

6 WORLD Israel is ready to halt its war in Gazaduring Ramadan: Biden
8 NATION Ukrainian troops pull back again as Russia's onslaught pushes ahead in eastern Ukraine
Congress and Communists, foes in Kerala, BFFs elsewhere: PM Modi
Voting in Rajya Sabha polls underway, SP MLA resigns as chief whip

Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee Empowering Divyangjans Distribution of assistive equipment and devices to 27 lakh Divyangjans in social empowerment camps Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

Tripura: Pradyot urges indigenous people to join his fast unto death

AGARTALA, Feb 27: Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Debbarma urged people of the state's indigenous community to join his 'fast unto death' that would begin on Wednesday, demanding a "constitutional solution" to secure their future.



Tipra Motha supporters but all Tiprasa people. About 90 per cent of the indigenous people are landless. I want our community to get their problems addressed by the Centre," he said.

Economic Survey Assam highlights recruitment initiatives too No of educated jobless soar 7 times in 2022: Survey

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: The latest Economic Survey Assam has stated that nearly 10 lakh fresh educated youths have registered in employment exchanges in the state in 2022 compared to just 1.4 lakh in the previous year.



Budget Session this month, stressed that the number of educated job seekers has increased at all levels of education in 2022 over 2021. It said that the overall number of educated job seekers stood at 18,05,441 as per registrations at

but could not get work stood at 1.7 per cent in Assam during 2022-23 compared to 3.2 per cent in the entire country. "In rural areas, the unemployment rate is 1.5 per cent whereas in urban areas, the unemployment rate is 6.1 per cent in Assam during 2022-23. The unemployment rate at all India level is 2.4 per cent in rural areas and 5.4 per cent in urban areas during the same period," the survey said.

BJP will decisively win 11 of 14 LS seats in Assam: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday exuded confidence that the BJP will win 11 of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the upcoming polls. He said the saffron party will also "try to secure the 12th seat" in the state.



HT BRIEFS Khel Maharan



BOKAJAN: All Assam Khel Maharan 2024 will be held at Hanjanglangso layground, Karbi Anglong from March 4 to 9. Regarding the holding of the sports event a meeting was held by Hanjanglangso Sports Association at Hanjanglangso. President of Hanjanglangso Sports Association, Jivan Chandra Pathak meeting with Bokajan (Civil) SDO, Dibojyoti Borah; district sports officer, Relip Ronghang; ACF, Pranab Terang and others to prepare for the sports event.

Road mishap

TEZPUR: In a road mishap two youths died on the spot near Mori-Depota Bridge on NH-15 under Bebejia police outpost in Sonitpur District on Monday night. The deceased were identified as 38-year-old Manash Nath and 33 year-old Shyamal Nath of Niz-Bihaguri area near here. The incident took place when the deceased were way back to their home by an auto rickshaw bearing number AS-12-AC 8323 after attending a marriage ceremony at Bam Beseria area while they met with the accident with a Tezpur bound truck. In the incident another youth identified as Kamal Nath of the same area sustained serious injury. He was rushed to the TMCH who is as per the hospital sources presently out of danger.

Govt pledges land pattas for all by 2026: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the Assam government is committed to provide land pattas to landless families of the state by 2026.

Stating that of the 50,000 families residing in Majuli, nearly 30,000 didn't have land pattas, Sarma opined that providing land pattas to a huge chunk of 'landless' families is indeed a matter of great satisfaction.



FIR lodged against PWD officials for misappropriation of government funds

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Assam Police have filed a First Information Report (FIR) against officials and staff of the Public Works Department (PWD) Dibrugarh Rural Road Division, along with personnel from the Office of the Chief Engineer, PWD Roads, Assam, and the PWD Budget Branch, Assam Secretariat, Dispur, Guwahati for misappropriation of government funds, said an official statement on Tuesday.

The FIR alleges misappropriation of government funds amounting to ₹1,30,47,282.00. As per the statement, these individuals colluded with certain contractors to submit forged demand proposals for 16 fictitious road construction projects. "These projects, supposedly outlined in the proposals, were never executed in the field," the statement read.

Special Task Force raid leads to apprehension of drug peddler

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Special Task Force (STF) of Assam Police on Tuesday apprehended drugs peddler cum veteran thief and recovered 23.5 grams of heroin from Khanapara area of Guwahati, said an official statement on Tuesday.

Injustice to divorced Muslim women to end with repeal with Marriage Act, says CM

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that women granted divorce under the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registrations Act, 1935, were not entitled to any alimony.

Act, which purportedly allowed registration of marriage even if the bride and groom had not reached legal ages. Referring to kazis getting bail even when they registered underage marriages under the Act, Sarma said, "Now, when this law will be gone, talaq will be difficult and registration of marriages of underage girls cannot happen anymore."

'Need urgent fixing of systemic flaws in global structures to address geopolitical challenges'



NEW DELHI, Feb 27: The conflict in Gaza is of "great concern" and the humanitarian crises arising out of it require a sustainable solution that gives immediate relief to those most affected, external affairs

minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday while calling for reforms of "outdated" global structures to effectively address geopolitical challenges. In a virtual statement at the 55th session of the United Nations

Human Rights Council in Geneva, Jaishankar pitched for urgently making multilateral frameworks fit to respond to current global realities by fixing systemic flaws in the current institutions. He said it would be in collective interest and responsibility to work together in the UN and outside to find lasting solutions to geopolitical challenges. "For this to happen, it is vital that we first recognise that for multilateralism to be credible, effective and responsive, it is now high time to reform outdated structures and fix systemic flaws, and urgently make multilateral frameworks fit for the purpose, reflecting current global realities," the external affairs minister said. India has been pressing for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'This time around, the countdown, the timing, and even the rocket would be ours'

PM Modi unveils Gaganyaan Astronauts: Pioneers of India's historic Space Mission

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a historic announcement on Tuesday, revealing the names of the four astronauts who are currently undergoing rigorous training for India's first-ever human space flight mission, Gaganyaan.



of this mission, noting that after four decades, an Indian is poised to venture into space. "This time around, the countdown, the timing, and even the rocket would be ours," Modi declared. Reflecting on the symbolic importance

presence of dignitaries, including Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, minister of state for external affairs V Muralidharan and ISRO chairman S Somanath. The PM expressed immense pride that the majority of components for the Gaganyaan mission are manufactured in India, underscoring the nation's self-reliance in space exploration. PM Modi further extolled the astronauts and asserted that their names have become intertwined with India's success. He lauded their dedication to training, which included the practice of Yoga, and hailed them as representatives of India's resilient Amrit generation, known for their unwavering determination and ability to overcome challenges. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

FM confident of India Inc aligning to country's developmental goals

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday exuded confidence that India Inc will align itself to the developmental goals of the nation with an objective of making the country a developed nation or 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 on the 100th anniversary of independence.

Sitharaman said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has clearly indicated that the goal of Viksit Bharat is to be attained to provide the future generations a better India.

Addressing a session on 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047: Viksit Bharat & industry', organised by Ficci, the minister said that industry's role is critical in achieving the goal by 2047. "You were with India during the freedom struggle, you built industry and capacity despite the colonial pressure... So Indian industry has always kept that spirit up and against terrible odds kept moving along on national interest. "I can't see how they will be left out in this game of building a developed India by 2047. So it should be natural to India's industry to align itself with India's developmental interests, and after all industry will be the first beneficiary...," the minister said.

The finance minister also assured the industry that reforms will



continue in the third term of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government.

The new government will be formed after the general elections due in April-May and the BJP is confident that Prime Minister Modi will return to power with a greater majority. Sitharaman said that India has moved up to become the fifth largest economy and is on the way to become the third largest global economy.

Even after Covid, she emphasised that the government showed its commitment by ramping up capital expenditure. Indian industry can now surely move forward with a great speed globally as investments are coming in.

It is time for the Indian industry

to also capitalise, the finance minister said. She said that several reforms were undertaken by the government during the last 10 years and the trend will continue.

She said that the reforms to be undertaken by the next Modi government will touch on factors of production.

The minister further said today, without digital infrastructure, no country can move at a pace at which it wants to achieve developmental goals for its own citizens.

India, she said, has shown how making investment in creating the digital infrastructure at the bottom, and scaling it up, led to creation of 'India Stack'.

"...other than the traditional factors of production like land, labour,

capital and the enterprise, I would put digital infrastructure as an important factor, without which we will not be able to scale up and bridge the gap with those who are still aspiring to move forward," the minister said.

Sitharaman also told the gathering that the government is focussing on areas like space and artificial intelligence (AI).

"We have emphasised that India should become a global hub for AI and we will set up centres of excellence for the same," she said, adding, a great leap forward has been made in logistics.

Whether it is logistics, agriculture productivity or tourism, India has immense potential and government is committed to its policy.

"That is why the prime minister is confident that in the third term we will be the third largest economy. It's because of the push which he likes to give in these areas, not just fiscal, but legislative and other measures as well," the minister said.

Renewable energy has better prospects for not just solar or wind, but the government is also looking at renewing its commitments to hydroelectric power, she said, and added that in green hydrogen and green ammonia, big investments are happening in India. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Tripura: Pradyot urges

"We are not against anyone. We are not asking those who settled in the state to go back, but it will be difficult if the infiltration continues in the small state. The Government of India must understand 'Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas' is not possible by ignoring the aspirations of the indigenous people," he said.

Asked what is the exact demand of his fast, Debbarma said, "The Centre has to start discussion to save the future of the Tripura people living in the northeastern state, and this too has to be officially by the officials and not by any political party." Debbarma met state cooperative minister Sukla Charan Noatia, who belongs to BJP ally Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), on Monday night and urged him to join the movement.

Assistant Inspector General (Law and Order) Jyotishman Das Chowdhury said proper security arrangements will be made at Hatai Katar to maintain the law and order situation. (PTI)

No of educated jobless

"The state government has also started different employment oriented programme/schemes to engage more unemployed youths in full-time or part time and create opportunities for their self-employment," it added. (PTI)

BJP will decisively win

clear that the NDA would cross the 400 mark this time". In Assam, the BJP currently has nine MPs, while the Congress has three, and the AIUDF one. There is also an Independent MP. (PTI)

PM Modi unveils Gaganyaan

Modi said that India's space sector's contributions were not only sowing the seeds of scientific temperament among the younger generations, but also providing an impetus for the country to emerge as a global player in the 21st century. He said that few nations have achieved the feats of reaching Mars in the first attempt, launching more than 100 satellites in a single mission, landing on the south pole of the Moon and the successful insertion of Aditya L1 solar probe in its orbit 15 lakh kilometers from Earth.

"All of you are opening new doors of future possibilities," he told the ISRO team, adding that it was estimated that India's space economy will grow five-fold and touch 44 billion dollars in next 10 years.

The PM said that India was becoming a global commercial hub in the field of space and in the coming days, it will once again go to the Moon, retrieve samples from there, and by 2035 the country will have its own space station. "In this Amrit Kaal, an Indian astronaut will land on the Moon in an Indian rocket," he said.

Earlier, Modi inaugurated three major space infrastructure projects worth around Rs 1,800 crores of ISRO during his visit to the VSSC. The projects include the SLV Integration Facility (PIF) at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, the new 'Semi-cryogenics Integrated Engine and Stage Test facility' at ISRO Propulsion Complex at Mahendragiri and 'Trisonic Wind Tunnel' at VSSC, Thiruvananthapuram.

The Trisonic Wind Tunnel at VSSC produces controlled uniform airflow over scaled models of rockets and aircraft to evaluate their aerodynamic characteristics and designs. It features a test section size of 1.2 meters and can generate speeds ranging from subsonic to supersonic, up to 4 times the speed of sound (Mach number 4.0).

The Mahendragiri unit is a state-of-the-art facility capable of handling large flows of propellants. It stands 51 meters tall and has a flame deflector depth of 30 meters.

The PSLV Integration Facilities at Sriharikota were developed to increase launch frequency from the First Launch Pad (FLP) and include Integration Building, Service Building, Rail Track, and associated systems.

In his speech on the occasion, the PM also emphasised upon the "important role" played by women in the country's space programme. "Whether it is Chandrayaan or the Gaganyaan, no such project can be imagined without women scientists," he said and pointed out that more than 500 women were in leadership positions in the ISRO.

He also recalled his statement about the beginning of a new 'kaal chakra' made during the Ram Temple consecration in Ayodhya and said that India was continuously expanding its space in the global order and its glimpses can be seen in the country's space program. Referring to India's achievement of becoming the first nation to land on the Moon's south pole, the PM said, "Today Shiv-Shakti Point is introducing the entire world to Indian prowess." He also drew comparisons between India's achievements in the space sector in the last 10 years with that of the decade before 2014 and said that the nation was launching around 400 satellites recently, compared to only 33 back then. "There is a growth in the number of youth-driven space startups to more than 200 from two or three," he added. The PM said that the various reforms, like the FDI policy of 100 per cent foreign investment in the space sector, have provided an impetus to the growth of that area as now the world's biggest space institutes can establish themselves in India and provide an opportunity for the youth to showcase their skills.

Pointing to India's resolution to become Viksit, Modi said space science was not just about rockets, but was also the biggest social science. "Society benefits the most from space technology," he said. The PM said agriculture, weather-related calamity warning, irrigation, navigation maps, the NAVIC system for fishermen, border safety, education, health etc were all areas to which space science has made huge contributions. Modi also took a walk-through of the exhibition of the various ISRO projects showcased at VSSC. Vijayan too spoke at the event where he said that Kerala was privileged to aid in the country's development, especially in aerospace research. (PTI)

'Need urgent fixing of

reforms in the UN, especially the UN Security Council. In his remarks, Jaishankar expressed deep concern over the situation in Gaza. At the same time, referring to the October 7 terror attack on Israel by Hamas, he asserted that "terrorism and hostage taking" are unacceptable. "The conflict in Gaza is of great concern to us all. The humanitarian crises arising from conflicts require a sustainable solution that gives immediate relief to those most affected," Jaishankar said. "At the same time, we must be clear that terrorism and hostage taking are unacceptable. It also goes without saying that international humanitarian law must always be respected," he added.

Jaishankar said it is vital that the conflict does not spread within or beyond the region. "And efforts must also focus on seeking a two-State solution where Palestinian people can live within secure borders," he said.

Israel has been continuing with its military offensive in Gaza as part of its retaliation to the unprecedented attack on Israeli cities by Hamas on October 7 last year. Hamas killed around 1,200 people in Israel and abducted more than 220, some of whom were released during a brief ceasefire. More than 27,000 people have been killed in Gaza in the Israeli offensive, according to the Hamas-run authorities in Gaza. In his remarks at the UNHRC, Jaishankar said India's civilisational values emphasise that the world shares "one earth, we are one family and we have one future". This Indian approach is defined more by how much "we are alike than by our differences" and that many are impacted by the choices made by even a few, he said, adding that this interconnectedness means that genuine dialogue as the only way to find solutions is not just an imperative, but in fact, inevitable. "It is, therefore, in our collective interest, and responsibility, to work together in the UN and outside to find lasting solutions to geopolitical challenges," he said. The external affairs minister said India's approach to human rights is rooted in its democratic principles and pluralistic ethos. "Our Constitution guarantees protection of civil and political rights and provides for progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural rights," he said. "Our society and polity are anchored by our institutional strengths of an independent judiciary, robust media and vibrant civil society," Jaishankar said. He said these values have continued to inform India's policies, domestically and globally. "And therefore, I believe, we have much to contribute," he added. Referring to the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the external affairs minister said 2024 is an important year for India's democracy, with nearly 96 crore voters gearing up to exercise their right to vote. "This is not merely a political exercise but a celebration of democracy, a festival where every voice resonates and every vote counts," he said.

"In a world where the principles of democracy are constantly tested, India stands as a beacon of hope and resilience, showcasing the power of the people to shape their collective future," he said.

Jaishankar said the multiple crises facing the world have highlighted the glaring global inequities. "Naturally then, it was with a sense of exceptional responsibility that we took up G20's presidency last year. On India's initiative, the African Union became a permanent member of the G20," he said.

The external affairs minister said the G20 New Delhi leaders' declaration put forth solutions on a range of domains, such as digital public infrastructure, climate action, reforming international financial institutions, women-led development, education and AI (artificial intelligence), to name a few. "As the world's most populous nation and fifth-largest economy, India always stands ready to share our experiences and expertise with those who wish to benefit from it," he said. Jaishankar said India's development cooperation that spans the globe is guided by the priorities of its partners and it creates local capacities and adheres to fiscal responsibility and transparency.

"India has been at the forefront of lending a helping hand when it is most needed. We demonstrated this during the Covid pandemic, also as first responders in disaster emergencies like in Türkiye and Syria last year, and when Sri Lanka experienced a severe economic crisis," he said. (PTI)

Govt pledges land pattas

relaxed to a great extent in comparison to the first and second editions of Mission Basundhara, the Chief Minister declared. "Through Mission Basundhara 3.0, institutions too would become eligible for land pattas," Sama added. The chief minister also said due to the efforts of the current government, non-tribal but indigenous communities of the state have been able to receive land pattas even in areas that fall under tribal belts and blocks. He further said that in less than 3 years of the current government, a perceptible positive development can be observed in case of Majuli. "Apart from the rapid public infrastructure development in the river island, there has also been a change in mindset of the residents of Majuli," he said.

The chief minister expressed happiness over the fact that more than 700 youths from Majuli have managed to secure jobs in the government sector entirely on merit in the last three years. Sama stated that the government was on its way to fulfilling majority of the promises made during campaigns in the last Assembly elections, adding, "The government has been taking a zero-tolerance view on drug trafficking, child marriage, to name a few." Commenting on encroachments, Sama said the government is committed to protecting places of spiritual importance such as Majuli, Batadrava and Barpeta from encroachments. The mechanism of "heritage belt and block" shall be used to protect these places, he added. Member of Parliament Pradan Baruah, members of Legislative Assembly Bhuban Gam and Naba Kumar Doley, chief executive member of Mising Autonomous Council Paramananda Chayengia, chief executive member of Deori Autonomous Council Bhairav Deori, along with a host of dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Centre extends ban on

The funds were used by the members in anti-national activities in the region of Jammu and Kashmir. The AHET was formed by the top leadership of the JeI and seven top leaders including accused Ameer Mohammed Shamsi who were the trustees of AHET. The home ministry said JeI is in close touch with militant outfits and is continuously supporting extremism and militancy in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere.

The JeI is supporting claims for secession of a part of the Indian territory from the Union and supporting terrorist and separatist groups fighting for this purpose by indulging in activities and articulations intended to disrupt the territorial integrity of India. It is involved in anti-national and subversive activities in the country intended to cause disaffection, it said. The home ministry said it is of the opinion that if the unlawful activities of the JeI are not curbed and controlled immediately, it will take the opportunity to escalate subversive activities, including attempt to carve out an Islamic State out of the territory of India and escalate secessionist movements, support militancy and incite violence in the country. The central government is firmly of the opinion that having regard to the activities of the JeI, it is necessary to declare it as an "unlawful association" with immediate effect, the home ministry said.

Therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967), the central government hereby declares the Jamaat-e-Islami, Jammu and Kashmir, as an unlawful association for a period of five years, the notification said. (With Inputs from PTI)

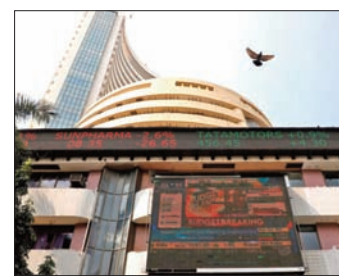
Stock markets rebound on gains in index heavyweights, firm global trends

MUMBAI, Feb 27: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday following buying in index major Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Motors and Sun Pharma amid mostly firm global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 305.09 points or 0.42 per cent to settle at 73,095.22. The index was hit by volatility in the first half of the session but gains in index heavyweights helped the barometer end two sessions of losses. During the day, the Sensex jumped 371.17 points or 0.50 per cent to a high of 73,161.30.

