts. She also posted a mirror selfie sitting in the bathtub. The actor rose to international prominence after starring as the strong-headed warrior Arya Stark in "Game of Thrones" on which she started working when she was 12.



No other brand ambassador of big-screen entertainment than SS Rajamouli: Nani



MUMBAI, March 29 (PTI): Masses or classes, S S Rajamouli's hold on the audience transcends barriers, says actor Nani, who describes the "RRR" director as the ultimate "brand ambassador" of big-screen entertainment. While the phenomenal response to "RRR" may have made Rajamouli a force to reckon with internationally, the actor said he is not surprised by the world cinema circuit embracing the master filmmaker with open arms.

Nani collaborated with the director on the 2012 Telugu-Tamil sleeper hit "Eega", better known as "Makkhi" to the Hindi-speaking audiences.

"His vision is something else for big screen entertainment, there is no other

brand ambassador, who can really... The entire theatrical experience should thank Rajamouli sir because he is the one who believes in big screen entertainment," the 39-year-old actor told PTI in an interview here.

Popular Telugu song "Naatu Naatu", composed by M M Keeravaani and penned by Chandrabose, earlier this month won the Best Original Song Oscar, making "RRR" the first Indian production to bring home the golden statuette in the category. It was the third major international recognition for the song after Golden Globe and Critics Choice Award wins.

Upon its March 2022 release "RRR", a fictional action epic inspired

by real-life Indian revolutionaries Aluri Sitaram Raju (Ram Charan) and Komaram Bheem (Jr NTR), emerged as a massive box office draw with reported worldwide earnings of Rs 1,200 crore.

When it comes to having a finger on the pulse of the viewers, Nani said, Rajamouli's acumen is unparalleled.

"He does it so well that it crosses language barriers, countries, or it doesn't have the limitation of audience of this or that kind... There is a multi-plex or single-screen audience, masses and classes... All of them rush to theatres when it is his film. His eye for understanding the pulse of the audience is on a different level altogether,"

he added.

The Hyderabad-born star recalled how he was an upcoming actor when he worked on fantasy action film "Eega" (The Fly).

In the 2012 film, Nani's character reincarnates as a fly to avenge his murder at the hands of Sudeep (Kichcha Sudeepa) and protect his love interest Bindu, played by Samantha Ruth Prabhu.

"I had done five films and he (Rajamouli) saw some potential. When he was doing 'Makkhi', it was not a star film or anything like that where he (his character) is a star from beginning to end," Nani, also known for blockbusters such as "Ashta Chamma",

LSG MANAGED PLAY-OFF FINISH IN ITS MAIDEN IPL APPEARANCE LAST YEAR

Rahul's acid test as LSG aims to do one better than last year



MUMBAI, March 29 (PTI): KL Rahul has been a powerhouse performer in IPL with multiple seasons of 500 and 600 plus runs but his leadership abilities will be put to test as Lucknow Super Giants would like to go one better than their play-off finish during last edition. Dropped from the playing XI in Test matches, stripped off vice-captaincy across formats and demoted in the annual central

contracts category, Rahul will need to make a personal statement not only with the bat but also as a leader of men.

Rahul's captaincy stint with Punjab Kings ended on a disappointing note and even in LSG's play-off finish in its maiden IPL appearance, nothing stood out as far as his captaincy was concerned.

LSG finished third at the end of the league stage last year and

bowed out of Eliminator following a loss to Royal Challengers Bangalore, with Rahul leading the batting charts for the side scoring 616 runs in 15 matches at 51.33 with two centuries and four half-centuries.

If Rahul, often criticised for his striking rate in IPL, topped the batting charts and led from the front, LSG and India's right-arm fast bowler Avesh Khan finished as the most successful bowler with 18

wickets in 13 matches.

However, going into IPL 2023, Lucknow will be without their most impressive bowler Mohsin Khan, who made a strong mark with his skills taking 14 wickets in nine matches, at least in the first half of IPL this year owing to a shoulder injury.