Snapping its two-day falling streak, the broader Nifty ended 76.30 points or 0.34 per cent up at 22,198.35.

Among the Sensex firms, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services, IndusInd Bank, Power Grid, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, JSW Steel and Tata Steel were the major gainers. On the other hand, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank and NTPC were among the laggards. "Mar-



kets rebounded from 2-session losses as selective buying in front-line stocks aided recovery from early weakness. There is no major trigger and investors are taking cues from global markets. As we approach F&O expiry day on Thursday, volatility will begin to kick-in as traders will rollover their positions to next expiry day," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. "The hopes for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and the drop in crude oil prices supported the sentiment," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.25

per cent and the midcap index dipped 0.10 per cent. Among the indices, Realty jumped 1.02 per cent, consumer durables climbed 1.01 per cent, teck (0.85 per cent), capital goods (0.79 per cent), IT (0.76 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.45 per cent).

Commodities, financial services, telecommunication, utilities and oil & gas were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the green while Seoul ended lower.

European markets were traded largely in the green. The US markets ended marginally lower on Monday.

The BSE benchmark fell by 352.67 points or 0.48 per cent to settle at 72,790.13 on Monday. The Nifty declined 90.65 points or 0.41 per cent to 22,122.05.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 285.15 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.16 per cent to USD 82.66 a barrel. (PTI)

Paytm shares hit fresh upper circuit limit; jump 5 pc

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, the owner of the Paytm brand, jumped another 5 per cent on Tuesday to hit the highest trading permissible limit for the day.

The stock climbed 4.98 per cent to ₹ 449.30 -- its upper circuit limit -- on the BSE even after a muted opening to the trade. Shares of the fintech firm exhibited highly volatile trends falling to the day's low of ₹ 413.55. Later, the stock bounced back and quoted 1.18 per cent higher at ₹ 433.

At the NSE, shares of the company rallied 4.99 per cent to reach the highest trading permissible limit for the day at ₹ 449.50 despite a weak beginning.

Shares of One97 Communications had hit upper circuit limits on Monday and Friday as well.

Vijay Shekhar Sharma has stepped down as part-time non-executive Chairman of Paytm Payments Bank Limited and the board of the bank has been reconstituted, a filing said on Monday, adding PPBL will commence the process of appointing a new chairman.

The dramatic turn of events assumes significance in the backdrop of RBI's crackdown on the Paytm Payments Bank over persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns.

Last month, in a regulatory action the central bank barred PPBL from accepting fresh deposits or top-ups in customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments after February 29 -- a deadline that was later extended to March 15. (PTI)

Planters' body voices concern over tea quality

MUMBAI, Feb 27: The rupee closed almost flat at 82.89 (provisional) against the US dollar in a restricted trade on Tuesday amid withdrawal of foreign funds and increased month-end demand for the American currency.

According to forex analysts, the Indian currency resisted a sharp fall due to robust equity market sentiment and a weaker dollar even as investors kept an eye on domestic and global macroeconomic data to be released this week. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened firm at 82.87 against the dollar and touched a low of 82.90 in intra-day trade.

The local unit finally settled at 82.89 (provisional) against the greenback, down by 1 paisa from the previous closing level. On Monday, the rupee settled 3 paise higher at 82.88 against the US dollar.

Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, LKP Securities, said, the rupee traded slightly weaker with minimal movement, while the dollar index remained flat at around 103.65.

"Market participants are awaiting the release of core durable orders and CB consumer confidence data later in the evening, which could potentially impact the dollar index and influence further movement in the rupee," he added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.12 per cent lower at 103.62. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading 0.12 per cent higher at USD 82.63 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex rose by 305.09 points, or 0.42 per cent, to settle at 73,095.22 points. The Nifty gained 76.30 points, or 0.34 per cent, to close at 22,198.35 points. (PTI)

Young Titans Jeet Chandan & Meet Jain Spearhead BizDateUp's

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: BizDateUp Technologies Pvt Ltd, a trailblazing player in the startup ecosystem, made significant waves at The Angel Investor Mixer hosted at The Lalit Lawns on February 23, 2024. The event witnessed the presence of prominent angel investors, including Biren Parekh, Chandni Jafri, Vikram Pandya, Sreenivas Nagappa, Jeet Chandan, and Meet Jain, both 22, who took center stage in announcing BizDateUp's plans to launch a \$25 million Angel Fund under Category 1 of the Alternative Invest-

ment Fund (AIF) regime. The Startup Investors' Conclave aims to create a dynamic platform for investors, speakers, and entrepreneurs to converge within the startup ecosystem. It facilitates insightful discussions and impactful presentations and provides ample opportunities for meaningful connections and networking.

BizDateUp Technologies Pvt Ltd envisions a future where entrepreneurship flourishes, powered by innovation, opportunity, and empowerment. The company's mission is to democratize access to capital and resources, fostering a global ecosystem where startups and ideas thrive.

Key Announcements

Launch of an Angel Fund: The highlight of the evening was the announcement of plans to launch an Angel Fund under Category 1 of the AIF regime. This fund, with a projected corpus of approximately \$25 million, aims to provide essential capital and support to early-stage startups.

Strategic Partnership: BizDateUp unveiled a strategic partnership with a top Angel Network for Category 2 venture funds, with a corpus of \$60 million. This collaboration will amplify efforts in nurturing high-potential ventures.

Introduction of a Global Advisory Board (GAB): BizDateUp is

establishing a Global Advisory Board consisting of 21 members, including 11 permanent and 10 non-permanent members. The GAB will support startups funded through BizDateUp and the broader ecosystem, focusing on empowering startups with the right guidance and aiding their growth journey.

In key highlights, BizDateUp showcased achievements with investments yielding 3.5X returns, exceeding \$10 million. The company emphasized a stringent seven-step startup selection process, prioritizing quality over quantity. Expansion plans target tier 2-5 regions for inclusive economic development.

With a robust mentorship network, BizDateUp underscores its commitment to fostering collaboration. Additionally, a strong focus on diversity and inclusion highlights the company's dedication to supporting startups led by founders from varied backgrounds and underrepresented communities.

The vision of the event was to serve as a catalyst for innovation and investment, shaping the future landscape of entrepreneurship. By bringing together a diverse audience of more than 250 industry professionals, including VCs, angel investors, and entrepreneurs,

the conclave aimed to foster a vibrant ecosystem that promotes collaboration, shares valuable insights, and facilitates engagement among key players in the startup world.

Jeet Chandan, Co-founder, BizDateUp, exclaimed, "We are thrilled to unveil our plans for the \$25 million Angel Fund. This is a significant step towards realizing our vision of fostering innovation and empowering startups globally. We believe in the transformative power of entrepreneurship, and this fund is a testament to our commitment to support the next generation of trailblazers."

Meet Jain, Co-founder, BizDateUp, also expressed his excitement and said, "The strategic partnership and the formation of the Global Advisory Board mark a new chapter in our journey. We are not just investing in startups; we are building a community and an ecosystem that nurtures and propels ideas towards success. This is just the beginning."

BizDateUp's announcements at The Angel Investor Mixer have set the stage for a new era in startup investment. With a clear vision, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion, BizDateUp is poised to be a driving force in shaping the future of entrepreneurship. (PTI)

CONSTRUCTION OF PROPOSED RAILWAY HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING

Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/50 of 2024 Dtd. 22-02-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of Item:** Construction of proposed Railway High School building at Dimapur under the jurisdiction of Sr. DEN/IV/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹85,88,579.16. **Earnest Money:** ₹1,71,800/- **Date & Time of closing of tender:** 15.00 hrs. on 19-03-2024 & opened at 15.00 hrs. on 20-03-2024. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 19-03-2024 in the website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM(W), Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

DDMA spearheads proactive disaster preparedness meeting



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 27: In a proactive measure to enhance disaster preparedness, a significant meeting was convened under the aegis of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in Haflong, Dima Hasao. The session, chaired by Simanta Kr Das ACS, district commissioner cum chairman DDMA, took place at the DCs conference hall. The primary agenda was to strategise and formulate a comprehensive Disaster Management (DM) plan to effectively address diverse adverse scenarios. Ricky Bora Phukan, district project officer, initiated the meeting by delineating its objectives, emphasising the imperative need for preparedness for both pre and post-disaster events of varying natures.

Following the agenda, Simanta Kr Das, the chairman, solicited insights from all concerned departments regarding their DM plans for the fiscal year 2024-25. Each line department subsequently elucidated their updated disaster management strategies. The departments in attendance included Health, Public Works Department (R&B), Irrigation, Soil Conservation, APDCL, P&RD PHE, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Fisheries, Water Resources, Social Welfare, Forest, and Education, with a special focus on Continuity of Education during and after Disasters (CE).

Additionally, the secretary of Dima Hasao Red Cross underscored various initiatives supplementing the district administration's efforts, such as essential distribution to affected families, disaster preparedness training, first aid instruction, youth empowerment programs on disaster and the creation of

climate change ambassadors in schools. Deputy commissioner Simanta Kr Das urged prompt submission of DM reports by departments yet to do so, setting a deadline for March 5. He stressed the importance of detailed departmental plans and the appointment of nodal officers across the district. Furthermore, he directed block development officers (BDOs) to form field functional teams and ensure preparedness for emergencies.

Addressing the assembly, Simanta Kr Das highlighted the unpredictable nature of disasters and emphasised the necessity for departmental vigilance to adapt to adverse conditions and bolster community resilience. He referenced the lessons learned from the 2022 disaster, underlining the district's imperative to remain proactive and agile in disaster response.

Ricky B Phukan, DPO, DDMA, provided insights into disaster management response preparedness, stressing the submission of availability status reports for listed items. He also outlined plans for installing a Ham station, a wireless voice communication system enabling information dissemination over vast distances, enhancing communication during crises. The meeting witnessed the presence of key officials, including NCHAC secretary Partha Sarathi Jahari, ACS, additional district commissioner James Aind, ACS, alongside representatives from various line departments.

The gathering concluded with a unified commitment towards bolstering disaster preparedness, affirming the district's resolve to mitigate risks and safeguard communities against unforeseen adversities.

KAAC to commemorate 76th death anniversary of Semson Sing Ingti

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 27: The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) is set to commemorate the 76th death anniversary of Semson Sing Ingti, the visionary founder of the former Mikir Hills District, now known as the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, on February 28, 2024.

The commemorative events will take place at the Semson Sing Ingti Memorial Park (Old & New), Diphu. As part of the observance, an interfaith prayer gathering will be convened. Additionally, a spontaneous speech competition will be organised for school students.

Self financed input dealers training in Nagaon

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 27: In a joint venture, State Cooperative Societies and Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, organised a 15-day-long self-financed input dealers training programme for primary agricultural credit societies at Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Nagaon. The programme began on February 9 and concluded on Tuesday. In the closing session of the programme, a valediction programme was held where Rajendra Perna, DDM NABARD, was present as the chief guest, while Bakul Ch Bora, registrar, Nagaon District Cooperative Societies, Dilip Kumar Bora, district agriculture officer, Nagaon, and Geetashree Dutta Baruah, sub-registrar, Nagaon District Cooperative Societies, attended the session as special invitees. Dr Niranjan Deka, principal scientist and head of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Nagaon, delivered the welcome address at the beginning, and Dr Animesh Deka, KVK, Nagaon, mentored the entire valediction session of the training programme, while Dipen Ch Nath offered the vote of thanks.

Books authored by Chandra Mohan Kakoti released



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 27: Four books penned by Chandra Mohan Kakoti were ceremonially released at a prestigious function held at the auditorium of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya in Nagaon on Saturday. Among the books released were two in Assamese and two in English language. The books were released by former AGP minister and academician Gunin Hazarika, and noted historian and columnist Dr Rajen Saikia. The programme was chaired by Thagit Mahanta, president of Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha, and mentored by Dr Tribeni Saikia, a senior professor of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya. Dr Mridul Kr Hazarika, vice chancellor of the var-

Focus on conviction of serious crime offenders: Guv Kataria

Governor reviews government schemes and police work in Morigaon

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, Feb 27: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria visited Morigaon and expressed satisfaction over the progress of works of various departments while attending the 2nd Review Meeting held with the heads of various departments at the DC's Conference Hall on Tuesday.

Speaking to members of the media, the Governor expressed satisfaction and said that completing the remaining tasks promptly will result in greater benefits for the people.

In connection with the 'Aadhaar seeding', the Governor said the Aadhaar seeding has not reached hundred percent due to improper identification, due to which Aadhaar-related issues have remained incomplete, such as the Ayushman card, KISAN Samman Nidhi, etc.

The benefit of KISAN Samman Nidhi will be available when the Aadhaar seeding is completed.

After the welcome speech by district commissioner Devashish Sharma, chief executive officer of Zilla Parishad Laxminanda Chaharia gave a brief overview of the district through a PowerPoint presentation and presented the progress of works of the Panchayat and Rural Development Department.

The Governor expressed satisfaction with the results shown by various departments this year compared to the previous review conducted in April.

Regarding the Jal Jeevan Mission under the Public Health Engineering Department, he said the real success of the scheme would depend on proper monitoring of whether all the beneficiaries have received water.

He said the work of this scheme should be accelerated in the district.

He reviewed the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin) under the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, issuance of job cards under MGN-REGA, progress of the Amrit Sarovar scheme, Swachh Bharat



Abhiyan-Gramin, etc. He expressed satisfaction with the work of the department and the linkage of Aadhaar with the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

The Governor expressed satisfaction that the number of out-of-school children in Morigaon district is not high but emphasised increasing the overall literacy rate.

He urged the donors to further encourage their support under the Vidyajalpi programme.

The Governor also reviewed the Health Department and stressed ensuring that eligible beneficiaries get benefits under the Ayushman Bharat scheme in Morigaon district.

He urged the Public Works (Roads) and Public Works (House)

Departments to prepare the schemes to complete the construction work on time.

He also reviewed the National Nutrition Mission and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana implemented under the Social Welfare Department, as well as Arunodoi, Mission Basundhara, and Mission Bhumiputra.

The Governor also reviewed the work of the Water Resources Department and the Irrigation Department. Reviewing the banking sector, he urged the district administration to cover the beneficiaries of government schemes under the Atal Pension Yojana so that they get a response in old age.

The district commissioner sought the Governor's cooperation in developing tourism in Morigaon district and increasing the jeep safari facilities and other facilities available to tourists in Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Governor also reviewed the progress of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY). He also took details of schemes like paddy procurement, One Nation One Ration Card under the Food, Public Distribution, and Consumer Affairs Department.

The meeting was attended by SP Hemant Kumar Das who explained the work of the police ad-

ministration through a PowerPoint presentation.

The Governor expressed satisfaction with the low crime rate in the district but expressed concern over the unsatisfactory conviction rate for serious crimes like sexual offences against children, and violence against women, etc.

He urged the SP to appoint special officers in such cases to ensure that no criminal escapes.

The meeting was attended by district development commissioner Devayani Chowdhury, additional district commissioners Dyotibha Bora and Biman Das, and officers of the district administration and heads of various departments.

The Governor then visited the Maternal and Child Health Unit of Swahid-Tilak - Hemram-Gunabhiram Civil Hospital in Morigaon.

He also inspected the newly constructed office of Shalmari Gaon Panchayat and the erosion prevention geobag project constructed by the Water Resources Department at Damal on the banks of the Kalang River.

The Governor also visited a high-quality orchard constructed with the assistance of the Agriculture Department in Betani. He then inspected the progress of the work of the Morigaon Medical College at Baghara.

District Task Force prepares for National Immunisation Day

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 27: The 2nd District Task Force Meeting on National Immunisation Day (SNID-2024) convened at the Officer's Conference Hall of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), Haflong, on Tuesday, witnessed proactive discussions and strategic planning. Chaired by Thai Tsho Daulagupu, ACS, principal secretary of NCHAC, the meeting witnessed the presence of key officials including Partha Sarathi Jahari, ACS, secretary of NCHAC, and Dr Duleshwar Gogoi, joint director of Medical & Health Services, alongside medical professionals and representatives from line departments. The principal secretary presided over a comprehensive review of preparedness and the immunisation status concerning the upcoming National Pulse Polio Immunisation schedule slated for March 3, 2024.

The primary objective of the scheduled Supplementary National Immunisation Day (SNID) is to ensure comprehensive protection for all children aged between 0-5 years

against poliomyelitis.

Dr Marina L Changsan, the district immunisation officer, urged parents within this age group to actively participate by bringing their children to the nearest polio booth or health institution to receive two drops of oral polio vaccine, thereby safeguarding them from poliomyelitis.

In a concerted effort to reach every child, polio drops will be administered across all villages in Dima Hasao through a network of 563 booths.

Additionally, distribution points will be established at the district hospital, urban health centre, primary health centers (PHC), sub-divisional and state health centers (SD, SHC), community health centers (CHC), as well as major railway stations and bus/sumo stands.

The meeting concluded with a resolute commitment from all stakeholders to ensure the seamless execution of the immunisation drive, reaffirming their dedication to safeguarding the health and well-being of children within the district.

Rangapara College organises symposium



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 27: Sahitya Akademi, in collaboration with Rangapara College, organised a symposium on 'Poetic Insight and Life' in the Digital Seminar Hall of Rangapara College on Monday. The inaugural session was chaired by Dr Ranjan Kalita, principal of Rangapara College.

Devendra Kumar Devesh, regional secretary of Sahitya Akademi, Kolkata, delivered a welcome address. Subsequently, Diganta Biswa Sarma, convener of the Assamese Advisory Board for Sahitya Akademi, delivered an enlightening introductory speech.

This was followed by a speech by Charu Saharia Nath, president of the Governing Body of the college.

The first session of the symposium was chaired by eminent poet Anubhab Tulasi. Mousumi Dutta, Rinjumoni Neog Bora, and Upam Saikia presented their papers in this session.

This was followed by the second session chaired by noted poet and author Pranab Kumar Barman, in which Bornali Borgohain, Mridul Haloi, and Ranjit Gogoi presented their papers.

Later in the day, Kavisandhi, an initiative started by Sahitya Akademi to provide poetry lovers an opportunity to hear poetry being read out by the poet, was held.

Distinguished poet Bipul Jyoti Saikia graced the occasion and spoke elaborately about his literary journey, reading from his recent works.

Nowgong College hosts workshop on reducing girls' school dropouts

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 27: A dissemination workshop on 'Reducing Girls School Dropouts: A Case Study in Select Areas of Assam' was organised by the department of Economics, Nowgong College (Autonomous) here. The workshop was based on the findings of an empirical project conducted by Prof Ratul Mahanta, HoD, department of Economics, Gauhati University; Prof Daisy Das, department of Economics, Cotton University; Dr Nurzamal Hoque, department of Economics, Kokrajhar Government College; and Dr Dimpal Dekaraja, assistant professor, department of Economics, Nowgong College (Autonomous) under the scheme 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao'. The project was funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.

The workshop proceedings were anchored by Dr Mrinal Saikia, assistant professor, department of Economics, and Dr Prasanta Khanikar, associate professor, department of Education, graced the workshop as an invited speaker. Dr Khanikar opined that stagnation, parents' marginal income, difficulty in traveling, and parental illiteracy can be considered the main reasons for girls' dropout.