LSG wicketkeeper-batsman Quinton de Kock is all set to miss the first two games at least given that South Africa will face the Netherlands with their 50-over World Cup qualification on the line.

It remains to be seen who will partner Rahul at the all-important opening slot.

Lucknow Super Giants have bolstered their side this year by adding West Indies wicketkeeper-batter Nicholas Pooran for a whopping Rs 16 crore, who led the Caribbean side in the last T20 World Cup.

Pooran's addition adds more to the flexibility in picking their wicketkeeper, with South Africa's Quinton de Kock being the primary option.

The biggest area of strength, however, is the list of all-rounders on the LSG roster. Along with India's Deepak Hooda, Krunal Pandya, Krishnappa Gowtham, Prerak Mankad, LSG also have a rich overseas presence of Marcus Stoinis, Daniel Sams, Kyle Mayers

and Romario Shepherd.

The spin department will have the likes of veteran India bowler Amit Mishra along with Ravi Bishnoi, whereas in Mark Wood and Jaydev Unadkat, they have experienced fast bowlers who have also won major international and domestic competitions.

With the firepower of Rahul and Quinton de Kock at the top, LSG will have to find a resolute middle-order which can respond as per need — mostly to pick up from the starts their openers provide. Ayush Badoni started well in the last IPL season but then his form tapered off. Hooda could be the enforcer in the middle-order but consistency will be a big question for the young India player, who has been seen in national colours on a regular basis in the shortest format.

Kyle Mayers, an exciting left-hander from the West Indies is likely to open with Rahul in the first two games unless they opt for an Indian option in Deepak Hooda. It will be a great chance for Mayers to showcase his skills in absence of Quinton de Kock, who is missing the first two games because of national duty.

Young Jammu and Kashmir pacer Yuvraj Singh Chahal or Vidhya's Yash Thakur could get an opportunity at some point during the tournament.

Klinsmann still awaits first win as Uruguay beat Korea 2-1



SEOUL, March 29 (AP): Jurgen Klinsmann is still waiting for his first win as head coach of South Korea after Uruguay triumphed 2-1 in a friendly played at the Seoul World Cup Stadium on Tuesday.

The former Germany and U.S. coach was appointed last month and his first match in charge was a 2-2 home draw with Colombia last week.

After South Korea progressed to the second round of last year's World Cup at the expense of Uruguay, the result in Seoul provided some measure of revenge for the visiting team.

The meeting between the two teams at the World Cup in Qatar ended 0-0 but it only took Sebastian Coates 10 minutes to open the scoring for Uruguay this time, after he rose above the Korean defense to head home a corner from Federico Valverde.

Six minutes into the second half, midfielder Hwang In-beom fired home a shot from inside the penalty area. But Lazio's Matias Vecino grabbed the winner in the 63rd, scoring from close range after goalkeeper Cho Hyun-woo parried a Joaquin Piquerez free-kick.

With six minutes remaining, Kim Young-gwon headed home but the goal was ruled out for a foul on the goalkeeper.

Lee Kang-in had a productive game in midfield, creating some chances including the opportunity for Kim, allowing Klinsmann to put a positive spin on the game.

"Kang-in, I think, is a very, very special talent, and they only could stop him with fouls," Klinsmann was quoted saying by South Korea's Yonhap news agency. "Because it's a friendly game, they didn't want to give too many yellow cards."

For his part, Lee can already see the benefits of the new coach's approach.

"Coach Klinsmann loves an aggressive brand of football, and we're still in the process of learning his ways," Lee said. "We will have more important matches coming up, and I think a match like today's will help us then."

Japan and Australia, which also reached the second round of the 2022 World Cup, fell to home defeats against South American opposition.

Despite taking a third-minute lead in Osaka against Colombia thanks to a powerful header from Brighton's in-form winger Kaoru Mitoma, Japan was beaten 2-1.