Dr Dimpal Dekaraja, Assistant Professor, department of Economics, elaborated on the findings of the project.

The study revealed that girls' dropout rates are decreasing in the state after the implementation of the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme, as mentioned by Dr Dekaraja in his speech.

However, the study recommended organising more awareness camps to increase community involvement in rural areas and to educate both the community and parents to permanently reduce dropout rates. Primary data for this project was mainly collected from Nagaon, Karbi-Anglong, and Nalbari districts.

Dr Pulin Chandra Borah, vice principal; Dr Bhuban Chandra Chutia, coordinator, IQAC; Dr Nabaprasad Nath, associate professor, department of Philosophy; Mridupaban Chintey; Dr Tiken Das; Dr Nitumoni Bora, department of Economics; Dr Purboshri Borpuzari, department of Sanskrit; and over 50 research scholars participated in the workshop. During the workshop, the participants interacted with the project director, Dr Dimpal Dekaraja, and appreciated the work conducted by the research team. The workshop concluded with a vote of thanks offered by Dr Mrinal Saikia, as stated in a press release here.

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL
KAAC SECRETARIAT :: DIPHU

Invitation

The authority of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu requests your kind presence in the commemoration programme on the occasion of 76th Death Anniversary of Semson Sing Ingti, Founder of the then Mikir Hills District and now Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council on 28th February, 2024 at Semson Sing Ingti Memorial Park (Old & New), Diphu, as per programme overleaf.

(Shri Dilip Terang, ACS)
 Principal Secretary, i/c
 Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council,
 DIPHU

PROGRAMME
 Dated: 28/02/2024

- 9:00 AM : Garlanding of statue of Semson Sing Ingti at Semson Sing Ingti Memorial Park (New), Diphu.
- 9:30 AM : Garlanding of statue of Semson Sing Ingti at Semson Sing Ingti Memorial Park (Old), Diphu.
- 9:35 AM : Prayer meeting (Duration of prayer: 3 minutes each).
 1. Kahoron (Kataram)
 2. Geeta Path
 3. Bible Reading
 4. Guru Granth Saheb
 5. Quran
 6. Kirtan Path
 7. Lokhimon Prayer
 8. Group song by KTMCRI
- 10:00AM : Brief Speech from Dignitaries.
- 10:30 AM : Vote of Thanks
- 11:00 AM : Extempore speech for Class 8 & 9 (Category-I) and Class-11 (Category-II)
- 5:00 PM : Illumination of Semson Sing Ingti Memorial Park, (Old & New), Diphu.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Never get a mime talking. He won't stop.
- Marcel Marceau

Political manoeuvring over poverty data

In the wake of the release of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23 by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), there has been a flurry of political rhetoric surrounding poverty levels in India. The Chief Executive Officer of NITI Aayog, B. V. R. Subrahmanyam, has stirred the pot by asserting that poverty in the country has plummeted to below 5 per cent, alongside claims of inflated retail inflation and a robust rural economy. However, a closer examination of the data and methodology reveals a more nuanced reality. Subrahmanyam's assertion hinges on a poverty line of earning less than ₹ 32 per day, a figure that has long been criticized for its absurdity. By extrapolating this outdated benchmark, he arrives at the conclusion that poverty levels have drastically reduced. Yet, such a narrow definition of poverty fails to capture the true economic plight of millions of Indians. The Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) figures paint a stark picture of inequality, with rural households struggling on meager incomes. Despite Subrahmanyam's claims, living on ₹ 1373 or even ₹ 1782 per month hardly exempts individuals from poverty. Moreover, the methodology behind these figures has been altered significantly from previous surveys, warranting caution in interpreting the results.

While Subrahmanyam touts the inclusion of government welfare schemes in the survey data, such as the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, it is essential to recognize that these provisions merely alleviate the symptoms of poverty rather than addressing its root causes. Rising joblessness and stagnant wages exacerbate the plight of the poor, rendering claims of poverty reduction dubious at best. Furthermore, the discrepancy between official poverty estimates and the reality on the ground is cause for concern. Despite government assertions, the disparity in consumption levels between rural and urban populations underscores the widening wealth gap under the current administration. Moreover, the discrepancy between official poverty estimates and the ground reality raises questions about the adequacy of current measurement methods. In light of these complexities, it is imperative that policymakers adopt a holistic approach to poverty alleviation. Sustainable economic growth and equitable distribution of resources must be prioritized over short-term political expediency. Merely providing handouts and subsidies without addressing underlying structural issues perpetuates the cycle of poverty and exacerbates socio-economic disparities.

As India navigates the intricacies of poverty measurement, it is incumbent upon policymakers to engage in evidence-based decision-making. By acknowledging the limitations of current methodologies and embracing a more nuanced understanding of poverty, India can chart a course towards inclusive and sustainable development. The discourse surrounding poverty in India demands nuance and rigor. Subrahmanyam's assertions, while politically expedient, must be scrutinized within the broader socio-economic context. Only through a comprehensive and evidence-based approach can India effectively address the entrenched challenges of poverty and inequality. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the impact of rising costs of living on vulnerable populations. As inflationary pressures mount and basic necessities become increasingly unaffordable, the plight of the poor is exacerbated. Despite claims of poverty reduction, the reality on the ground tells a different story—one of families struggling to make ends meet amidst skyrocketing prices. Addressing the root causes of inflation and implementing measures to mitigate its impact on low-income households must be a priority for policymakers. Ignoring the economic hardships faced by millions will only deepen social inequalities and undermine the nation's progress towards prosperity for all.

Saudi Arabia is set for a transformation in its economic programme

By: Tirthankar Mitra

Saudi Arabia, a country in popular imagination of white caped sheikhs driving around in limousines in broad avenues lined with sky scraping condominiums is on the cusp of a change. It is grappling with the task of reinventing its economy. It is going to be an uphill task. For the entire process involves steering it away from the dependence on oil that has been part and parcel of its financial landscape. Reinventing the economy includes the task of generating jobs for the youth two thirds of whom are under 35. Joblessness reached 15.4 per cent in the second half of 2020.

The unemployment rate has declined but the concern persists. Saudis are taking low laid jobs which were once taken by the migrants but the higher end of the market still lacks opportunities for educated citizens.

Its royal family and its fabulous landscape apart, what other unique selling point does Saudi Arabia possess? Attracting foreign firms and investors is of paramount importance in this regard. But reduction of subsidies, increased taxes and riding labour costs have eroded some of Saudi Arabia's traditional advantages for foreign firms. In fact, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been sluggish. Detention of businessmen and some royals in corruption cases in 2017 has sent shock waves through the business community. Hefty bills served on tax issues to companies like Uber

add to uncertainty.

The recent directive to multinationals to relocate their regional headquarters to the kingdom by 2024 is being considered by some as a corrective move. It has prompted firms like Unilever and Siemens to open offices in Riyadh.

Tourism is being considered to be the linchpin of this transformation. The policy makers hope it will become the source of new jobs and a major contributor to the GDP. The challenge lies in convincing foreign tourists in choosing Saudi Arabia over other global destinations. Abha, a city in the southwestern part of the kingdom is earmarked for a great turnover. Billions have been allocated to build hotels and tourist attractions aimed to draw 2 billion tourists by 2030. Tourist visas have been started to be offered only since 2019.

The potential is vast. The competition is fierce. Striking a balance between reforms and foreign investors is the imperative for the Saudi policy makers. It is the only prescription to develop a competitive edge to the economy of this desert kingdom.

But the fact remains that ambitious plans to transform the economy is progressing at a slower pace than originally thought of. Some critics feel that ambitious targets are being set without adequate feedbacks. The path of diversification of the Saudi economy is intricate. It has to be journeyed carefully, point out many experts. (IPA Service)



TN may witness 3 cornered contest in LS elections

It is not yet a done deal with regard to political alliances in Tamil Nadu for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. As the saying goes there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies in politics. In Tamil Nadu, politics revolves around two Dravidian parties DMK and AIADMK for a half a century or more. The two parties, which had around 30 to 35 per cent vote share each has certainly come down ever since the death of DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi and AIADMK supremo J Jayalalitha some years ago. Since then the individual vote share of the two Dravidian parties have come down to 20-22 per cent each and as we had seen in the last few elections, whichever party stiches up better coalition, wins all, be it Tamil Nadu assembly or Lok Sabha elections.

The party combination that comes to power in Tamil Nadu has to garner around 40 per cent of the votes, so the additional 15 to 20 per cent that is needed to win the elections has to come from the alliance partners that either of the party gets into before the elections.

Strangely, any of the parties, including national parties have in the past aligned with one or the other Dravidian parties thereby indicating no ideological barrier towards them. There is also a third front in every elections, which gets around 15-20 per cent of the votes as there is a percentage of the Tamil Nadu population, which does not vote for either of the Dravidian parties or their combination.

This has been the arithmetic of TN polls for quite some time now. Congress, though ousted from power in the state in 1967, has still some committed voters in every constituency and they form around 8-12 per cent of the votes depending upon which side

the wind blows. So the Dravidian party with which Congress aligns has an edge in winning the elections in the present circumstances.

Lately, under the leadership of Annamalai, BJP is becoming a force to reckon with in Tamil Nadu, particularly among the youth, who are fed up with the mounting corruption and caste-based politics of the two Dravidian parties. BJP, which has a vote share of around 4-5 per cent in the last 2021 assembly elections, is expected to go up to 14-15 per cent this time. BJP, which has made it clear that it would not be part of an alliance with either of the Dravidian parties, may cobble up an alliance with some minor parties like that of Late filmstar turned politician Vijayakant's party and this could give an additional 10-12 per cent of the votes.

As of now DMK is part of INDIA alliance, but seat sharing discussion with Congress has not yet started. If DMK, being the larger partner in the state, acts tough in seat sharing exercise, there is always a possibility of Congress taking a tough posture.

AIADMK has severed its alliance with BJP some time ago and has time and again made it clear that it would not join hands with BJP at least for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, AIADMK feels that, it has to be the senior partner, whereas BJP is of the view that AIADMK can be only part of BJP led NDA alliance, even though state party can contest more seats than BJP.

This is not agreeable to AIADMK as it fears ultimately, the party will get marginalized by BJP as it has happened in

states like Maharashtra and Bihar with Shiv Sena and JD(U). Some signs are already visible with splinter groups of AIADMK led by former chief minister O Panneerselvam and Sasi Kala's nephew T T V Dinakaran hinting at the possibility of going with BJP. As of today they being marginal players, it is unlikely to affect the AIADMK, which is largely intact as of today under the leadership of Edappadi Palaniswami.

A clear picture is yet to emerge with regard to alliances in Tamil Nadu. Some smaller parties, traditionally with DMK have reiterated their decision to go with the Dravidian party. Till now DMK has given 1 Lok Sabha seat to Indian Union Muslim League. Another seat was given to Kongunadu Makkal Desiya Katchi. These are two minor partners of DMK, who contested as part of the alliance last time as well.

The talks with Congress is expected this week and if congress failed to get as many seats as last time, There might be some real problem for the INDIA block in Tamil Nadu. IUML will fight the April-May Lok Sabha elections from Ramanathapuram parliamentary seat. Tamil Nadu has 39 Lok Sabha seats. There is one additional Lok Sabha seat from Pudukchery.

Actor turned politician Kamal Haasan, who heads Makkal Needi Maiyam (MNM), has indicated he is in talks for an alliance. He himself may contest a Lok Sabha seat this time and indications are that he would go with DMK alliance. He is apparently waiting for DMK-Congress seat sharing talks outcome before taking a decision.

As of now DMK is keeping its

alliance partners, including the Congress, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Left parties, among others, intact and initiating seat-sharing talks with them, Opposition parties have also begun talks in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections

The state's main Opposition party, AIADMK, which walked out of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), is making efforts to bring as many parties as possible under Edappadi K Palaniswami to project them as the alternative to the DMK.

Recently, Edappadi participated in a Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) meeting and criticised the BJP asserting they stand for the minorities. He had reiterated they will not join hands with the BJP in either the Lok Sabha polls or the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections scheduled to be held in 2026.

C Vee Shanmugam, one of the key AIADMK leaders, held talks with Pattali Makkal Katchi founder Dr S Ramadoss and the meeting is being accorded importance as the PMK, one of the key parties in the state, has not yet announced its decision over the alliance.

Last week, during the special executive meeting, the PMK had passed several resolutions including its decision to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha poll in alliance with parties that care for the welfare of both the state as well as the country.

With the AIADMK taking these measures, BJP is also holding talks with non-Dravidian majors. While the AIADMK is also holding talks with the PMK and the Premalata Vijayakant-led Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), sources said the latter is likely to join the BJP-led NDA.

During the DMDK's executive and general council meeting, Premalatha had said they are ready to hold talks with any party but before that, they need to promise Rajya Sabha seat to them in writing.

Besides the DMDK, T T V Dhinakaran's Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam, T R Paarivendhar's Indhiya Jananayaga Katchi (IJK), and K Krishnaswamy's Puthiya Tamizhagam are the other parties who are likely to be part of the NDA.

Former chief minister and expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam will most likely campaign for the saffron party. Tamil Maanila Congress led by G K Vasan, son of G K. Moopanar too might go with BJP. He could go with AIADMK as well.

At the moment, the picture with regard to alliance is still unclear and all possibilities are still open. It may take a couple of weeks or so before they take shape. But one thing is clear, that there will be a three-cornered contest in Tamil Nadu for the Lok Sabha elections. One will be led by DMK, the second one by AIADMK and the third by BJP.

If DMK goes with Congress, many smaller parties too will go with it making it a formidable alliance. In that event, AIADMK is likely to be the main loser. But there is also growing resentment against DMK rule in Tamil Nadu and that will get reflected mainly in the state assembly elections, which is due only in 2026.

BJP however will be an emerging force in the state, even though it may not get translated into many seats in the Lok Sabha elections but the picture could be different in the ensuing assembly elections, if the trend continues and one of the Dravidian parties will get marginalised. (IPA Service)

The fractured state of Myanmar

By: Saleem Samad

If anybody reads Myanmar's state-run daily newspaper, the Global New Light of Myanmar, the oldest English Daily which covers news, the state Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV), and one would not fathom the crisis faced by the Myanmar government. News coming in from dissidents, journalists and media activists inside Myanmar rebel-held regions gives diametrically opposite news, which is not comfortable for the military junta in the capital, Naypyidaw.

The rebels are upbeat when they could make the government troops withdraw from northern Rakhine State after the onslaught of the rebel Arakan Army (AA).

The AA is one of the three ethnic armies in the Brotherhood Alliance, which launched Operation 1027 against the Myanmar military dictator, which ousted an elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, ending a 10-year experiment with democracy and plunging the Southeast Asian nation into bloody turmoil. Armed insurgencies by the People's Defence Force (PDF) of the National Unity Government (NUG) have erupted throughout Myanmar in response to the military government's crackdown on anti-coup protests. As of February 7, 2024, at least 6,337 civilians, including children, have been killed by the junta forces and 21,000 arrested. Meanwhile, pictures and videos surfaced on social media and several other websites of the rebels, indicating that they have taken control of six towns in Rakhine State -Pauktaw, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Mrauk-U, Taungpyoetwe and Myebon - and one in Chin State, Paletwa.

The government soldiers, in retaliation, are attacking civilians in the south. The Rohingyas in the north of Rakhine State have also taken the brunt and fled from their settlement. The guards of the Rohingya settlements have long abandoned their checkpoints and the ethnic community has scattered for safety and security.

Unfortunately, the Arakan Army is equally not so kind to them. The Rohingyas forced them to flee towards the coasts of the Naf River, with advice to cross into Bangladesh. They are asked to join their relatives and neighbours living in squalid refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. Intensified patrols and vigilance of Bangladesh Border Guards (BGB) and Coast Guards have discouraged them from crossing the river, which borders Bangladesh with Myanmar. Several sources in Ukhiya in Cox's Bazar and Gumdum in Bandarban have indicated that some Rohingyas, after taking dangerous journeys through the hill forests, have trekked into the camps.

Officials working with international NGOs have confirmed the incidents of some illegal migration and have been sheltered in the camps by relatives mostly.

The NGO officials declined to be named and said they are not expecting a huge or even moderate influx of Rohingya people, as the borders are sealed.

The refugee leaders and camp leaders are reviewing the situation across the border into Rakhine State. They are in touch with scores of Rohingyas who are living in extreme difficulties. The Home boss and Chief of BGB have reiterated that they will not allow a single Rohingya to enter Bangladeshi territory under any circumstances.

UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar

On the other end of the world, Myanmar's ruling military junta has "doubled down" on civilian attacks while showing signs of becoming "increasingly desperate" by imposing military service, the UN special rapporteur UN's Tom Andrews said at Geneva on Wednesday.

"While wounded and increasingly desperate, the Myanmar military junta remains extremely dangerous," the UN's Tom Andrews said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the conscription law, the junta was trying to justify and expand its pattern of forced recruitment. The junta faces widespread armed opposition to its rule three years after seizing power from an elected civilian government and has recently suffered a series of stunning losses to an armed alliance of ethnic minority groups.

Junta Families Evacuated

On last Saturday, a naval vessel reportedly carrying family members of the junta and police personnel was seen departing from Maday Island, where the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port project is located.

Earlier, on February 15 and 16, the family members were evacuated from Ma Ei town by helicopter. Later the soldiers and police personnel were seen leaving Ma Ei police station in military vehicles. Following the Arakan Army's capture of many towns after the conflicts erupted in Ramree, Taungup and Kyaukphyu localities, the military regime relocated their family members to Kyaukphyu, Thandwe and Ann localities. Later, the officer's families were shifted to Yangon.

Sittwe Braced for Street Fight

Fighting continued in northern and southern Rakhine State since the AA launched an offensive against Myanmar's junta in mid-November last year.

The AA has seized Mrauk-U, Minbya, Kyauktaw and Pauktaw towns and Paletwa in southern Chin State, along with numerous junta bases and border outposts. Only Sittwe remains to be occupied by AA.

Global geopolitical dynamics and the emergence of IMEC: A critical analysis

In the intricate fabric of global politics, the emergence of new initiatives often heralds both promise and turbulence. As the world witnesses rapid changes and heightened competition, two titanic endeavours stand at the forefront: China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the burgeoning India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). These initiatives, laden with geopolitical significance, are reshaping the contours of international relations and economic development.

Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)
Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2023, the BRI stands as China's grandiose endeavor to revive ancient trade routes and expand its global influence. Presented as a win-win proposition, the BRI has sparked both admiration and skepticism. While China touts its benefits, concerns over debt traps and opaque financing mechanisms linger. Trade critics, the BRI has proliferated, fostering trade and cooperation agreements with a multitude of nations.

The response to the BRI has been multifaceted. While attempts like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the G7's PGI have sought to counterbalance China's sway, their impact remains limited due to fragmented initiatives and insufficient financial backing. Moreover, the BRI's darker side emerges as debt burdens weigh heavily on partner nations, casting a shadow over China's global image.

China's push for BRI 2.0

Acknowledging criticisms, China pivoted towards BRI 2.0, emphasizing transparency, environmental sustainabil-

ity, and diversified investments. This evolution reflects China's adaptability in navigating the complexities of global politics and mitigating geopolitical risks. Yet, challenges persist, particularly amidst escalating US-China rivalry and concerns over debt sustainability.