Colombia equalized just after the half-hour through Aston Villa's Jhon Duran before Rafael Borre sealed the victory with a spectacular overhead kick on 61 minutes.

Just four days after beating Ecuador 3-1 in Sydney, Australia lost to the same opposition 2-1 in Melbourne.

Brandon Borrello put the Socceroos ahead after 16 minutes but two second-half goals, the first a Pervis Estupinan penalty and the second from William Pacheco after 65, gave Ecuador the win.

De la Fuente under pressure early as Spain's new coach

MADRID, March 29 (AP): Two games in, and the Luis de la Fuente era in Spain is already being questioned.

A lackluster win and a disappointing loss were enough to put the new coach under the spotlight. Spain needed two late goals in a hard-fought 3-0 win over Norway to open its qualifying campaign for the 2024 European Championship on Saturday, then fell 2-0 at Scotland on Tuesday after another poor performance.

De la Fuente's Spain showed some of the same problems from the past — lots of possession and few scoring chances — leaving the coach under pressure to show some significant improvement the next time the team plays in June in the Final Four of the Nations League.

"It was a painful loss," De la Fuente said after the Scotland match. "Analyzing the game now, we feel like we did enough good things to deserve a different result, but there is a lot to improve."

The 61-year-old De la Fuente replaced Luis Enrique after the team's elimination by Morocco in the round of 16 of the World Cup in Qatar. He took over while being relatively unknown in Spain after spending years coaching the nation's youth squads.

He came in as the latest attempt to breathe new life into Spain's "tiki-taka" possession-based style that again looked outdated at last year's World Cup.

Luis Enrique had failed to get his team to translate the tons of passes into goals, and De la Fuente had arrived pledging to make scoring a priority for the national team going forward. He brought in some of the nation's top strikers while revamping the squad.

Spain managed only three shots on target against Scotland — the same as its opponent — despite having nearly 70% of possession.

It was Spain's first loss to the Scots in 39 years, and its first defeat in European qualifying since 2014. The result left La Roja three points behind first-place Scotland in Group A of Euro 2024 qualifying.

"We need to learn from this match, but the overall plan doesn't change," said De la Fuente, who made eight changes to the squad that started against Norway. "We have to work hard to try to win the remaining matches." Spain's next qualifying game isn't until September, when it visits Georgia. It will first face Italy in the Nations League on June 15 in the Netherlands, when the De la Fuente will be under heightened scrutiny.

Scotland upset Spain, Croatia wins, Belgium beat Germany

GLASGOW, March 29 (AP): Scott McTominay scored twice as Scotland upset Spain 2-0 in qualifying for the European Championship on Tuesday, its first win in 39 years over one of soccer's biggest heavyweights.

McTominay's goals came after he also scored two in a 3-0 win over Cyprus on Saturday and ended Spain's 19-game unbeaten run in European qualifiers. The result also puts Scotland top of Group A with six points from two games. Mateo Kovacic also scored twice as Croatia defeated Turkey 2-0 away for its first win in Group D. Romania and Switzerland both won in Group I, continuing their perfect starts. A look at the Euro 2024 qualifying games across Europe on Tuesday: Spain's players were warned after McTominay scored two late goals in Scotland's opening win over over Cyprus.

But few expected him to do it



again Tuesday against a team that had not lost a European qualifying game since a 2-1 loss to Slovakia ahead of the 2016 tournament. Spain had not lost to Scotland since Maurice Johnston scored two and Kenny Dalglish added another in a 3-1 World Cup qualifier in No-

ember 1984. New Spain coach Luis de la Fuente made eight changes to the lineup to the team that started Euro 2024 qualifying with a 3-0 win over Norway. Joselu went closest for the visitors when his header hit the crossbar midway through the

first half. Georgia and Norway drew 1-1 in the other group game.

Croatia was forced to rely on goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic to deny Turkey's Cengiz Under and Kerem Akturkoglu early on in Bursa. Kovacic opened the scoring from close range in the 20th and nabbed the second just before the break. Kieffer Moore scored just before halftime for Wales to beat 1-0 in the other group game.

Switzerland earned a 3-0 win at home over Israel, giving coach Murat Yakin his second qualifying victory from two games after its 5-0 win over Belarus in Serbia on Saturday. Romania defeated Belarus 2-1 to maintain its winning start, while Kosovo and Andorra drew 1-1. Kevin De Bruyne steered Belgium to a 3-2 friendly win over Germany in new coach Domenico Tedesco's return home.

No formal discussions at ICC board meet on Pakistan playing World Cup games in Bangladesh

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI) ICC sources on Wednesday dismissed speculations about Pakistan playing their World Cup matches in Bangladesh instead of India due to the political tension between the two countries, terming it a "figment of imagination". The rebuttal came after reports that discussions were held during the recent ICC board meeting in Dubai about Pakistan possibly playing their league games in Bangladesh.

"No one knows if PCB chief Mr Najam Sethi has had any informal discussion with his Bangladeshi counterpart Najmul Hasan Papon but this can be said with a degree of certainty that no such discussions hap-

pened officially that Pakistan will play in Bangladesh," an ICC board source privy to the developments told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

The source did point out that procurement of visas was an issue that was discussed and, contrary to conjectures made from the PCB's part, the Indian cricket board has assured of all assistance.

"The BCCI has categorically said that there will be no problems with procurement of visas. One of the main points for a host country is that all participating nations will be given visas on time. From ICC's part, Bangladesh is not even in its scheme of things as a co-host as of now," the

source said. "Suppose Pakistan reach the semi-finals or win to play the finals, do they expect the matches to be played in Bangladesh. This is not a theatre of absurd happening," the board member added.

The top brass in BCCI circles understands that this is a pressure put by the PCB to host the entire Asia Cup in Pakistan, which isn't being looked upon as a feasible solution.

"We understand that this is a kind of pressure tactic applied by PCB because of the Asia Cup issue. But let me tell you, ultimately, Asia Cup will also be played in UAE or Qatar and probably Pakistan will

also have to play its matches in one of these countries," a BCCI source said.

Asian Cricket Council (ACC) chairman and BCCI secretary Jay Shah has already made it clear that India is not travelling to Pakistan for the Asia Cup and that it will be held at a neutral venue.

"As far as Pakistan playing its Asia Cup games in Pakistan is concerned, the budget for the tournament is passed by the Asian Cricket Council. If ACC says that it's not a commercially viable proposition to hold Asia Cup in two countries, how can Pakistan play its games at home. ACC, for all you know, might not pass the budget," a board source said.

Saudi-backed Newcastle's ownership called into question

MANCHESTER, March 29 (AP): The ownership of Saudi-backed Newcastle was under renewed scrutiny on Tuesday when Premier League chief executive Richard Masters was asked by a member of the British parliament if the league was investigating the club's backers.

Masters told the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) select committee that he was unable to comment.

The question came in light of fresh uncertainty about who controls Newcastle, which was bought for \$409 million in 2021, with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) having an 80% ownership stake.

At the time, a legally binding promise was made to the league that Saudi's sovereign wealth fund was separate from the coun-



try's government. That has since been brought into question after an American court document filed by lawyers for Saudi-backed LIV Golf

claimed the PIF should be regarded as "a foreign state."

"I can't really comment on it," Masters said when asked by Clive Efford MP about potential inves-

tigations. "I mean, even to the point of saying, 'Is the Premier League investigating it?', we can't really comment on it."

"Obviously we are completely aware. And you're correct about the general nature of the undertakings that we received at the point of takeover. But I can't really go into it at all."

After Newcastle's protracted takeover was completed, Masters told the BBC that the Saudi state would not control the club. He added that if it was proved untrue, "we can remove the consortium as owners."