The rise of IMEC and its implications

In the wake of BRI's ascent, the IMEC emerges as a formidable response, unsettling China's hegemonic aspirations. Conceived as a strategic maneuver by the West, India, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, the IMEC seeks to counterbalance China's influence and bolster geopolitical alignments. Its vision of interconnecting Asia, the Middle East, and Europe through robust infrastructure projects reverberates with historical significance, promising economic integration and geopolitical realignments. With its ambitious scope encompassing roadways, railways, and digital infrastructure, the IMEC heralds a new epoch of connectivity and economic collaboration. Positioned as a potential counterweight to the BRI, the IMEC holds the promise of reducing political tensions, promoting economic growth, and fostering strategic alliances. However, its efficacy hinges on adept diplomacy, financial commitment, and alignment of shared interests among participating nations.

The divergence between BRI and IMEC

While both initiatives share similarities, the BRI's magnitude eclipses that of the IMEC. Moreover, the entanglement of IMEC member states within the BRI ecosystem underscores the complexities of geopolitical alignments.

Despite its potential, the IMEC's policy framework remains nebulous, lacking explicit references to countering the BRI. Financial commitments notwithstanding, the IMEC's viability hinges on navigating geopolitical fault lines and addressing concerns over China's presence in strategic sectors.

Navigating the geostrategic landscape

As the geopolitical theater unfolds, the IMEC emerges as a beacon of hope for developing nations and strategic partners seeking alternatives to the BRI. However, the road ahead is fraught with challenges, as geopolitical rivalries and economic imperatives intersect. While the US endeavors to bolster initiatives like the IMEC, China remains steadfast in safeguarding its interests and securing the trajectory of the BRI. In conclusion, the emergence of IMEC signifies a paradigm shift in global geopolitics, underscoring the multifaceted nature of international relations. As nations vie for strategic dominance and economic prosperity, the IMEC stands as a testament to collective aspirations and shared interests.

Yet, its success lies in navigating the turbulent waters of geopolitics, learning from the lessons of the BRI, and fostering inclusive cooperation on a global scale. As the world navigates through uncharted territories, the journey towards economic integration and geopolitical equilibrium continues, shaped by the interplay of interests, ideologies, and aspirations. (The author can be reached at shashankadas0007@gmail.com)



At home and outside, women are constantly made to do unpaid work

By: Shankar Gopalakrishnan and Smita Gupta

Ahead of the Lok Sabha election, the crisis of unemployment unites India as few things do. Why are important sections of India out of work? How do unemployed Indians live? Why is the work available not enough to earn a livelihood? How do Indians secure employment? How long is the wait? With India out of work, The Wire unveils a series that explores one of the most important poll issues of our time.

Nine in ten woman domestic workers are compelled to do additional, unpaid work beyond what they agreed to — work that they estimate is worth between Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 3,000 a month in lost wages.

A third of women MGNREGS workers in Uttarakhand said the work expected from them is so intense that they have to get family members to help, for which, again, there is no payment. In Tamil Nadu, nearly three quarters of women fishworkers said they were doing more work now for the same wage than when they started work. Moreover, all this unpaid labour is on top of the existing unfair burdens of unpaid care work in the home.

Unsurprisingly, more than two thirds of women workers reported that they feel exhausted every day, and in Delhi 40% of women workers say they get less than six hours of sleep. Where they are able to share the care work in their homes, they do so much more with their girl children than they do with either their spouses or their boy children.

The problem is made worse by shortcomings in public services.

For instance, not being able to access health care quickly and affordably meant that family members are often only treated when they are seriously ill — increasing the likelihood of disability and long recovery periods, which in turn imposes additional burdens on women (public health insurance schemes such as Ayushman



Bharat can help reduce hospitalisation expenditures, but do not help with illnesses that do not require hospitalisation).

Similarly, the lack of public day care for children means women workers have to either take their children with them to work or leave them with other women relatives, which also increases their care workload.

The limited supplies available from the public distribution system in most states increase prices and require women to take time out to either access rations or find cheaper supplies. The same is true of fuel, given how expensive cooking gas has become.

All of these factors were worsened by the pandemic, which simultaneously hit family incomes and increased care burdens on women. The weakness of labour law means that workers are unable to resist demands for unpaid work from employers, because they fear for their jobs and often have no effective legal recourse to protect their rights.

These are some of the findings of a study by the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, conducted across four regions of three states (Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and Delhi).

Using a survey of over 2,500 women, followed by focus group discussions and individual interviews, the study found that unpaid work is a huge burden on women workers — affecting their health and their ability to secure

their rights.

The study makes certain policy recommendations that aim to address these key problems. It calls for the expansion of anganwadis, primary health care, and public distribution of food items to reduce the care burden on women workers. The study notes that the MGNREGS, notwithstanding its shortcomings, also provided a framework for women workers to attempt to secure their rights (which was particularly evident in Tamil Nadu). Therefore, it calls for rationalisation of rates under the MGNREGS, the provision of mandatory child care under the scheme (which is already required by law, but often not implemented), redressal of other implementation issues in the MGNREGS.

To address the legal disempowerment of women workers, it recommends a labour law framework for domestic workers rights, registration boards for women workers on the lines of construction welfare boards, and an urban employment guarantee on the same lines as the MGNREGS.

Overall, while recent policies such as laws around sexual harassment and domestic violence have helped protect women in their homes and workplace, the economic and legal disempowerment of women workers has meant they continue to face unfair burdens of unpaid work. The hope is that changes in some key policies can be a start on the path to addressing this problem. (Courtesy: The Wire)

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Breastfeeding myths & facts: Busting common myths about breastfeeding

By: Shivangani Singh

Breastfeeding is not an easy journey; it is full of ups and downs. A woman is usually not used to the practice and a delay by the baby often makes the new mothers anxious. But there are various other myths around the breastfeeding journey and too much information or misconceptions can result in restlessness and overthinking among the mothers which is unwanted, unhealthy and not needed.

Problems relating to breastfeeding is common and few of them are low milk production, confusion with the diet, frequency of breastfeeding, etc. Today, we are here to tackle the myths and misconceptions and replace these with facts and truths so that you know better and are well prepared for your breastfeeding journey.

Myth 1: It is Normal For Breastfeeding to Hurt

According to WHO, many women experience discomfort in the first few days of their breastfeeding journey since they are new to it and it takes some time for them to learn the process. But if they have the right support and position their baby correctly, making sure their baby is correctly attached to the breast; the problem of sore nipples can be prevented. If you think you do everything right yet face issues regarding lactation, it's best to consult a lactation specialist.

Myth 2: You Need to Wash Your Nipples Before Breastfeeding



No, this is the wrong information and a big misconception. You don't need to wash your nipples before breastfeeding isn't necessary. When babies are born, they recognize their mothers by their smell and touch thus they are already used to the mother's smells and sounds. The nipples produce a substance that has good bacteria and is recognized by the baby due to its smell. It is only beneficial for the baby since it helps them to build babies' healthy immune system for life.

Myth 3: Breastfeeding Mothers Can't Take Medicines

There is no such thing that breastfeeding mothers can't take medicines. The main criteria is to just inform your doctor that you are breastfeeding and make sure to read the instructions on the medicines if you are buying over the counter medicines. Make sure to take medications at a specific time and in a specific dosage.

Myth 4: You Can't Breastfeed While You Are Sick

The mothers can and cannot breastfeed their child while they are sick and the answer depends on the type of sickness or disease the mothers are suffering from. Make sure to get the right treatment, eat right, and drink plenty of fluids. There are few diseases in which the antibodies produced in the mother's body is passed on to the baby thus it is better to take an advice from the doctor.

Myth 5: Many Mothers Can't Produce Enough Milk

Almost all mothers produce the right amount of milk for their babies. Breastmilk production depends on the fact that how well the baby is latched on to the breast, the frequency of breastfeeding and how well the baby is feeding on the milk while breastfeeding. During breastfeeding, mothers need support and guidance from their health care providers, help at home, and need to stay healthy by eating right and drinking more fluids.

Myth 6: Breastfeeding Mothers Should Only Eat Plain Food

There's no such thing that breastfeeding mothers need to eat plain food but yes, you need to consume a balanced diet if you are breastfeeding. No change is required in the eating habits and diet of a mother as long as it is healthy. According to WHO, babies are habituated to their mothers' food preferences from the time they are in the womb so you do not need to worry about the baby's response. (Courtesy: The Quint)

What causes high testosterone in women?

By: Jayne Leonard

Many people consider testosterone a "male" sex hormone, but females produce small amounts in the ovaries and adrenal glands. Higher testosterone levels can increase the risk of acne, body hair, and other features. They may indicate an underlying health condition.

Together with the female sex hormone estrogen, testosterone plays a role in the growth and maintenance of female reproductive tissue and bone mass. These hormones also influence behavior.

Typical testosterone levels

According to the American Urology Association, typical blood levels of testosterone in males are at least 300 nanograms per deciliter (ng/dL). Females secrete much lower levels — about one-tenth of those in males.

The level of hormones the body produces varies daily and throughout the day. However, testosterone levels are generally highest in the morning.

Symptoms of high testosterone in females

Testosterone imbalances in females can affect their physical appearance and overall health.

Symptoms of high testosterone in females include:

- acne
- deep voice
- excess hair on the face and body
- irregular periods
- larger than average clitoris
- reduction in breast size
- thinning hair
- deep voice
- increased muscle mass

Severely high levels of testosterone in females can cause infertility.

Causes of high testosterone in females

High testosterone in females is usually due to an underlying medical condition, such as:

Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH)

CAH is the term that refers to a group of inherited disorders that affect the adrenal glands. These glands secrete the hormones cortisol and aldosterone, which play a role in managing metabolism and blood pressure.

The adrenal glands also produce the male sex hormones dehydroepiandrosterone and testosterone.

People with CAH lack one of the enzymes necessary to regulate the production of these hormones, so they secrete too little cortisol and too much testosterone.

CAH may be mild, which is non-classic CAH, or severe, which is classic CAH.

Symptoms in females include:

- deep voice
- early appearance of pubic hair
- enlarged clitoris
- excess body hair
- facial hair
- irregular or absent menstrual periods
- severe acne
- shorter height as an adult after rapid childhood growth

While there is no cure for CAH, most people with the condition can receive treatment that will reduce symptoms and improve their quality of life.

Hirsutism

Hirsutism involves unwanted hair growth in females. It is a hormonal condition that healthcare professionals believe has links to genetics.

Symptoms include male-pattern hair growth that is dark and coarse. It typically affects the:

- lower back
- chest
- face

In cases of excessively high testosterone, other symptoms will also be present, including:

- acne
- balding
- deepening voice
- enlarged clitoris

- increased muscle mass
- reduced breast size

Home remedies and medical treatments help many people control the symptoms of hirsutism.

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

PCOS is a common hormonal disorder that affects females of reproductive age. Health experts estimate that PCOS affects 6–12% of United States females.

People do not usually receive a diagnosis until they are in their 20s and 30s. However, the condition can affect children as young as 11 years old.

Symptoms of PCOS include:

- weight gain
- difficulty getting pregnant
- acne or oily skin

PCOS may lead to several health complications, including:

- depression
- heart disease
- infertility
- miscarriage
- obesity
- sleep apnea
- type 2 diabetes

Doctors do not know what causes

PCOS, although excess insulin and genetics may play a role.

Diagnosis of high testosterone in females

A doctor can diagnose high testosterone in females

according to the following.

Physical examination

During a physical examination, the doctor will look for symptoms such as:

- acne
- excess body hair
- facial hair growth

They will also inquire about menstrual cycle abnormalities and attempts at pregnancy.

If doctors suspect PCOS, they may visually and manually examine the pelvic region to look for abnormalities.

Blood test

If symptoms suggest high testosterone levels, the doctor will take a blood sample and test hormone levels. They may also check glucose and cholesterol levels.

Usually, a healthcare professional will take a person's blood sample in the morning when testosterone levels are highest.

Ultrasound

To check for PCOS, the doctor may perform an ultrasound of the ovaries and uterus.

Treatment of high testosterone in females

The recommended treatment for high testosterone will depend on its underlying cause.

Typically, a doctor will recommend both lifestyle changes and medication. Doctors may also use some treatments to control unwanted hair.

Medication

High testosterone and associated conditions are treatable with the following medications:

Eflornithine: This is a cream that a person applies directly to the skin that slows the growth of new facial hair.

Glucocorticosteroids: This is a type of steroid hormone that doctors recommend if there is evidence of inadequate steroid production by the adrenal glands. It regulates metabolism and immune response.

Metformin: This is a treatment for type 2 diabetes, which doctors sometimes use to decrease insulin resistance and address metabolic abnormalities in people with PCOS.

Progesterin: This is a hormone that may regulate periods and improve fertility.

Spiroglactone: This is a diuretic that helps balance water and salt levels and reduces excessive female hair growth.

Doctors may also prescribe oral contraceptives, as this treatment helps block excess testosterone.

According to a 2019 review, pairing oral contraceptives that contain estrogen and progestin with antiandrogens and metformin may be most effective for the treatment of hirsutism.

However, oral contraceptives may be unsuitable for people trying to get pregnant. They can also cause adverse side effects.

Hair removal treatments

Both electrolysis and laser therapy may help control unwanted hair. However, these treatments will not resolve an underlying hormonal imbalance.

Electrolysis: This involves inserting a tiny needle into each hair follicle. A pulse of electric current travels through the needle and damages the follicle so that it cannot grow new hair. Multiple treatments may be necessary.

Laser therapy: During this treatment,

a healthcare professional applies a laser to the hair follicles to damage them. Multiple treatments may be necessary.

These hair removal treatments

can cause adverse reactions and may have other associated risks.

Anyone with a hormonal imbalance needs to speak with a doctor before trying medical treatments for excess hair growth.

Lifestyle changes

Some lifestyle changes can reduce high testosterone in females, while others simply manage symptoms.

Here are a few lifestyle changes that may be beneficial:

Reach and maintain a moderate weight: Some research shows that losing even 5–10% of body weight can improve fertility, help balance menstrual cycles, and reduce symptoms in people with PCOS.

Follow a balanced diet: A person can improve symptoms of PCOS by following a nutritious, well-rounded diet and limiting their intake of foods high in sugar, refined carbs, saturated fat, and trans fat.

Manage unwanted hair growth: A person can choose to treat their facial and body hair growth by plucking, shaving, waxing, or using chemical depilatories. Others bleach their hair to make it less visible.

What happens if testosterone is high in females?

Some symptoms of high testosterone in females include:

- acne
- deep voice
- excess hair on the face and body
- increased muscle mass
- irregular periods
- a larger than average clitoris

Why would a woman's testosterone be high?

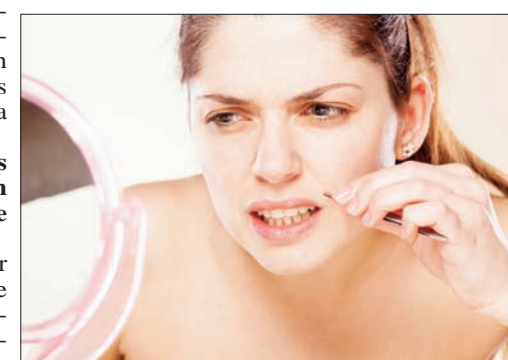
A woman's testosterone levels may be high due to congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) or polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

Summary

High testosterone in females can cause a range of symptoms, from excess facial hair to infertility. It is usually due to an underlying medical condition.

Treating the underlying disorder will often reduce symptoms and improve a person's quality of life.

People who are or think they may be experiencing high testosterone symptoms should consult a doctor to determine the cause and determine the best course of treatment. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)



Spring skin & hair care & make-up

By: Shahnaz Husain

Ready to feel all fresh-faced and fabulous this spring? After months of snow, slush, and frigid temperatures, spring is finally on the horizon.

Spring is a time of renewal: birds chirping, flowers blooming, and your skin emerging from a cocoon of intensive winter moisturizer and chapstick.

With the change from winter to spring, our skin is exposed less to cold, dry air and more to higher moisture levels in the air.

As we make a shift from cosy sweaters to cool tees, it's time to update your skincare routine because what worked in winter might be different from what works now.

Not sure where to start? Follow these expert tips. If the skin is very dry, with rough reddish patches, avoid applying soap. Instead, use a cleanser morning and night. Apart from daily cleansing, give the skin some nourishment. As a home reme-

edy, you can try applying a little sesame seed (til) oil and pat the skin with a hot moist towel. Or, you one can apply a little milk, with a few drops of honey, leave it on for 10 to 15 minutes and wash off with water. These treatments are especially good for normal to dry skins.

If you have oily skin, add one teaspoon of pure glycerin to 50 ml rose water. Put it in a bottle and shake well. Apply this on the face. You will find that glycerin and rose water provide enough moisture to the skin.

The coming of spring often brings problems for people with allergies, including skin problems like itchy, rashy or inflamed skin. Sandalwood is an ideal ingredient for such conditions. Sandalwood paste can easily be applied on the skin to soothe inflammatory conditions. It also helps to relieve itching. However, if there is excessive itching, it is best to consult a doctor.

Here are some home remedies:

Mix sandalwood with a little rose water and apply on the face. Wash off with plain water after 20 to 30 minutes.

Simmer a handful of neem leaves on a very low fire in 4 cups of water for one hour. Leave it overnight. Next morning, strain the water and make a paste of the leaves. Apply it on inflamed and rashy areas. The water can be used for rinsing the area. Neem contains organic sulphur compounds, with versatile healing actions that are of particular benefit to the skin.

Add a pinch of turmeric to milk and apply on the face. Wash off after 15 minutes.

Clays like fuller's earth (multani mitti) have a cooling and soothing effect. Mix one tablespoon Fuller's Earth with rose water. Apply the paste on affected areas and wash it off after 15 to 20 minutes.

Spring Hair Care

During winter the hair becomes dull and dry. For spring hair care, heat pure coconut oil and apply once a week. Re-

member to apply on the ends too. Leave it overnight and wash the next day. Applying curd or egg on the hair 15 minutes before shampoo helps to add body to fine hair. A beer rinse after shampoo also helps to add body.

After shampoo, apply a creamy conditioner, taking less quantity and massaging it lightly into the hair. Leave on for two minutes and rinse off. Or apply a "leave-on" type of conditioner or hair serum.

Or, mix some water with creamy hair conditioner and put it in a spray bottle. Spray the mixture on the hair. Then comb the hair, so that it spreads throughout the hair.

Here are some home remedies for dry hair:

Take two teaspoons of pure glycerine, one tablespoon sesame seed (til) oil and one egg yolk. Mix together and apply on the scalp and hair. Apply on the ends too. Wear a plastic shower cap and leave on for an hour before washing the hair.

Curd or egg yolk can be applied on the hair for conditioning dry hair. Apply and leave it on for half an hour, before washing the hair.

Spring Make-up

In keeping with the spring season, the make-up should be one that is fresh and youthful. Try to achieve a more natural look. Yellow and green are the main colours of spring. For clothes, colours like leaf green, olive green, lime green, lemon, yellow, cream, light brown, pink, mauve, turquoise blue, light blue would be suitable. Floral prints, checks and dots look pretty, or you can use lace or light embroidery on your clothes.

For makeup, leave out foundation, if the skin is clear. Apply a light liquid moisturizer and a touch of baby powder for a translucent look. Or, use compact powder. For the night, a light, liquid foundation would be appropriate. If the skin is too dry, use a creamy one.

When you apply make-up, re-

member not to smear too much or rub it. Whether it is foundation or blusher, it is best to do it with a light touch, using a finger tip, or an applicator. It can also be applied lightly and evenly with a damp sponge.

If you wish to cover a pimple or spot, it should be done before applying foundation or powder. Concealing sticks are available for this. Using a thin brush, paint over the spot with a little concealer, or a shade lighter you're your normal foundation. Then, apply a little powder.

For the natural look, use lip gloss, instead of lipstick, during the day. At night, you need more colour. Applying lipstick with a lip brush helps it to last longer. The lip colours for spring can be light brown, rose, mauve and pink for the day, while bronze, coral, copper, burgundy and even red would look good for the night.

Apply a hint of lip gloss after applying lipstick. This gives a fresh and youthful look.

A hint of blusher should be

used on the cheeks. A powder blusher is easier to apply. Use it after you have applied powder and at the end of your make-up. Apply on the cheekbones and blend it outwards and slightly upwards.

Exercising regularly is great for your overall health and skin. It gets the blood circulation going and helps flush out the toxins ruining your plans of getting beautiful skin. When you sweat, you expel dirt and grime from our pores, making the skin moist and hydrated.

Applying eye cream at night is investing for future good skin. The skin under the eyes is extremely thin and your regular moisturizer might not work. Use an eye cream to hydrate the skin under your eyes and promote younger-looking skin.

Perfume is also a part of make-up. During spring, use light floral perfumes. A cologne would be ideal during the day. (The author is international fame beauty expert and is called *Herbal Queen of India*)

There was no immediate Israeli reaction to Biden's comments Israel is ready to halt its war in Gaza during Ramadan if a hostage deal is reached, Biden says



TELAVIV, Feb 27: United States President Joe Biden said Israel would be willing to halt its war on Hamas in Gaza during the upcoming Muslim fasting month of Ramadan if a deal is reached to release some of the hostages held by the militants. Negotiators from the US, Egypt and Qatar are working on a framework deal under which Hamas would free some of the dozens of hostages it holds, in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners and a six-week halt in fighting. During the temporary pause, negotiations would continue over the release of the remaining hostages. There was no immediate Israeli reaction to Biden's comments, released for publication early on Tuesday. The start of Ramadan, around March 10, is seen as an unofficial deadline for a cease-fire deal. The month is a time of heightened religious observance and dawn-to-dusk fasting for hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world. Biden said Monday that he hopes a cease-fire deal could take effect by next week. During a pause, negotiations would continue over the release of the remaining hostages and the release of additional Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. "Ramadan's coming up and there has been an agreement by the Israelis that they would not engage in activities during Ramadan as well, in order to give us time to get all the hostages out," Biden said in an appearance on NBC's "Late Night With Seth Meyers." At the same time, Biden did not call for an end to the war, which was triggered by the deadly Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7. He left open the door to an eventual Israeli

ground offensive in the city of Rafah in southern Gaza, on the border with Egypt, where more than half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has fled under Israeli evacuation orders. The prospect of an invasion of Rafah has prompted global alarm over the fate of Gaza civilians trapped there. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said a ground operation in Rafah is an inevitable component of Israel's strategy for crushing Hamas. Biden said Monday that he believes Israel has slowed its bombardment of Rafah. "They have to and they have made a commitment to me that they're going to see to it that there's an ability to evacuate significant portions of Rafah before they go and take out the remainder Hamas ... but it's a process," he said. (AP)

Addressing the summit via video, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy emphasized the need to increase joint production of weapons and ammunition, improve Ukrainian air defenses and put pressure on Russia via sanctions and confiscation of assets. "We have to prove that we can deprive Russia of its advantage in the sky, in financing aggression, and in the political sphere. This is the task of the year," Zelenskyy said. U.S. President Joe Biden was also seeking to remove political roadblocks on providing more aid to Ukraine, convening the top four congressional leaders at the White House on Tuesday. In other developments, Moscow-installed officials in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region claimed that Russian troops had destroyed a U.S.-made Abrams tank for the first time since they were deployed in Ukraine last fall, RIA Novosti reported. A drone strike on the Russian city of Belgorod near the Ukraine border killed three people and wounded three more, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said Monday evening. Russia launched seven missiles of various types and 14 Shahed drones over Ukraine early Monday morning. Ukraine's Air Force said it intercepted nine drones and three missiles. A guided aerial bomb killed a married couple at home in the northeastern Sudy region of Ukraine, regional authorities said. Also on Monday, Zelenskyy marked the Day of Resistance to the Occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol. The annual holiday commemorates a 2014 demonstration by thousands of Crimean Tatars against the Russian occupation of Crimea. (AP)

Peru has declared a health emergency in most of its provinces as dengue cases soar

LIMA, Feb 27: Peru declared a health emergency in most of its provinces on Monday due to a growing number of dengue cases that are occurring at a time of higher than usual temperatures caused by the El Nino weather pattern. According to the nation's health ministry, the number of dengue cases registered during the first seven weeks of this year is twice as high as during the same period in 2023 - with more than 31,000 cases recorded. "This is a grave problem," health minister Cesar Vásquez said last week, before the emergency was declared. "And it is getting out of hand."

The health emergency will enable the nation's government to transfer funds faster to the affected regions and also transport doctors and nurses. It will cover 20 of the country's 24 provinces, including regions that surround the capital city of Lima. A dengue epidemic last year put Peru's public health system under strain as thousands sought care in emergency rooms. The disease is spread by Aedes Egypti, a mosquito that reproduces in hot and humid conditions. Although most dengue cases present light symptoms, the disease can cause severe headaches, fevers and muscle pains. Last year, a dengue epidemic in Peru killed 18 people, while in the first two months of this year 32 Peruvians have died from the virus. In December, the World Health Organization said that Peru's 2023 dengue epidemic was linked to rains and hot temperatures that helped mosquito populations to grow, especially in the north of the country. (AP)

Putting Western troops on the ground in Ukraine is not 'ruled out' in the future, French leader says

PARIS, Feb 27: French President Emmanuel Macron said on Monday that sending Western troops on the ground in Ukraine is not "ruled out" in the future after the issue was debated at a gathering of European leaders in Paris, as Russia's full-scale invasion grinds into a third year. The French leader said that "we will do everything needed so Russia cannot win the war" after the meeting of over 20 European heads of state and government and other Western officials. "There's no consensus today to send in an official, endorsed manner troops on the ground. But in terms of dynamics, nothing can be ruled out," Macron said in a news conference at the Elysee presidential palace. Macron declined to provide details about which nations were considering sending troops, saying he prefers to maintain some "strategic ambiguity."

"In recent months particularly, we have seen Russia getting tougher," Macron said. Macron cited the need to solidify security to head off any Russian attacks on additional countries in the future. Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia as well as much larger Poland have been considered among possible targets of future Russian expansionism. All four countries are staunch supporters of Ukraine. Estonia's foreign minister said earlier this month that NATO has about three or four years to strengthen its defenses. In video speech, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on the leaders gathered in Paris to "ensure that Putin cannot destroy our achievements and cannot expand his aggression to other nations."



Several European countries, including France, expressed their support for an initiative launched by the Czech Republic to buy ammunition and shells outside the EU, participants to the meeting said. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said his country decided to provide over 100 million euros for that purpose. In addition, a new coalition is to be launched to further "mobilize" nations with capabilities to deliver medium and long-range missiles, Macron said, as France announced last month the delivery of 40 additional long-range Scalp cruise missiles. European nations are worried that the U.S. will dial back support as aid for Kyiv is teetering in Congress. They also have concerns that former U.S. President Donald Trump might return to the White House and change the course of U.S. policy on the continent. The Paris conference comes after France, Germany and the U.K. recently signed 10-year bilateral agreements with Ukraine to send a strong signal of long-term backing as Kyiv works to shore up Western support. (AP)

The meeting included German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Poland's President Andrzej Duda as well as leaders from the Baltic nations. The United States was represented by its top diplomat for Europe, James O'Brien, and the U.K. by Foreign Secretary David Cameron. Duda said the most heated discussion was about whether to send troops to Ukraine and "there was no agreement on the matter. Opinions differ here, but there are no such decisions." Poland's president said he hopes that "in the nearest future, we will jointly be able to prepare substantial shipments of ammunition to Ukraine. This is most important now. This is something that Ukraine really needs." Macron earlier called on European leaders to ensure the continent's "collective security" by providing unwavering support to Ukraine in the face of tougher Russian offensives on the battlefield in recent months.

Ukrainian troops pull back again as Russia's onslaught pushes ahead in eastern Ukraine

KYIV, Feb 27: Ukrainian troops have pulled out of a village in the east of the country, an army spokesman said on Monday, as Russian forces display advantages in manpower and ammunition on the battlefield at the start of the war's third year. The latest setback for Kyiv's soldiers was in the village of Lastochkyne, where they fell back to nearby villages in an attempt to hold the line there. Dmytro Lykhovii, a spokesman for one of the Ukrainian troop groupings, said on national television. Lastochkyne lies to the west of Avdiivka, a suburb of Donetsk city that the Kremlin's forces captured on Feb. 18 after a four-month battle. The outnumbered defenders were overwhelmed by Moscow's military might, and Ukraine chose to pull out its troops and mount a defense elsewhere. Russian state-owned news agency RIA Novosti quoted local commander Andrei Mordvichev as saying troops had pushed Ukrainian forces back by 10 kilometers (6 miles) and were continuing with their offensive. The agency said a key Ukrainian supply route ran through Lastochkyne. It was not possible to independently verify each side's claims. Though not in itself a major loss, abandoning the village illustrates the battlefield challenges Ukraine is currently facing. The new phase of the war has brought some bleak developments for Ukraine. Moscow's troops are driving on, smashing towns and cities with their superior firepower, despite suffering high losses of troops and equipment, Ukraine says.



Western analysts say the Russians are attacking in strength along four parallel axes in the northeast, aiming to press deeper into the Ukraine-held western part of the Donetsk region and also penetrating into the Kharkiv region north of it. Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustan Umerov complained Sunday that half of promised Western military support to Ukraine fails to arrive on time. That, he said, makes it hard to undertake proper military planning and ultimately costs the lives of soldiers. Western leaders have sworn to stand by Ukraine as long as they need to defeat Russia's full-scale invasion of Feb. 24, 2022, and Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikolay Denkov arrived in Kyiv on Monday to show his support. More than 20 European heads of state and government and other Western officials were due to meet in Paris on Monday to discuss the war at what French President Emmanuel Macron called a "critical" juncture. He says Kyiv needs more military resources and likely will require them over an extended period of time.

Hungary's parliament ratifies Sweden's NATO bid, clearing the final obstacle to membership

BUDAPEST, Feb 27: Hungary's parliament voted on Monday to ratify Sweden's bid to join NATO, ending more than 18 months of delays that frustrated the alliance as it sought to expand in response to Russia's war in Ukraine. The vote, which passed with 188 votes for and six against, was the culmination of months of wrangling by Hungary's allies to convince its nationalist government to lift its block on Sweden's membership. The government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán submitted the protocols for approving Sweden's entry into NATO in July 2022, but the matter stalled in parliament over opposition by governing party lawmakers. Hungary's decision paved the way for the second expansion of NATO's ranks in a year after both Sweden and Finland applied to join the alliance in May 2022 following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine — an assault that was purportedly intended to prevent further NATO expansion. Unanimous support among NATO members is required to admit new countries, and Hungary was the last of the alliance's 31 members

to give its backing since Turkey ratified the request last month. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said his country was "now leaving 200 years of neutrality and nonalignment behind us." "It is a big step, we must take that seriously. But it is also a very natural step that we are taking. NATO membership means that we've found a new home within a large number of democracies which work together for peace and freedom," he told a news conference in Stockholm. Orbán, a right-wing populist who has forged close ties with Russia, has said that criticism of Hungary's democracy by Swedish politicians soured relations between the two countries and led to reluctance among lawmakers in his Fidesz party. But addressing lawmakers before the vote, Orbán said: "Sweden and Hungary's military cooperation and Sweden's NATO accession strengthen Hungary's security." NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told The Associated Press that the vote "makes NATO stronger, Sweden safer and all of us



more secure." Stoltenberg said Sweden brings with it capable armed forces and a first-class defense industry, and it is spending at least 2% of national gross domestic product on defense, which is NATO's target level. The vote "also demonstrates that NATO's door is open" and that Russian President Vladimir Putin "did not succeed in his attempt to close NATO's door," he said. On Monday, Orbán criticized Hungary's European Union and NATO allies for pressuring his government in recent months to move forward on Sweden's request to be part of the alliance.

"Hungary is a sovereign country. It does not tolerate being dictated by others, whether it be the content of its decisions or their timing," he said. Last weekend, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators visited Hungary and announced it would submit a joint resolution to Congress condemning Hungary's alleged democratic backsliding and urging Orbán's government to allow Sweden into NATO. A presidential signature, which is needed to formally endorse the approval of Sweden's NATO bid, was expected within a few days. In the U.S., White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre urged the Hungarian government to quickly complete the process of bringing Sweden into the alliance. "Having Sweden as a NATO ally will make the United States even safer," she said, speaking aboard Air Force One as President Joe Biden flew to New York for an appearance. Kristersson, Sweden's prime minister, met last week with Orbán in Hungary's capital, where they appeared to reach a decisive reconciliation after months of diplomatic tensions. (AP)

Most UN Security Council members demand Taliban rescind decrees seriously oppressing women and girls

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 27: More than two-thirds of the U.N. Security Council's members demanded on Monday that the Taliban rescind all policies and decrees oppressing and discriminating against women and girls, including banning girls' education above the sixth grade and women's right to work and move freely. A statement by 11 of the 15 council members condemned the Taliban's repression of women and girls since they took power in August 2021, and again insisted on their equal participation in public, political, economic, cultural and social life -- especially at all decision-making levels seeking to advance international engagement with Afghanistan's de facto rulers. Guyana's U.N. Ambassador Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett read the statement, surrounded by ambassadors of the 10 other countries, before a closed council meeting on U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' conference with more than 25 envoys to Afghanistan on Feb. 18-19 in Qatar's capital, Doha. Afghan civil society representatives, including women, participated in the Doha meeting, which the council members welcomed. The Taliban refused to attend, its Foreign Ministry saying in a statement that its participation would be "beneficial" only if it was the sole and official representative for the country at the talks. While the Taliban did not attend the meetings, U.N. political chief Rosemary DiCarlo did meet with Taliban officials based in Doha, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric



said. DiCarlo also briefed council members on Monday's closed meeting. The Taliban have not been recognized by any country, and the U.N. envoy for Afghanistan last year warned the de facto rulers that international recognition as the country's legitimate government will remain "nearly impossible" unless they lift the restrictions on women. The 11 council nations supporting the statement -- Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, South Korea, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States -- underscored that there can only be sustainable peace in Afghanistan if its political process is inclusive and the human rights of all Afghans are respected including women and girls. Four Security Council nations didn't sign on to the statement -- Russia, China, Mozam-

bique and Algeria. The Taliban refused to attend the Doha meeting. A Foreign Ministry statement said participation would only be beneficial if the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, as the Taliban call their administration, are the sole and official representative for the country at the talks. Secretary-General Guterres told reporters in Doha that among participants -- also including representatives of the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization -- there was "total consensus" on requirements for Afghanistan to be integrated into the international community. To reach this "endgame," he said, Afghanistan must not be "the hotbed of terrorist activities that impact other countries,"

its institutions must include diverse groups including Uzbeks, Tajiks, Pashtuns and Hazaras, and human rights must be respected especially the rights of women and girls. Guterres said to a certain extent there is currently "a kind of situation of the chicken and the egg." "On one hand, Afghanistan remains with a government that is not recognized internationally and, in many aspects, not integrated in the global institutions and in the global economy," he said. "And on the other hand, there is in the international community a perception that inclusivity has not improved; that the situation of women and girls and human rights in general has in fact deteriorated in recent times." The secretary-general said one objective of the meeting with the envoys was "to overcome this deadlock" and develop a roadmap in which the international community's concerns and the Taliban's concerns are "taken into account simultaneously." A Security Council resolution asked Guterres to appoint a U.N. envoy after consultations with all parties, member states, the Taliban and others. Guterres said the participants decided he should initiate consultations "to see if there are conditions to create a U.N. envoy that might be able not only to have a coordinating role in relation to the engagements that are taking place but that can also work effectively with the de facto authorities of Afghanistan." "I will initiate immediately those consultations," the U.N. chief said. (AP)

Imran Khan's party to call 'parallel' Punjab Assembly session to elect CM, Speaker: Report

LAHORE, Feb 27: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party plans to call a "parallel" Punjab Assembly session to elect the chief minister, speaker and deputy speaker, claiming that newly-elected chief minister Maryam Nawaz was in the House on "a stolen mandate", a media report said on Tuesday. Maryam, the 50-year-old senior vice president of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, made history by becoming the first-ever woman chief minister of Pakistan's most populous Punjab province after receiving 220 votes. She defeated Rana Aftab of 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), who received no votes as his party boycotted the election. Former-cricketer-turned-politician Khan's PTI party made a call for a "parallel" Punjab Assembly on Monday after claiming a strength of 250 members, including reserved seats for women and minorities, the Dawn newspaper reported. To win the chief minister's election, a candidate needs to win the backing of the majority, which is 187 members in the House that currently has 327 seats. Addressing a press conference, PTT's central leader, Shaukat

Basra, claimed that more than half of the elected Punjab Assembly members, including the newly elected chief minister Maryam, were in the House on "a stolen mandate". He claimed that Maryam was defeated by a PTI-backed candidate, Mehr Sharafat, in Lahore's PP-159 constituency, according to the report. Asserting that the results were rigged to ensure the new Punjab chief minister's victory, Basra said that Maryam "won the election on February 9 instead of February 8". "PML-N leaders used to say they struck a deal with powers that be, but they failed to strike a deal with the people of Pakistan," he said. "This rigged election will result in anarchy," the PTI leader said. Claiming that the establishment was still requesting PTI founder Khan to become prime minister, Basra said, "But Mr Khan is determined that the establishment should ensure the mandate given by the people of Pakistan to PTI-backed candidates be returned," he said. Separately, the party criticised Maryam's election as the chief minister of the politically crucial Punjab province and said all democratic and constitutional norms were trampled to elect her. (PTI)

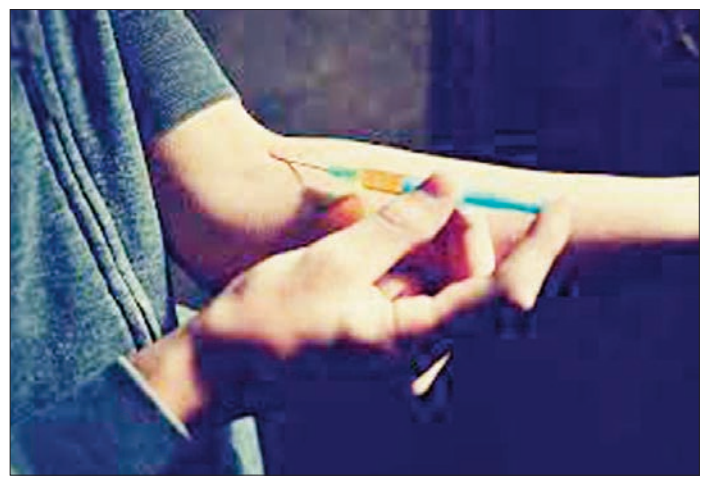
1,100 youths identified as intravenous drug users in the state

Tripura CM expresses concern over intravenous drug abuse among students

AGARTALA, Feb 27: Expressing concern over the rising use of injection drugs among school students, Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Tuesday urged parents to keep a close watch on their children.

Addressing a programme in Gomati district, he alleged cultivation of ganja shot up during the CPI(M)-led Left Front's rule, and people came to know about it after the regime changed.