PIF has assets under its management valued last year at \$620 billion. It is chaired by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and six of the other eight board members listed on its website are government minis-

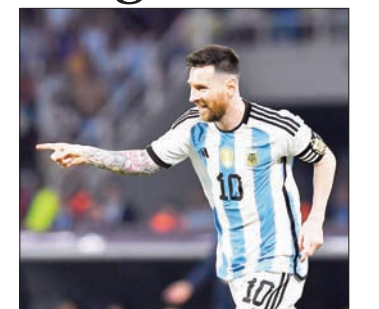
ters.

Lawyers for LIV Golf argued in a case against the PGA Tour that PIF and its governor, Newcastle chairman Yasir Al-Rumayyan, were "not ordinary third parties" and should be exempted from some standards in the discovery phase of the case.

"They are a sovereign instrumentality of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," the filing said. It added that the discovery order was "an extraordinary infringement on the sovereignty of a foreign state."

Newcastle has thrived under its new ownership. It has been transformed from a team that was battling to avoid relegation from English soccer's top flight, to one that is challenging for qualification for next season's the Champions League.

Lionel Messi surpasses 100 career goals for Argentina



SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO, March 29 (AP): Lionel Messi scored a hat trick and surpassed 100 career goals for Argentina with three in the first half of Tuesday's international friendly against Curacao. The World Cup winners beat the Caribbean side 7-0 in their second match since clinching the trophy in December.

The 35-year-old Messi opened the scoring against Curacao in the 20th minute with a right-foot shot from the edge of the box to reach the 100-goal milestone. Nico Gonzalez added another three minutes later with a header from close range.

Messi then scored his 101st for Argentina in the 33rd minute with a crossed shot to the right of the goalkeeper and his 102nd in the 37th after an easy run to score. Two minutes earlier he had assisted Enzo Fernandez' blast from the edge of the box.

The Argentine captain trails only two players on the list of most goals scored for national teams in official matches; Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, with 122, and Iran's Ali Daei, with 109.

Rohit, Pandya make gains in ICC ODI rankings



DUBAI, March 29 (PTI): India captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday moved up one place to be eighth in the batters' list while all-rounder Hardik Pandya jumped 10 positions to be 76th among bowlers in the ICC ODI Rankings.

Shubman Gill remains India's best-placed batter at number 5, while Virat Kohli was at the seventh position after the update took into consideration performances in the Chennai ODI. The batting chart was led by Pakistan's Babar Azam.

Mohammed Siraj at number three was the only In-

dian in the top 10 bowlers list, headed by Australia's Josh Hazlewood.

Among others, Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan moved back to the top of the T20 rankings after leading his side to a 2-1 series victory over Pakistan in Sharjah.

Rashid, who took a wicket each in the three matches conceding a total of 62 runs off his 12 overs, has overtaken Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga to take the top position among bowlers.

Rashid grabbed the top spot for the first time in his career in February 2018 and was number one most recently in November last year.

Mujeeb Ur Rehman, who grabbed two wickets each in the first and third matches, is another Afghanistan spinner to move up, from 10th to eighth position, while fast bowler Fazalhaq Farooqi's five wickets in the series see him climb 12 places to a career-best third position.

In the ODI rankings, Australia leg-spinner Adam Zampa has moved up three places to a career best sixth position after his match-winning haul of four for 45 in the third game against India in Chennai.

Player of the Series Mitchell Marsh also made gains, jumping four slots to reach 51st position among batters with an aggregate of 194 runs in the series.

Captaining Dhoni was a little bit daunting: Smith

NEW DELHI, March 29 (PTI): Australian star Steve Smith says captaining MS Dhoni in the 2017 IPL was "a little bit daunting" but he also learned to be calm and level-headed by spending time with the Indian great.

In that season, Smith led the Rising Pune Super Giants squad that also featured Dhoni season, as Chennai Super Kings were serving a two-year ban from the competition.

Smith, who will part of the commentary team in the upcoming season, led the franchise to the finals of the tournament in 2017, narrowly missing out on the title by just one run.