"Intravenous drug abuse has become a disastrous thing with around 1,100 school students and young persons identified as those injecting drugs in the state. As everybody knows drugs are coming from Myan-



mar via Mizoram and Assam," he said.

"There is a need to pay serious attention to the growing

menace. As you know Tripura is the second highest after Assam in the Northeast when it comes to seizure and destruction of drugs," he said, urging parents to keep a close watch on their children.

Saha said a huge quantity of ganja was earlier smuggled out of the state and it was not known to the people till 2018.

"It is well known now that ganja cultivation had become an alternative to traditional crops. Now, the government agencies are working relentlessly to make Tripura a drug-free state," he said.

Saha said de-addiction centres will be set up in all eight districts of the state. (PTI)

Arms, ammunition recovered in East Imphal district



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Arms and ammunition have been recovered from Sabungkhok Khunao-Chanung Heights in Imphal East district in Nagaland.

Acting on specific intelligence, the Indian army, Assam Rifles and Manipur police conducted a joint search operation at the Sabungkhok Khunao-Chanung Heights in Imphal East on Monday. During the search, one 12-bore single barrel gun, three improvised mortars, one 9mm pistol, three grenades and ammunition were recovered.

The recovered items have been handed over to the Manipur police. However, no one has been arrested in this connection.

Army distributes sports items worth ₹ 5 lakhs among students

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: The Indian Army has distributed sports items worth ₹ 5 Lakh among students of the Government Middle School in the Vishwema village in Kohima district in Nagaland.

Army personnel distributed the sports items among students as part of 'Operation Sadbhavna' scheme, which aims at promoting sports and fitness among the youths.

The distribution of sports items is in accordance with Army's ongoing efforts to engage with the local community, specially the youth and supporting initiatives that contribute to the overall well-being of the youths to make them physically and mentally resilient individuals, who are equipped to face the different challenges of life.

The local community, meanwhile, appreciated the efforts of the Indian army.

Opposition stages walkout in Manipur Assembly

SHILLONG, Feb 27: The Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly on Tuesday staged a walkout as a mark of protest against voting on demand for grants before the finance minister's reply on the budget discussion.

Raising a point of order during the last day of the budget session, opposition Congress legislator from Umsning, Celestine Lyngdoh said the statement of the chief minister Conrad K Sangma, who is also in charge of finance, that voting on demand for grants that was done on February 24 was for supplementary demand is absolutely wrong since the supplementary demands were done on February 21.

"If we say voting for demand for grants can be done before the finance minister's reply then his reply at the end of the budget discussion becomes redundant," he said while adding, "I want this House to follow the rules. If the House is not following the rules, what is the point for us to sit here and listen."

"If they have voted for the main budget for this year February 24 then we have crossed beyond the provisions of the rules," he further stated.

Lyngdoh's raising the point of order was supported by the All India Trinamool Congress (or TMC) and Voice of the People Party (VPP).

Giving his ruling, speaker Thomas A Sangma said, "It was not my intention to say this House has wasted its time. Actually because of the time constraint as time is limited so I ask not to say unnecessary things and to come straight to the point. However, I stand corrected and the words wasting of time will be expunged."

"However, to the second issue the calendar has been finalised in the BAC that has been placed in the House on the first day when the house sat for business on February 16 and it was approved by this House. As per rule, suspension of the rules can be moved by the parliamentary affairs but, as I have already given the ruling, it is final," he stated.



Not satisfied with the ruling of the Speaker, members of the three opposition political parties staged a walkout in protest against failure of the government to rectify the mistake.

"The ruling is not very clear, we are not satisfied so the opposition members have no role to sit here and waste their time (since) the reply of the finance minister is redundant," Lyngdoh said while leading the members out of the House. Defending the treasury bench, deputy chief minister in-charge parliamentary affairs Prestone Tynsong said, "Your (Speaker) ruling is very clear. First day itself we have placed this (calendar) in the BAC and the House has agreed."

When Mukul Sangma, while standing to join the rest of the opposition members stated that the walkout was as a token of protest and disapproval, Tynsong said, "Then the opposition is making a fool of themselves. This calendar has been approved by the house on the first day of the session. How can we again go back?"

Terming the opposition's action as unfortunate, chief minister Conrad K Sangma said the opposition members are making issues out of something where they

themselves were part of the decision when the House accepted the calendar proposed by the BAC.

He also accused the opposition members of not wanting to listen to his reply on the budget discussion after seeing the kind of work that is happening in the state.

"From what I understand they are finding reasons not to be here to listen to the reply, which is unfortunate as I said these are very important matters. A budget speech and reply would be focusing on many aspects nonetheless it is their decision and the entire state is watching," the CM stated.

Earlier while supporting the issue, former chief minister Mukul Sangma said, "We need to correct things. I think correcting things is very crucial otherwise what is wrong will be considered as right and what is abnormal will be considered as normal which is dangerous and should not be a precedent."

Echoing similar concern, VPP legislator from Nongkrem Ardent M Basaiawmoit said, "We expect that there will be a cooperation from all stakeholders so that we can maintain the highest decorum...we expect that the chair would admit its mistake and ensure this will not happen in the future." (NNN)

Mizoram CM presents ₹ 14,412-crore budget for 2024-25

AIZWAL, Feb 27: Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday presented the first annual budget of the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government, announcing a total outlay of ₹ 14,412.12 crore for the fiscal 2024-25.

The outlay is ₹ 202.17 crore higher than the budget estimate of 2023-24. The chief minister presented the supplementary demands for grants for the current fiscal, too, amounting to ₹ 3,287.93 crore.

Lalduhoma, who also holds the finance portfolio, said 2024-25 will be a year of consolidation and



the priority will be to improve the state's fiscal health. "Strategic action will be taken

to reduce our fiscal deficit and curb debt accumulation through prudent management of public finance," he said.

The public debt is estimated to fall by ₹ 697.69 crore, Lalduhoma said.

"The government will focus on projects, which are fully funded by the Centre, as it will be incapable to take up projects from the state's funds during the year of consolidation," Lalduhoma told a press conference after presenting the budget.

There was no proposal for levying new taxes in the budget. (PTI)

COCOMI urges PM to end SoO truce with Kuki militant groups

IMPHAL, Feb 27: Coordination Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) through a memorandum has urged the central government not to extend the tripartite Suspension of Operation (SoO) terms with Kuki based militant groups.

As many as 24 Kuki based militant groups under the banner of Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF) are under SoO truce with the Indian government and Manipur government.

The agreement, which was signed in 2008, has been extended from time to time and the last term is due to expire by February 28 this year.

The COCOMI submitted the memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi through his office at New Delhi on Monday.

In the memorandum, COCOMI urged the Prime Minister to "exercise extreme caution" and "refrain from hastily extending" the SoO agreement with Kuki militant groups.

It alleged the armed groups were violating the ground rules repeatedly and flagrantly without thorough scrutiny and reassessment.

There was hard evidence of involvement of the groups under SoO in targeted attacks against Indian Army and state police personnel, it alleged while adding that the progress in the peace process remains elusive despite the numerous extensions since 2008.

"As the expiry date of the SoO pact with Chin-Kuki narco-terrorist groups approaches on February 28, 2024, we are compelled to ex-



press our deep concerns. Despite numerous extensions since 2008 under the guise of political dialogue, progress in the peace process remains elusive," the COCOMI stated in the memorandum.

The repeated and flagrant violations of the ground rules of the truce exacerbated the already volatile situation in Manipur, it added.

It further alleged that the violation of the ground rules by SoO groups behind the recent escalations of violence in Manipur.

"This reality underscores the urgent need for caution and re-evaluation of any decisions regarding the extension of the SoO agreement," it added.

The numerous instances of SoO ground rules violations presented a compelling justification for the demand to abrogate the SoO agreement, the COCOMI also said in the memorandum.

"These breaches not only demonstrate a flagrant disregard for the terms of the agreement, but also pose a significant threat to peace and stability in the region," it asserted.

While alleging that the cadres of the militant groups under SoO are continuously engaging in criminal activities including attacks on civilians, involvement in the narcotics trade and flouting of Indian citizenship laws, the COCOMI stated that it undermined the integrity of the agreement and erodes trust in the peace process.

COCOMI further urged the Prime Minister to take immediate and decisive action to address SoO ground rule violations and illegal activities perpetrated by "Chin-Kuki narco-terrorist groups".

Furthermore, it implored the central government to prioritize the safety and security of the indigenous people of the state above all other considerations in any decision-making process, the COCOMI added in the memorandum.

The memorandum signed by COCOMI coordinator Somerendo Thokchom was submitted by a three-member team, including its spokesperson Khurajiam Athouba, through the PMO in New Delhi on Monday. (NNN)

5 killed as car plunges into gorge in Arunachal's Upper Subansiri

ITANAGAR, Feb 27: Five members of a family were killed as their car plunged into a gorge in Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Subansiri district on Tuesday, police said.

A child was also among those injured in the accident that occurred in the Bopi Godak circle near Daporijo town, they said.

The car, which was being driven by Jarki Paksok, skidded off the road and fell into the deep gorge, they added.

The vehicle was escorting an ambulance carrying a patient, who had been referred to the Tomo Riba Institute of Health and Medical Sciences in Naharlagun for treatment.

Besides the driver, the others killed in the accident were identified as Tator Pakmen, Linya Yudik, Tajum Nuk and Beto Marde, police said.

Three-year-old Libo Paksok is at present undergoing treatment at the Muri Mugli Hospital in nearby Kamle district, they said. (PTI)

Tripura registers increase in tax collection

AGARTALA, Feb 27: The overall tax collection in Tripura has increased substantially over the last one year, a senior official said on Tuesday.

The Goods and Service Tax (GST) collection has registered a 16 per cent increase from ₹ 2014.32 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal to ₹ 3,302.58 crore in the 2023-24 fiscal till January, he said.

Addressing reporters, state finance secretary Apurba Kumar Roy said the collection of state excise has increased from ₹ 298.08 crore to ₹ 327.90 crore during the period, recording a 10 per cent hike.

Sales tax collection has increased by 16 per cent, from ₹ 367.67 crore to ₹ 428.32 crore during the period, he said.

The state's revenue has increased from ₹ 2,445 crore to ₹ 2,656.86 crore, the minister said.

"Tax collection has increased due to efforts of the Tripura government agencies. This is the true reflection of better fiscal management in the state," he said.

"Currently, financial transactions are being done in government departments through the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS). The system will be updated to ensure faster financial transactions and more transparency," he said. (PTI)

5 Myanmar nationals arrested with unaccounted cash

AIZWAL, Feb 27: At least five Myanmar nationals were apprehended by Assam Rifles for possessing unaccounted Indian and Myanmar bank notes in two separate operations in south Mizoram's Lawngtlai district, an official said on Tuesday. Acting on intelligence regarding the transportation of a substantial amount of cash at Bungtlai village in Lawngtlai district, Assam Rifles troops conducted the operations on February 24 and 25, an official of the paramilitary official said. (PTI)

Meghalaya cabinet approves draft power policy

Meghalaya Power Policy, 2024 aims to develop power projects through hydro, thermal, pumped storage, solar, wind in sustainable manner

SHILLONG, Feb 27: The Meghalaya Cabinet has approved the draft Meghalaya Power Policy, 2024, which seeks to develop power projects through hydro, thermal, pumped storage, solar, wind etc in a sustainable manner.

Addressing media persons after a meeting on Monday, state power minister, Abu Taher Mondal said, "We have discussed the new power policy in a thorough manner and the cabinet has approved the new power policy."

He informed that the old power policy was formulated in 2010. "14 years have elapsed and there have been big changes in the power scenario, so we needed a new power policy," he added.

The policy also aimed at improving the efficiency for the operations of the existing power plants and the generation utility as a whole, to build, maintain and operate an efficient, coordinated and economical transmission system, to improve the distribution system and reduce the system losses and to make the system user friendly for the public right from billing, complaints, etc of electricity.

The policy also stated the need to form the State Power Trading Company with the objective to execute power purchase agreements, undertake short-term pur-

chase on behalf of State Distribution Utility, undertake PPA with new renewable power plants in the state and management of the power in efficient manner, to encourage and promote the development of renewable energy and to address the environmental issues in line with the requirement of the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change.

The policy said that a state level committee to be headed by the power minister will be constituted to overlook the process of clearances and development of all power projects in the state.

The committee would engage in identification of the projects, facilitating government land transfer/lease, facilitation in arriving at an agreement between private land owners and developers.

Meghalaya has a huge hydro power potential amounting to nearly 3000 MW. However, with the help of the State Power Generation Corporation Limited it has been able to harness 13 per cent of the available potential. The power potential harnessed so far is only 378 MW with another 3 MW under implementation.

A four-pronged strategy has been proposed by way of participation of central, state, private sectors and joint ventures. This participation shall be through open



bidding/MOA route.

Allotment of the projects will be on build, own, operate and transfer (BOOT) basis. Royalty shall be charged in the form of free power during that period to provide IPPs' for development of self-identified projects and adoption of river basin approach for development of hydro power.

The policy said that the Pumped Storage Hydro Power Projects are flexible, dynamic, efficient and green ways to store and deliver large quantities of electricity,

pumped-storage hydro plants store and generate energy by moving water between two reservoirs at different elevations.

The main objectives of the policy for the development of Pumped Hydro Power in the state are to facilitate development of Pumped Storage Hydro Project in the state, attract private investment, generating revenue for the government and boost the economy of the state, make power from pumped storage hydro projects available as per requirements as well as to fulfill the

Congress and Communists, foes in Kerala, BFFs elsewhere: PM Modi

'People of Kerala will answer this betrayal in the coming LS polls'

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday took a swipe at the Congress and Communist parties, which are making efforts to form a strong alternative against the BJP at the Centre, pointing out that they are each other's enemies in Kerala, but in other states they are BFFs—Best Friends Forever.

Speaking at the conclusion ceremony of the BJP state unit's padayatra at the Central Stadium here, Modi pilloried the opposition claiming it lacks a roadmap for the nation's progress and is therefore convinced it won't win the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, due to which its leaders resort to abusing him.

"The Congress and the Communists are each other's enemies in Kerala, but in other states, they are BFFs. BFFs means best friends forever," the PM said.

He said the Congress accused the Communist Chief Minister (Pinarayi Vijayan) of being involved in corruption and scams and termed the Left government as fascist.

"The Communists in response, lathi-charged the Congress workers and termed their previous administrations as being involved in various scams. However, outside Kerala, at the INDI alliance meetings, they sit together, eat samosas and biscuits, and have tea," the PM said, pointing out the incongruity.



"So in Thiruvananthapuram they say one thing and in Delhi they say something else. The people of Kerala will answer this betrayal in the coming LS polls."

Attacking the Congress, Modi, in an apparent reference to the Gandhi family, said the track record of the grand old party shows how it managed to keep the country under the control of one family for decades.

"For them (Congress) the interests of that family are above that of all the other families in the country," he alleged, adding that the Communists were now showing the same colours.

In a veiled reference to Rahul Gandhi, who represents Wayanad seat in Lok Sabha, Modi also said that the Commu-

nists were advising the Congress to keep its 'Yuvraj' (prince) out of Kerala.

During his speech at the party programme, Modi urged Kerala's people to bless the saffron party with seats in double digits in the 2024 LS polls.

Insisting that the BJP never sees a state from the perspective of a vote bank, Modi claimed that over the past 10 years, Kerala has benefited from development like other BJP-ruled states.

He said it was his guarantee to make all possible efforts to help the people of Kerala realise their dreams and expectations.

The PM said it was 'Modiyude guarantee' (Modi's guarantee) to make India the third-largest economy in the world as well as eradicate poverty and corruption

from the country.

Apparently responding to Kerala's CPI(M)-led Left government's allegations that the state was discriminated against by the Centre, Modi said the BJP has never seen any Indian state from the perspective of a vote bank.

"Even when the BJP was not strong in Kerala, even then we worked day in and day out to empower Kerala. Over the past 10 years, the benefits of development have been reaped by Kerala as much as by the BJP-ruled states," the Prime Minister said.

He said despite the "constant non-cooperation by the state government, Kerala has still remained our priority."

Recounting the steps taken by the Centre for the development of Kerala, Modi said the BJP government connected the world with India's traditional knowledge of Ayurveda. Forty thousand farmers of Kerala have received direct financial assistance through the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, and over 50 lakh MUDRA loans have been disbursed in the state to help young entrepreneurs.

He also said works are being done for new-generation infrastructure projects in Kerala.

"The people of Kerala have a new enthusiasm. The 'hope' that emerged in the hearts of the people of Kerala in 2019 has now become their 'faith' in 2024. In 2019, the BJP-led NDA received votes

in double digits in Kerala. It seems like in 2024, Kerala has decided to give 'seats' in double digits," Modi said.

He said what is going to happen a few months later is not a secret anymore.

"In 2019, the talk of the town was 'Fir Ek Baar, Modi Sarkaar'. In 2024, the talk of the town was 'Abki Baar, 400 Paar'."

He said everyone is talking about the third term of the Modi government.

"In our third term, India is set to become the world's third-largest economy. This is Modi Ki Guarantee. In our third term, our fight against corruption is going to be more defined," he said.

Alleging that the LDF and the UDF rule did not do anything for the education system in Kerala, Modi said everyone knows about the struggle faced by the students of the poor and the middle class of the state while pursuing higher education.

"Our third term will work on the development of educational institutions in Kerala. This will pave the way for opportunities for students hailing from poor and middle-class families," he said.

"We live by one mantra—Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas'. For us, every community, caste, and region is important. We have worked for the progress of every citizen. In our third term too, we will work with the same intentions," he added. (PTI)

Voting in Rajya Sabha polls underway, SP MLA resigns as chief whip

LUCKNOW, Feb 27: Polling was underway in the elections for the 10 Rajya Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday amid fears of cross-voting in the opposition Samajwadi Party camp, underscored by party MLA Manoj Kumar Pandey resigning as its chief whip in the Assembly.

This comes a day after eight MLAs, including Pandey, skipped a meeting called by Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav at his residence here to brief party legislators about the voting process.

Speaking to reporters before casting his vote at the Assembly's Tilak Hall earlier in the day, Yadav said those who were looking for a "profit" in this situation would leave.

The BJP will adopt any means necessary to win elections, he alleged, adding, "Those who put spikes in someone else's path or dig holes for others will pay the price themselves."

"You have seen what happened in Chandigarh in front of CCTV cameras. I thank the Supreme Court, which saved the Constitution. The BJP can adopt all tricks to win elections. It must have given assurance (to some MLAs) of some profit... BJP will do anything to win," Yadav said.

Besides the SP president, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak and Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna were among the prominent faces who arrived at the Assembly to cast their votes.

Talking to reporters, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya claimed that Yadav made a mistake by fielding his third candidate and he does not the numbers.

"SP has become 'Samaptwadi Party' and all the eight candidates of the BJP will win," he added.

Pathak too asserted that all BJP candidates were going to win.

SP MLAs Rakesh Pratap Singh, Abhay Singh and Rakesh Pandey, who were among the eight to skip Yadav's Monday night meeting, arrived in the same vehicle.

"We will cast our votes as per our inner voices," Rakesh Pratap Singh said. Asked if 'Jai Sri Ram' will prevail, he replied, "Ram is everywhere..."

The ruling BJP and the principal opposition SP have the numbers in the Assembly to send seven and three members respectively unopposed to the Rajya Sabha, but with the BJP fielding its eighth candidate, a keen contest is on the cards in one of the seats.

The BJP and the SP are the two largest parties in the 403-member House with 252 MLAs and 108 MLAs respectively. The Congress, an alliance partner of the SP, has two seats.

BJP ally Apna Dal (Sonela) has 13 seats, the NISHAD Party has six seats, RLD has nine seats, SBSP six, Jansatta Dal Loktantrik two and the BSP has one seat. Four seats are currently vacant.

The candidates fielded by the BJP are former Union minister RPN Singh, former MP Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, general secretary of the party's Uttar Pradesh unit Amarpal Maurya, former state minister Sangeeta Balwant (Bind), party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi, former MLA Sadhana Singh, former Agra mayor Naveen Jain and industrial Sanjay Seth.

The Samajwadi Party has fielded actor-MP Jaya Bachchan, retired IAS officer Alok Ranjan and Dalit leader Ramji Lal Suman.

Seth, a former SP leader, joined the BJP in 2019. Any cross-voting by SP legislators could get Seth elected.

To get elected to the Rajya Sabha from Uttar Pradesh, a candidate needs nearly 37 first-preference votes.

Polling started at 9 am and will continue till 4 pm. Counting will commence from 5 pm and results are likely to be announced by the night. (PTI)

Modi govt has 'eclipsed' dreams of students: Rahul Gandhi on paper leaks

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Attacking the BJP over recent incidents of exam paper leaks and issues in recruitment, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday alleged that the government has "eclipsed" the dreams of students and said history will never forgive Prime Minister Narendra Modi for it.

In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi alleged that the Modi government has become the "enemy of the country's future".

"At some places students are yearning for recruitment, at some places students are frustrated due to paper leaks, at some places students are visiting courts for appointments and at some places students are facing lathicharge for raising their voice," the former Congress chief said.

The BJP government, which has failed to conduct even a single exam-

ination from RO-ARO to police recruitment and from railways to the army in a fair manner, is venting its anger on the youth, he claimed.

"Selling job-creating institutions to their friends and hiring youth on contract is Modi's policy, and exploitation is Modi's guarantee," he alleged.

The Modi government has eclipsed the dreams of students and their families and has taken away the light of hope from them, Gandhi claimed.

"History will never forgive Narendra Modi for this crime," Gandhi said.

Terming the cancellation of the police constable recruitment exam by the Uttar Pradesh government as a victory of youth unity and student power, Gandhi on Saturday had said those who unite will win while those who divide will be crushed. (PTI)

Rise above politics, take strict action against Sandeshkhali culprits: Chhattisgarh CM tells Mamata

RAIPUR, Feb 27: Chhattisgarh chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Tuesday wrote to his West Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee seeking strict action against culprits responsible for sexually assaulting tribal women and grabbing land in Sandeshkhali village in the eastern state.

Sai said putting the lives of tribal people in danger for "appeasement and vote bank politics" is intolerable, and appealed to the TMC chief to rise above political considerations for the sake of humanity.

Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24-Parganas district has been tense with a large number of women in the locality accusing TMC strongman Shajahan Sheikh and his supporters of "land-grab and sexually assaulting" them under coercion.

The Chhattisgarh chief minister shared a picture of the letter written in Hindi on his X handle, saying that incidents like the brutal rape of more than 50 women from tribal communities and grabbing land of tribals in Sandeshkhali, West Bengal, are shameful.

"I am sending a letter to West Bengal Chief Minister Ms @MamataOfficial seeking stern action against the culprits involved in the crime. Hope Mamata ji will take cognisance of this letter and do justice to the victims of West Bengal," he added.

Sai stated that incidents of "injustice done to mothers and sisters" that have come to light in West Bengal recently are heart-

wrenching.

"In Sandeshkhali area of your state (WB), incidents like brutal rape of more than 50 tribal women, grabbing land of thousands of tribals, and snatching the money given towards MNREGA wages have tarnished the humanity," the Chhattisgarh chief minister wrote. He dubbed the incidents in Sandeshkhali gruesome and horrifying citing reports given by the National Tribal Commission. Sai highlighted the rich culture of West Bengal and its history of women empowerment.

"The movement for women's empowerment started in the Bengal province and the history is witness to it. Swami Vivekananda, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee hailed from Bengal which is known to the world for its cultural richness.

"In such an aware state, the civilized society can't tolerate atrocities being committed against the deprived sections of the society," it stated.

Sai hoped Banerjee would order immediate action and ensure strict punishment of the culprits.

"I urge you to take legal action against criminals like Shajahan and Sirajuddin along with their political protectors. Hope you will rise above political considerations and take decisions in this matter related to the interest of humanity," he added. (PTI)

World Cancer Day: LG Electronics India announces CSR programme

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Ahead of World Cancer Day, LG Electronics India announced the launch of its comprehensive Cancer Support & Treatment CSR Program—'Together Against Cancer'. This initiative underscores LG's dedication to social responsibility and aims to address the intricate challenges posed by cancer across India. The initiative is in collaboration with the renowned Indian Cancer Society (ICS), a 70-year-old organisation founded by D J Jussawalla and Naval Tata, dedicated to cancer awareness, research, and patient support, registry and research.

The program's reach is extensive, encompassing mass awareness campaigns across various platforms such as radio, cinema, and social media. In addition to these, the initiative incorporates a targeted approach with approximately 100 schools, colleges and at public / private organisations for outreach programs.

This approach of ICS with support

from LG Electronics India aims to create awareness and education, laying the groundwork for a more informed and vigilant society.

Commenting on the same, Hong Ju Jeon—MD LG Electronics India, said, "The fight against cancer requires collective efforts, and we are proud to partner with the Indian Cancer Society to launch this comprehensive CSR program. Our commitment goes beyond financial aid; we aim to address the entire spectrum of cancer care, from awareness and screening to treatment and survivorship. This initiative reflects our dedication to creating a positive impact on society and aligns with our corporate social responsibility values."

Usha Thorat, National Managing Trustee, Indian Cancer Society said, "The collaboration with LG Electronics India marks another significant stride in our collective efforts against cancer and want to thank them for this partnership. The aim is to drive positive communication that helps reduce

fear, encourage people to get themselves checked / screened regularly to stay two steps ahead of cancer. We are poised to amplify our impact and provide much-needed assistance to individuals in need. Together, we are steadfast in our resolve to make a positive difference in the lives of cancer patients and survivors."

Crucially, the program will conduct numerous screening camps across Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar, reaching directly to over 10,000 beneficiaries and sensitising an additional 49,000 individuals. This ambitious effort reflects LG's joint commitment with ICS for early detection and proactive intervention, which is key components in the fight against cancer.

In addition to the screening initiatives, will provide financial aid for the diagnosis and treatment of a minimum of 150 underprivileged patients in states including Delhi, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Bihar.

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: The Congress is considering giving a ticket to its Delhi unit president Arvinder Singh Lovely to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls from the North East Delhi constituency, party sources said on Tuesday.

Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit, the son of former chief minister Sheila Dikshit who fought from the seat in 2019, is also a probable candidate from the North East Delhi seat, party sources said.

Party leaders Alka Lamba and Jai Prakash Aggarwal are being considered from Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency, and former MP Udit Raj and former Delhi minister Raj Kumar Chauhan are probable candidates from North West Delhi, they said.

The party has finalised its seat-sharing arrangement with its INDIA bloc ally AAP for Delhi with the latter contesting four Lok Sabha seats. The AAP will contest the seats of New Delhi, West Delhi, South Delhi and East Delhi and the Congress will field candidates in the other three seats.

"The probable candidates for North East Delhi Lok Sabha constituency are Arvinder Singh Lovely and Sandeep Dikshit. Party workers believe that if Arvinder Lovely fights polls from North East, he has good chances of winning.



"But since Sheila Dikshit was the candidate from the same constituency in 2019, Sandeep Dikshit might also be considered as a candidate," a source in Congress told PTI.

BJP's Manoj Tiwari had clinched the North East Delhi seat in 2019 Lok Sabha polls, defeating three-time chief minister Sheila Dikshit by a record margin of 3,66,102 votes.

Lovely was the Congress candidate from East

Delhi constituency in 2019, but lost to cricketer-turned-politician Gautam Gambhir of the BJP by a record margin of 3,91,222 votes.

From the Chandni Chowk seat, the Congress is could either field its Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba or party leader Jai Parkash Aggarwal, sources said. Aggarwal, contesting from the Chandni Chowk constituency in 2019, had received the highest number of votes with 29.67 per cent votes among all other Congress candidates.

For North West Lok Sabha constituency, sources said that former MP Udit Raj or former Delhi minister Raj Kumar Chauhan may be considered as the probable candidates.

Currently, BJP's Hans Raj Hans is the MP from the North West Delhi (reserved) seat. In 2019, Hans had defeated second-placed Gagan Singh of the AAP with an emphatic margin of 5,53,075 votes.

In 2014, Udit Raj had won the seat on a BJP ticket by a margin of 1,06,802 votes.

In 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had swept all the seven seats in Delhi and set new records in five constituencies where its candidates defeated their opponents with the highest margins ever. (PTI)

Study finds high rate of lung damage in Indians after acute Covid, experts decode why

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Indians suffer high rates of lung function damage after acute Covid with about half reporting shortness of breath, according to a recent study, a worrying finding that experts attribute to various reasons, including co-morbidities and pollution.

The study by the Christian Medical College, Vellore, is the largest from India to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on lung function. It examined 207 individuals, showcasing substantial impairment in lung function, exercise capacity, and quality of life among recovered individuals.

The study revealed a high prevalence of respiratory symptoms among Indians who recovered, even after a mean of over two months following acute illness, with shortness of breath reported in 49.3 per cent and cough in 27.1 per cent of the cohort.

"It is clear from the study that lung function is affected more in the Indian population compared to data from other countries across every category of disease severity," said study lead researcher D J Christopher, professor of pulmonary medicine at CMC Vellore.

"Although it is impossible to know the exact cause of worse impairment among Indians, co-morbidities may be a factor contributing to lung damage, as our population had much higher co-morbidities than the others," Christopher told PTI.

The study, published recently in the journal PLOS Global Public Health, compared data from Europe and China. An Italy-based study, for instance, found dyspnoea or shortness of breath present in 43 per cent and cough in less than 20 per cent of the subjects. The corresponding figures from a Chinese study were also lower than those seen in the Indian study.

However, the CMC study did not cite any specific data from China or from European countries other than Italy.

In terms of co-morbidities, CMS Vellore researchers found 72.5 per cent of individuals reporting underlying health conditions such as diabetes mellitus, systemic hypertension, and chronic lung diseases.

Lung function tests revealed a concerning trend of impairment, particularly in diffusion capacity



(DLCO), a sensitive test to assess the lungs' ability to transfer gas from inspired air to the bloodstream, the researchers said.

Nearly half (44.4 per cent) of the participants showed impaired diffusion capacity, with rates of impairment being higher in those with more severe Covid infection. Therefore, those who needed invasive or non-invasive ventilation and had recovered had the worst lung function

impairment. Reacting to the study findings, Delhi-based pulmonologist Vivek Nangia said the most unique feature that predisposes Indians to greater damage to Covid or disease-induced lung injury could be a high prevalence of tuberculosis in the country, which is weakening our immune system and also damaging the lungs.

India accounts for about 25 per cent of the global TB burden, with

an estimated disease incidence of 2.77 million in 2022, according to a study published last year in the Journal of Infection and Public Health.

However, Christopher said none of the study subjects had features of active TB at the time of recruitment to the study.

"A second factor that could explain the worse lung damage is the air pollution, which of course is reducing our immunity and damaging the lungs," Nangia, principal director and head of pulmonology, at Saket's Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket, told PTI.

Deepak Sharma, consultant pulmonologist, Ujala Cygnus Group of Hospitals, Delhi agreed.

"Access to quality healthcare during and after the infection can influence recovery outcomes. Also, pollution, particularly in densely populated areas, could exacerbate respiratory issues and hinder recovery," he told PTI.

Although the study sample is small, he added, several factors could contribute to these outcomes, including the severity of the infection.

"Those with severe Covid cases

may experience more pronounced long-term effects on lung function and overall health. Individuals with pre-existing respiratory conditions or other co-morbidities may make patients more susceptible to lasting effects from the virus," Sharma said.

While pollution is likely a contributing factor, the experts noted that other variables such as genetics, lifestyle factors, and healthcare infrastructure also play crucial roles.

"In the future what we're going to see is a significant rise in the number of cases of respiratory diseases. This could be in terms of interstitial lung disease, could be in terms of lung cancer, in terms of respiratory infections," Sharma said.

"Even now what we're seeing is that minor viral infections are turning into very severe kind of illnesses requiring hospitalisation, ICU care and are even resulting in mortality," he added. Extrapolating the findings of his study, Christopher noted that in the long run, these patients might end up with lungs that function less than optimally.

"The impact on their lung function may improve for up to one year, but some patients may have to live

with scared lungs all their lives. If the impairment is relatively smaller, they will carry on with normal activities of life but it may limit their exercise capacity. If it is severe it may become an impediment on a daily basis straight away and a few may be oxygen dependent," he added.

Addressing these factors requires a multi-faceted approach, including improving healthcare access, reducing pollution levels, and implementing targeted interventions for at-risk populations, the doctors said.

Nangia said the implications of the study reveal potential long-term health challenges for Indians who have recovered from Covid, including lung function impairment and lingering symptoms.

"This suggests a need for comprehensive post-recovery care and monitoring to address these issues," he explained.

How does one decrease the risk of disease?

Regular exercise and yoga, Nangia said.

Appropriate vaccinations may reduce lung infections and thus offer protection. Avoiding air pollution outside can help, he added. (PTI)

North-south divide created by opposition for 'narrow' political gains: Rajnath

VISAKHAPATNAM, Feb 27: The BJP is not a north-centric party and the north-south binary has been created by the opposition parties for "narrow" political gains, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday, asserting that such efforts to discredit the party also put a question mark on national integrity.

In an address at an event, Singh said the BJP was the ruling party across various states in the country including in the southern state of Karnataka and the allegation that it is only a part of north India is "factually wrong".

"An allegation is often levelled against us that BJP is only a party of north India. You all must have heard this. They also make this allegation against us that we are only a party of the Hindi belt. We have formed a government with absolute majority twice in Assam. Assam is not a Hindi belt state," he said.

The senior BJP leader said the party has been registering its effective presence in states like Rajasthan and Gujarat for about three-four decades and that it received maximum seats in western India in the last Lok Sabha elections.

"In Gujarat, we have a government for almost 30 years. If we talk about the



states of southern India, we have had our government in Karnataka for a long time. Presently we are the second largest party in West Bengal, Odisha and Karnataka. Our vote share is continuously increasing in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala," Singh said.

"Therefore, the allegation that BJP is only a party of north Indians is factually completely wrong. For narrow political gains and immediate electoral gains, these people, in the name of discrediting BJP, also put a question mark on the national integrity of India," he said.

"By showing prosperity figures of south India, our opposition colleagues many times try to show animosity between north Indians and south Indians," Singh said.

He noted that there are "some different structural issues in north India and south India," adding "our effort should be that we can do something good, something big by combining both."

"Our effort should be to connect both more, and not to break both in the name of language and prosperity," he said.

The defence minister said today

India's credibility has increased on international platforms and the country is no longer a weak nation.

"It has now become a powerful country in the world. Now if anyone dares to target India in a wrong way, India will not shy away from giving a befitting reply. Now heads of state of many countries also believe that the 21st century is going to belong to India," he said.

"Our prime minister has so much goodwill abroad that eight former Indian sailors who were given death sentences in Qatar got pardoned from there and one of them is from Visakhapatnam," he said.

Singh also rejected allegations that the BJP is a communal party.

"Some people accuse BJP of being a communal party whereas BJP is the largest secular party in the world. Today five Arab countries have given Prime Minister Narendra Modi-jii the highest honour," he said.

Singh alleged that the Congress is the "mother of corruption", "mother of appeasement" and "mother of dynasticism".

He said that the BJP has ended the crisis of credibility in the politics of this country.

"We do what we say. We have prom-

ised to abolish Article 370 and we did it. We promised to end the evil practice of triple talaq. We have done that. We talked about the Uniform Civil Code. Today the BJP government in Uttarakhand has implemented it," he said.

Singh also spoke about the difference between BJP-ruled governments and those by other parties.

"The difference lies between short termism and long termism. BJP gives priority to long termism and long term gain," he said.

The defence minister also listed various measures rolled out by the Modi government to bolster India's economic progress.

"We introduced the GST. In the beginning people faced some problems but today the country has benefited from GST. Today our prime minister is building next generation infrastructure. It is not just to win elections but to strengthen the country in the long term," he said.

"Today the NPA (non-performing assets) in Indian banks has reduced considerably. Credit offtake has increased. Today India has moved from the category of 'fragile five' to the category of 'fabulous five'," he said. (PTI)

Embraer case: Court seeks status report from CBI, asks how much more time to complete probe

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: A special court here has asked the CBI director to file a status report in the Embraer aircraft deal corruption case, noting the probe is not complete even after seven years and no purpose will be served to proceed with the trial with a "half-baked case".

The agency had filed a charge sheet against arms dealers Arvind Khanna, advocate Gautam Khaitan and businessman Anup Gupta on June 1 last year in the corruption case where kickbacks to the tune of USD 5.76 million were allegedly paid to swing a three-aircraft deal with the DRDO in favour of the Brazilian firm.

The court had taken cognisance of the charges against the accused last year, but the trial could not proceed because the CBI did not apprise the court of how much more time was required to conclude the investigation.

Underlining that the investigation is not complete even after seven years of registering the case, special judge Gaurav Rao said, "Let a detailed report be filed by the IO (Investigating Officer), duly forwarded by the Director CBI, as to how much time he requires to conclude the investigation as the reports already filed so far are almost verbatim of the previous reports."

During the hearing, Khaitan's lawyer Ramaditya Tiwari argued the investigation is running in oblivion and the CBI, being the premier probe agency, needs to give a time frame. The precious time of the court and the resources are wasted otherwise, he said.

Tiwari cited a Delhi High Court order in which it laid down that if the investigation is not complete, then argument on charge should not be heard in haste, and the trial court should put up the question to the investigation team about the status of the probe.

The Special Judge said, "The CBI and Investigation Officer state that they cannot specify the exact time in which the investigation shall be concluded however, it is stated that all efforts shall be made to conclude the investigation at the earliest."

Undoubtedly, investigation is the sole prerogative of the investigating agency, but there has to be an end to it at some point in time, the judge said. "No purpose whatsoever shall be served in going ahead with the trial of a half-baked case," he said.

The agency has dropped proceedings against Vipin Khanna, an accused named in the FIR, because he had passed away.

The CBI had told the court during a hearing last year in October that the replies of Letters Rogatory from Brazil and the UAE are still awaited, and only partial execution reports from the UK and Singapore have been received.

It said the investigation has been still kept open to ascertain the role of other persons, including public servants, M/s Embraer and its officials and also to ascertain the end use of the commission amount.

The deal for the three aircraft, which were to be used by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for installing air-borne radar systems, was reached with Embraer in 2008.

The CBI has alleged that the kickbacks worth USD 5.76 million were allegedly routed from the subsidiaries of Embraer to Vipin Khanna through Singapore-based Interdev Aviation Services Pvt Ltd to be used for influencing officials in the Defence Ministry and the DRDO.

In its FIR, the CBI also booked two companies - Brazil-based Embraer and Singapore-based Interdev Pte Ltd - in connection with the alleged corruption in the deal.

The agency had registered a preliminary enquiry in September 2016 after a report in a Brazilian newspaper alleged that Embraer had used the services of middlemen to clinch deals in Saudi Arabia and India. It was converted into an FIR on October 18, 2016.