Recalling his experiences of captaining the RPS and how Dhoni played a big role in that season, Smith told Star Sports, "When I got the call to say that they wanted me to captain, it was a little bit daunting. But that season, MSD was just wonderful. You know, he helped in any way that he could and, he's a terrific guy."

"It was a great experience being



able to captain him, but also very daunting as well."

Smith also spoke on the emotions he went through when he was picked as the captain of the RPS team and how he felt leading a side with Dhoni in it.

"Yeah, I didn't really know what to expect initially, you know, MS had captained every team he played for, obviously throughout the IPL with Chennai, every season should I say."

"But yeah, when they came and

asked me, I was a little bit shocked first, and then I didn't really know what to say. It was like, have you spoken to MS about this? This is a little bit strange from my side, but after we sorted everything out, MS was just wonderful."

"And the way he helped me and helped guide that team that year was incredible. And yeah, I couldn't thank him enough."

Smith said he was bouncing ideas off Dhoni.

"He was someone that I was

bouncing ideas off. You know, being behind the stumps, he's got a great, great view of the game. He understands the angles really well and obviously playing in India also, you know, it's his home and he understands those conditions as well as anyone would."

The Australian further spoke about what he has been able to learn and emulate from Dhoni over the years.

"I think just the calmness that MS shows, we saw it throughout his career, just how calm he was. It didn't look like he was flustered by any emotions or anything like that."

"And that's certainly something that I've taken in not just in that season, but just watching him go about his business in the prior years, just how calm and relaxed he was. And you know, at times I can get quite agitated and things like that."

"So you know, I have to try and keep myself as calm and as sort of levelheaded as I can. And yeah, that's certainly something that I learned off of MS."

Pandit hoping that Iyer is back 'very soon'

KOLKATA, March 29 (PTI): Kolkata Knight Riders head coach Chandrakant Pandit is hoping that their full time skipper Shreyas Iyer will return to action "very soon" and until then, he expects Nitish Rana to do well in the high-pressure leadership role.

A recurring back injury is likely to keep Iyer out of action for the first half of the IPL. He had also missed the first and fourth Test against Australia due to the persistent back issues.

"Whatever little cricket I have played or coached, I have never gone back over things like squad unavailability. Shreyas' absence will make a difference since he is important, but this is truly unfortunate. "We are hoping Shreyas will be back very soon and that will make a lot of difference to the team," Pandit said on Tuesday night. Stand-in captain Rana is an experienced campaigner and has been part of the KKR set up for the last five seasons.

Pandit is supremely confident of Rana's leadership abilities.

"When we select players and give responsibility to players, we see who is capable. And Nitish is

capable. He has been with KKR for a long time and also has a strong domestic record. Like they say, 'all boxes to be ticked' and it has come down to that."

"I am comfortable knowing he can handle the role. We don't see whether someone is deserving or not. Every player has different skills, and after thinking about what Nitish brings to the table, we are confident with the decision. "This decision is not just my decision but of the whole support staff, including our management."

Pandit has achieved remarkable success as a coach in domestic cricket but he said IPL will be a different ball game.

"Challenges are everywhere. This is also one, but it is a challenge of a different kind. After domestic cricket, to come here where there are experienced international-level players with different reputations is a different challenge. "I have already said that the players we have, many of them have been playing for their country and are experienced players. Ultimately, the game is not different, only the format is.

Will try to be unpredictable for bowlers: Joe Root ahead of maiden IPL stint

JAIPUR, March 29 (PTI): Ahead of his maiden IPL stint, Rajasthan Royals' star English recruit Joe Root says he will try to "get the best out of myself" and "be unpredictable for bowlers" in the tournament beginning March 31. "I'll try and be me as much as I can and try to be unpredictable for bowlers. I am sure I will smile and enjoy it, and will try to get the best out of myself," Root said in a team release.

Ahead of a practice session here, the 32-year-old spoke about his new team. "Everyone seems to want to create that feel around things that it's more than just performances on the field. They said they were delighted to get me in the auction..."

England's ex-Test cricket captain is looking forward to the season. "It's an experience that you can't replicate anywhere else in the world. I've never experienced it before so it's all going to be very new to me, which, for an experienced player that's playing a lot of international cricket, is really exciting." "I've heard a lot of things. And I'm really looking forward to living it now."

Sharing his thoughts on the Royals' team, Root said: "Last year was an exceptional year for the franchise and I've always enjoyed watching Sanju (Samson) play. I think he's a hell of a talent and seems to be growing every year as a player and as a leader."

The stylish batter also spoke about how he is preparing himself for the format. "I'm just trying to be as consistent as I can be. You can always work on things slowly and in the background but ultimately you are trying to make sure that your strengths are as good as they possibly can be. "And that you know you're switched on and ready for any situation and scenario that you find yourself in and you have that clarity under pressure."

Having played for so many years, expectation of people doesn't bother me: Rohit

MUMBAI, March 29 (PTI): Rohit Sharma knows a thing or two about winning IPL trophies and having been there and done that on five occasions for Mumbai Indians, public expectation is the last thing to make him wary. The most successful captain in the history of IPL with five championships, Sharma knows that Mumbai Indians as one of the title contenders comes enters any tourney with a baggage of hype and hoopla. And that's what a protective skipper wants to shield the youngsters in his side from as one can easily get overawed by the sense of occasion.

"Expectations will always be there whenever we go out to play, not just in the IPL. Having played for so many years it does not bother me and I am not worried about what the people are expecting me to do," Sharma said at the season opening media conference organised by MI. "We know that we have to do our best and win the

trophy. To keep thinking about it all the time is to put pressure on yourself," the skipper said.

Dewald Brevis, Tilak Verma will all be playing their second season but for young Cameron Green with a multi-million dollar deal, IPL will be a different beast altogether. "I don't want to put too much pressure on them (youngsters) right now. Closer to our first game, we will give them that specific roles. Obviously leading up that first game, guys pretty much know what we are expecting from them," Sharma explained.

"But the last thing I will do is put too much pressure on them, especially the guys who have not played IPL before and there are a few," the skipper assured to put his protective arm around the junior members of the contingent.

The one tip that MI skipper always offers to the new players in the set-up is to think the platform as an extension of domestic cricket and do exactly what got them suc-



Players in action during the match between OIL India Limited (Red) and Assam Police (Blue) of 69th Bharat Ratna Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi Trophy football tournament at Nehru Stadium in Guwahati on Wednesday. UB Photos

With all due respect, we shouldn't be talking about workload in T20 cricket: Mark Boucher

MUMBAI, March 29 (PTI): Mumbai Indians head coach Mark Boucher feels the incessant talk over workload management is overrated in T20 cricket as the other two formats are more punishing on the body.

Speaking to media ahead of the IPL beginning March 31, Boucher said he doesn't feel the need to manage workload in the shortest format.

However, considering the ODI World Cup at home later this year, the Indian players' workload will be monitored closely by the BCCI over the course of the IPL.

"It is amazing we are even talking about workload in T20 cricket. Probably about 10 or 15 years ago we would not be having this conversation. Workload is something... we have the science behind it, we have got trainers and we have got the guys who give us the data," said Boucher on Wednesday.

"There is a lot of talk about workload but if you look at our schedule, we have got quite a bit of rest in between. We can try and look after every player and I do not see workload being a major issue for us throughout the IPL. Sometimes media and people look too much into workload in T20 cricket."

"Test cricket and one-day cricket are tough on the body. T20 cricket is short. We

should not be talking about workload in T20 cricket with all due respect," said the former South African wicketkeeper-batter.

Boucher also Suryakumar Yadav to get back amongst the runs in the IPL following a dreadful run in the recent ODI series against Australia. The stylish right-hander was out on the first ball in each of the three innings against Australia.

"Surya is fine. You can't judge a guy's form based on how he is playing the first ball. I checked on him about how he is feeling, and he said, 'coach I am hitting the ball very well'. I said, 'cool'," Boucher said.

"You can't say that a guy is out of form if a guy does not get past the first ball. Unfortunately, he has not been able to do that in the last three games. Hopefully, when he faces the first ball in the IPL, the whole crowd will cheer and he will be back to business. "He's a great player and probably the best T20 player in the world for the moment," he added.

Boucher said the absence of Jasprit Bumrah provides an opportunity for other bowlers to step up.

"Our bowling attack is quite exciting. Losing Bumrah has been a big loss for us; I will be honest with that."



"The way the Mumbai Indians have selected their squads over the last few years is that, you select your playing eleven, you select your back-up eleven and then you invest in a couple of youngsters for the future. It's now time for those youngsters to show up and basically get the opportunity."

"We got experience in the spinners in Piyush (Chawla), we have got a couple of youngsters in Kumar (Kartikya) and (Hrithik) Shokeen as well. It's going to be

interesting to see how they sort of operate this season," he said.

Talking about the new rule of teams being allowed to field an impact player, Boucher said, "We are going to have to learn. It is a great innovation; I have no problem with the changing of the teams after the toss."

"It is going to be a level playing field after the toss if you do lose the toss, especially in India where there is the dew factor. So you are just going to be able to adjust."



cess over there.

"I will try to tell them to replicate what they did in first-class or club cricket. I know the IPL is a different ball game but I tell them to bring that mindset. At the end of the day, the battle is between bat and ball," he added.

Sharma said while his side will miss Jasprit Bumrah but to com-

pensate his absence, MI will have Jofra Archer ready to unleash his 145 plus thunderbolts.

Mumbai Indians are also expected to announce a replacement for Bumrah, the captain confirmed.

"It will be a big miss but it is an opportunity for someone else. There are a couple of guys who have been with this team for the

last two years and they are very much ready to step up. Hopefully we will blood a few youngsters," Sharma said.

"Jofra (Archer) was part of the team last year, but he was injured. Obviously we all know the quality of Jofra. It is sad we will miss Bumrah this year, we do understand how big his (Jasprit Bumrah's) shoes are to fill, but there is an opportunity that is up for grabs, to fill that place."

"A lot of young players will get an opportunity and this is a platform for them to come out and express themselves," he said.

Talking about the new rule of "Impact Player", Sharma said there will be more clarity on the change after a first few matches.

"There's no doubt that the captains would use it. But, again, like I said, it depends on all the team dynamics. What the other teams have as an 'Impact Player' who is sitting outside. "We will not be worried about what the other teams

are doing. We will see what we can do and how we can strengthen our team on that particular day. "We'll get some idea (about how to use the rule) in the first couple of games and obviously, we've had a good chat around this new rule as well," Sharma said. "Luckily for us, when the first (few) games start, we are playing the last, so we would be able to watch the other teams, what they do and how much beneficial is it to the team," he continued.

The 'Impact Player' allows 12 players to take active part in the game and hence the skipper said that team combinations will remain fluid although at least nine slots out of 12 being sorted.

Sharma said it was too early for him to discuss team combination.

"Obviously, (it is) too early to talk about the combination. You want to try and cover all bases. You are playing against RCB and we know how they play. We want to field our best eleven — rather

12 now," he said.

"These practice games that we play will give us a fair bit of an idea about what we want to do as a team. In terms of combination, it's pretty tough to reveal anything right now. Your nine of the players are sorted, it's just that one or two slots that we need to have more chats around. Otherwise, our squad is pretty much settled."

Sharma had forged a successful combination with Mahela Jayawardene for some years and is equally hopeful that he will develop a fine rapport with new head coach Mark Boucher. For the record, Jayawardene is now the Global Head of all the MI franchises.

"It's always been my philosophy. I like to learn and grow as a cricketer. I have heard so many good things from the South African players about Mark about how he is taken the SA team through in the last couple of years," the skipper waxed eloquent.