According to India's defence procurement rules, middlemen are strictly barred in such deals.

The CBI has said that due to alleged mediation by Vipin Khanna, DRDO officials moved a proposal for the purchase of aircraft from Embraer on a single vendor basis.

It was also alleged that in lieu of facilitating the agreement/deal between Brazil-based firm and DRDO (India), the firm paid an amount of USD 5.76 million (approx) to the said middleman (Khanna) through Singapore-based company during the year 2009," the CBI spokesperson had said after the filing of the FIR. (PTI)

Wild elephant kills auto driver in Kerala; govt provides ₹10 lakh aid to victim's family

IDUKKI (KERALA), Feb 27: A 44-year-old man was killed on Monday night by a stray wild elephant near here, in yet another instance of man-animal conflict in Kerala.

The incident happened in Kannimala estate near the tourist town of Munnar in this hilly district. The victim was identified as Suresh Kumar alias Mani, an auto driver.

The elephant also attacked and toppled the autorickshaw he was driving, but the passengers had a narrow escape, police added.

The state government handed over an immediate financial aid of ₹10 lakh to the family of the deceased.

Kumar's death comes in the wake of two persons being killed by wild elephants in Wayanad recently, sparking protests by local people.

The deceased Kumar hailed from Kannimala Top Division here, police said.

Some other passengers including a woman and her school-going daughter had a narrow escape when the autorickshaw was attacked and toppled by the elephant, police said.

Kumar was on his way to drop a family comprising Rajeeva, a local woman, her husband and daughter at their home after the annual day celebration at the girl's school here.

Two migrant workers were also present in the vehicle at the time of the incident.

A shocked Rajeeva later recounted that the elephant, which was standing on the road, attacked the autorickshaw and toppled it.

She said they were trapped beneath the vehicle and the driver was attacked by the animal when he attempted to exit.

"The elephant took him by the trunk and tossed him three times. We were rescued by some persons who were passing by in a jeep. They helped us come out of the toppled vehicle after the elephant moved away," she told the media from a hospital here on Tuesday.

A senior police officer said the critically injured man reportedly died before reaching a nearby hospital.

The other passengers, who suffered minor injuries in the incident, were recovering in hospital, he added.

Meanwhile, the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) called for a dawn-to-dusk hartal in KDH Village, comprising Munnar Town, seeking a permanent solution to the increasing human-animal conflict in the region. However it was withdrawn in the wake of Kumar's family receiving financial aid.

The opposition Congress also announced a roadblock in the region raising the same demand.

Police said shops remained closed and the agitators stopped the vehicles in the region but no untoward incidents have been reported so far.

Meanwhile, authorities held an emergency meeting at a high-range hospital and handed over the financial aid to Kumar's family comprising his wife and two children.

Besides Forest and district officials, the local MLA, MP and senior leaders of various political parties took part in the meeting, sources said. (PTI)

Delhi HC dismisses plea against doctor's mandatory registration with DMC to practice Allopathy

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: The high court here has dismissed a petition challenging a notice of Delhi Medical Council (DMC) making it mandatory that a doctor practising allopathy here has to be registered with the council.

The high court said the consequence of registration by medical practitioners under the DMC Act is that the council will have jurisdiction to take disciplinary actions in case of any professional or ethical misconduct done by a medical practitioner practising in Delhi.

"The intent of making the medical practitioner amenable to the regulatory jurisdiction of the State Medical Council of State in which he/she practises is in public interest as it enables the concerned State Medical Council to hold accountable, the erring medical practitioners for their wrongful conduct and take disciplinary against them, in accordance with law," a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora said.

The bench referred to a case where mischief

was done by a medical practitioner not registered with the DMC in which the erring doctor objected to the jurisdiction of council on the ground of non-registration with it, though the medical treatment had been administered in Delhi.

The high court said there was no merit in the public interest litigation filed by Dr Namit Gupta seeking quashing of the December 24, 2023 public notice issued by DMC, directing that any person practising modern scientific system of medicine (Allopathy) in Delhi to be mandatorily registered with the DMC in terms of provisions of the Delhi Medical Council Act.

The notice further directed that all the Medical establishments, including hospitals, nursing homes, polyclinics, charitable dispensaries and diagnostic centres, to ensure the validity of DMC registration of the doctors before utilising their services and to ensure that the DMC registration of the doctors working therein is renewed every five years as per the DMC Act.

The counsel for DMC submitted that the notice has been issued to curb the menace of professional misconduct by medical practitioners practising in Delhi.

Advocates T Singhdev and Abhijit Chakravarty, representing NMC, submitted that the petitioner's contentions are misconceived as the requirement of registration with the respective State Medical Council continues to remain the norm even under the NMC Act.

The high court said the petitioner's contention that it would be inconvenient for a medical practitioner to seek transfer to a new state medical council in case of a transfer of job, is "without any basis".

It said the regulations provide for a convenient web portal-based procedure for seeking transfer of registration to another state medical council and also provide for a mechanism of deemed approval. There is no basis for alleging that the process of transfer and registration is inconvenient, it said. (PTI)

Fishermen protest demanding subsidy on diesel, welfare fund in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 27: A large number of fishermen from the coastal areas of three districts of Odisha on Tuesday staged a protest here, demanding fulfilment of their six-point charter of demands, including social security.

The members of the fishing community, under the banner of Odisha State Fishermen Federation, demanded subsidy in diesel, regular dredging in sea mouths, stopping of draining chemical effluents from industrial units into the sea, ending alleged misbehaviour of forest department and coast guard officials, and formation of a fishermen welfare fund.

The protestors from Bhadrak, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara districts, wearing blue caps and waving blue flags, assembled at Mahatma Gandhi Marg and alleged that the state government ignored their genuine demands.

"Our lives have become miserable as we have to buy diesel at Rs 94 a litre for operating the fishing boats," the president of the Odisha State Fishermen Federation, Srikant Parida, said.

"Fishing in rivers and the sea is our only source of living. Unfortu-

nately, we have to leave the waters and take to the streets because of the government's apathy," he said.

Demanding subsidies on diesel, the agitators claimed that at least seven coastal states are providing diesel subsidies to fishermen.

"There is no such provision in Odisha. We have written many times to the government. But nobody is concerned about our plight, another agitator said. So, we have been forced to come to Bhubaneswar to press for our demands," Parida said.

The agitators also demanded the inclusion of fishermen families in the Public Distribution System (PDS) and other social security schemes during fishing bans.

The state government bans fishing near the coast for three months, April 15 to June 14 every year, to protect brood fish and provide an undisturbed breeding ground.

The fishermen cannot work due to adverse calamities like cyclones and low-pressure areas. As many as 15 lakh families are victims of the state government's apathy, they alleged.

They also demanded dredging of river mouths. They said the fish catch has been dwindling due to the closure of river mouths. (PTI)

TN's VOC Port will be India's first green hydrogen hub: Sarbananda Sonowal

CHENNAI, Feb 27: The VOC Port at Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu will become India's first green hydrogen hub as it will develop an ecosystem of green ports and also emerge as a transshipment hub when Prime Minister Narendra Modi launches numerous initiatives on February 28, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Tuesday.

Also, Chennai would become the gateway to the Eastern Maritime Corridor to Vladivostok, Russia, and further increase the bilateral trade between the two countries, he said.

"Tomorrow PM Modi will lay the foundation stone, inaugurate, and dedicate to the nation 36 transformative projects worth over Rs 17,000 crore. This is a step towards Viksit Bharat @2047," Sonowal told reporters here.

About 30 projects under his Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways worth Rs 10,324 crore would be inaugurated, foundation laid or dedicated by the prime minister, he said. Of these, six projects worth Rs 7,587 crore are only in the two ports in Tamil Nadu.

"Only a few years ago, our prime minister had announced that the government will take steps to make VOC Port as the transshipment hub on the east coast of India. Tomorrow this guarantee is going to be fulfilled," Sonowal said.

Development of the Outer Harbour Container Terminal project at VOC Port, costing Rs 7,056 crore, will position it as a major transshipment hub on the east coast of India. This project will increase the container capacity of VOC Port Authority by many times and would significantly boost the state economy, he said.

Further, it would reduce the logistics cost, and time thereby saving thousands of crores annually.

The VOC Port will be India's first green hydrogen hub for large-scale production. Already 500 acres of land has been earmarked and a MoU has been signed with NTPC for installing a green hydrogen production facility, the union minister said.

For the first time in the country, an indigenously developed hydrogen fuel cell ferry built by Cochin Shipyard Limited will be launched as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat. This zero-emission, zero-noise vessel is a revolutionary step towards India becoming a hydrogen fuel vessel manufacturer, he said.

The Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) will convert the existing two ships to run on green hydrogen and it has been targeted to convert at least 50 per cent of all tugs into green tugs by 2030, he said.

The Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor would significantly reduce the time required to transport cargo between India and Far East Russia by upto 16 days - from 40 to 24 days - besides considerably reducing the distance by upto 40 per cent.

Presently, the distance between Mumbai Port and the Port of St. Petersburg, by the Western Sea Route via Suez Canal, is 16,066 km, whereas the distance from Chennai Port to Vladivostok Port via the Eastern Maritime Corridor is only 10,458 km, he said, and added this would help in reducing logistics costs immensely, apart from hugely boosting the efficiency in transportation of cargo between the two countries. (PTI)

CVC suggests 'delaying' to govt depts to avoid delay in deciding corruption cases

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: To avoid delay in deciding corruption cases, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has suggested "delaying" by limiting the levels of processing and speeding up decision making. The probity watchdog (CVC) has issued guidelines from time to time, prescribing the time limit for completion of different stages of actions in vigilance related matters.

"It has been observed that there are occasions when action in vigilance matters has been unduly delayed. One of the reasons for such delay has been found to be that the levels of examination/processing of vigilance matters are more than the required levels. The levels of processing of vigilance matters in different organisations also lacks uniformity," the CVC said in an order.

It said that in order to avoid delay in vigilance matters, the organisations concerned should review the levels of processing of such matters and should bring down the levels to a maximum of four.

"The limit of four levels would be applicable to each administrative unit separately, in the hierarchy of the organisation concerned," the CVC said in the order issued to secretaries of all central government departments, chief executives of public sector banks and insurance companies among others. (PTI)

African experts to conduct surveys on translocating cheetahs to 2 sanctuaries in MP: Bhupender Yadav

BHOPAL, Feb 27: A team of African and Namibian experts will soon visit the Gandhi Sagar and Nauradehi sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh to conduct surveys for translocating cheetahs to these places, Union minister Bhupender Yadav said.

The minister for environment, forest and climate change addressed a review meeting of the cheetah project at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in MP's Sheopur district.

Yadav said Kuno will be established as an international tourist destination in the coming five years and the economy of this region will grow to around ₹1,000 crore, that too without industries.

"There are 21 cheetahs in the KNP at present and this area has great potential. Currently, eight cubs are roaming freely with the female cheetah in Kuno," Yadav was quoted as saying in an official

release.

He said a Cheetah Rehabilitation Centre has been started and it is also the area of biggest success in the world because cheetahs have been rehabilitated here (KNP).

"A total of 10 forest areas were selected under the cheetah project, and three of these centres, including KNP, are in Madhya Pradesh. Besides Kuno, there are Gandhi Sagar and Nauradehi sanctuaries. A team from Africa and Namibia will soon go to these two sanctuaries and cheetahs will be translocated to these places after conducting surveys," he said.

The minister said under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a Big Cat Alliance has been formed in which 97 countries are working and cooperating to save big cats.

Five species of big cats are found in India and a pilot project is being undertaken to save them, he



said.

Yadav further said the KNP region would be developed as a model of economic development.

"Along with the cheetah project, arrangements will be made at the KNP to conduct other activities. More than 40,000 tourists are likely to visit this place in the com-

ing time. Local people will be imparted special training as cooks and forest guides," he added.

Later, addressing a gathering to distribute bicycles to Cheetah Mitra, Yadav said KNP was the first intercontinental translocation in the field of wildlife.

"Initially, there was a challenge

as cheetahs had to adopt new surroundings, prey and weather. The progress of the cheetah project is advancing better than expected. We brought 20 cheetahs and we have lost some of them, but today 21 felines exist in Kuno," he said.

The Union minister said the MP government is focusing on area-centric development, including infrastructure, public utilities, skill development among local people and increasing occupation related to eco-tourism.

The number of tourists visiting the KNP has gone up from 2,000 in the year 2023 to 8,000 now, he said.

"In neighbouring Sawai Madhopur sanctuary, 2 lakh tourists come and such possibilities exist for Kuno also," he added.

Earlier, speaking at the review meeting, chief minister Mohan Yadav said Madhya Pradesh will be developed as a hub of eco-

tourism and about 2 lakh people will get jobs in Kuno alone.

At the chief minister's request, Bhupender Yadav said an elephant conservation project will be launched in MP.

Under Project Elephant, a central team will visit MP and conduct a study based on experiences of Assam and Kerala, and submit a report to the MP government, the release said. The chief minister and Bhupender Yadav also laid the foundation stone for works costing ₹71.89 crore including the construction of a bridge in the KNP for ₹37 crore.

Under the Cheetah Reintroduction Project, eight Namibian cheetahs - five females and three males - were released into enclosures at the KNP on September 17, 2022. In February 2023, another 12 cheetahs were brought to the park from South Africa. (PTI)



Richa Chadha, Ali Fazal to produce six films via their production banner

MUMBAI, Feb 27: Following the Sundance success of their maiden production venture, "Girls Will Be Girls", actors Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal have announced a slate of five more films that they will back via their production house Pushing Buttons Studios. The slate includes an adult animated project, a comedy, a satire, a documentary, and a fantasy drama film. Directed by Shuchi Talati, "Girls Will Be Girls", a coming of age story of a teenager and her young mother, earned rave reviews at the international film festival in January

this year. A collaborative effort between Pushing Buttons Studios, Crawling Angels, Blink Digital, and Dolce Vita Films, the film won the Audience Choice for Best Film and the Jury Award for Best Actor for lead star Preeti Panigrahi at the festival.

The actor-couple is also producing crime thriller "Papita". To be directed by Akash Bhatia, the film revolves around a Mumbai paparazzi photographer who aspires to become respected in his profession.

"Doggie Stylez", an adult animation project, directed by

Ashutosh Pathak, is a tongue-in-cheek satire on modern humans, told through the lens of a society of dogs imitating human values, and failing, while musical comedy "Pinky Promise" is set in a Himachal Pradesh hilllock-town and revolves around the forbidden love story between a 'spirited' dancer and the singer from a rival Bhajan-Mandli. Documentary film "RiAlity", to be directed by Rahul Singh Datta, will delve in Chadha and Fazal's lives when they were planning their whirlwind wedding while juggling demanding jobs and tricky

relationships in 2022.

The sixth film from their production venture, fantasy drama "Miss Palmolive All Night Cabaret", is by noted filmmaker Kamal Swaroop, known for films such as "Om-Dar-Ba-Dar", documentary film "Battle For Benaras" and "Pushkar Puran".

As per the film's plotline, a revolutionary celibate daku, Bhavani Singh, and a cabaret dancer, Miss Palmolive, embark on a platonic musical journey through the fantastical world of Cinemata, where the government discovers that only a kiss can defeat him. (PTI)

Grammy win an unforgettable memory: violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan



NEW DELHI, Feb 27: It was as if time had stopped, says violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan as he recalls walking up to the Grammy stage with his Shakti band members to receive the golden gramophone for 'Best Global Music Album'. Shakti won the Grammy for "This Moment", the band's first studio album in over 45 years.

Rajagopalan, Shakti's founder and guitarist John McLaughlin, tabla maestro Zakir Hussain, singer Shankar Mahadevan and percussionist Selvaganesh Vinayakram won the award at a ceremony in the US earlier this month.

"It was like euphoria because time stopped (for us). We had a contingent of 25 people with us so celebration started at that time. It was like a beautiful moment unforgettable, etched in memory," Rajagopalan told PTI in an interview. The violinist, 59, who along with his brother Kumaresh, is a prominent name in the Carnatic music fraternity, is settled in Seattle (US) but has a home in Chennai too. He credits McLaughlin and Hussain for

being the driving force behind the studio album that was created during the pandemic with members sitting in "different corners of the world".

"We created a drop box so every composition, every thing was put on that drop box. After the composition was run, we played layers and layers and layers, so everything was mixed. It was so beautiful that the whole thing came (together) because in the beginning, there was only one line and after that everything was added one after the other..."

"When you hear the music, it's so beautiful. It all sounds like we were in one studio, seating and playing against each other. It sounds like that now but it was actually played in different parts, from different parts of the globe. So, that's the power of 'Shakti' I think," he said.

Rajagopalan became a member of 'Shakti' in 2019, stepping in as a violinist after Lakshminarayana L. Shankar left the group, which was originally founded in 1976.

The musician said Shakti as a band is very special for each

member.

"When we get together, the vibration, the energy that Shakti brings in, you will be sucked into that kind of feel. We long for that and when there is a gap, we long for that feel. To be rubbing shoulders with such great people is also one of the incentives of playing with 'Shakti'." Rajagopalan said the band, whose founding members were McLaughlin, Hussain, Lakshminarayana Shankar and Vikku Vinayakram, "defined fusion".

"It's a very unique, special band. That's how it was formed and after that for about ten years or so and then they disbanded and then after that it came in another avatar and then it got disbanded again, then another one happened. "50 years have passed and 'Shakti' has also evolved with time and music is so different from what it began and what is it now. It's so different, so beautiful and it's evolved with the times, change in members and now it's come a full circle." (PTI)

Fortunate to essay role of football legend Chuni Goswami: Actor Amartya Ray

KOLKATA, Feb 27: Young actor Amartya Ray said he felt fortunate to essay the role of football legend Chuni Goswami, and share the screen with Ajay Devgn in upcoming Bollywood movie 'Maidaan'. Ray, the son of seasoned Bengali actor Chaiti Ghosal, was talking about the sports drama in which Devgn essays the role of the architect of modern Indian football, Syed Abdul Rahim. 'Maidaan' will be released on Eid. Speaking to PTI on the sets of upcoming Bengali movie 'Never Mind', Ray said, "I feel so fortunate to essay

the role of Chuni Goswami, whom I had met several times before. He was a family friend who knew my mother and grandfather very well." Stating that a significant part of his role revolved around India's 1962

Asia Cup win in which Goswami, as the skipper, played a stellar role in the country's victory, Ray said no video recording of the Indian team's practice was available and he went through photographs to perfect the on-field techniques with the ball. "I did not imitate Chuni Goswami... he was a legendary footballer. But I sought to reinterpret his graceful movements on the turf. I had heard anecdotes about him from family elder and sports reporter Partha Rudra, and sports journalist Novy Kapadia. I underwent hardcore training under a sports choreographer and a physical trainer for the role," he said. Ray said his first love had been football in the cricket-crazy nation even though he is also a big fan of the gentleman's game. "I love sports in general and I am very happy to be a part of this sports movie," he said. Speaking about his experience with Devgn, Ray said he grew up watching the Bollywood actor's films and on the sets of 'Maidaan', he "had an aura and his character carried a certain weight". 'Maidaan', directed by Amit Sharma, stars Devgn as football coach Rahim and showcases Indian football between 1952 and 1962. (PTI)



Sajid Nadiadwala to team up with Rajinikanth on a Pan-India film



MUMBAI, Feb 27: Filmmaker Sajid Nadiadwala on Tuesday announced his collaboration with south superstar Rajinikanth, for a feature film.

The filmmaker, known for backing movies such as "Chhichhore", "Housefull" franchise, "83" and "Bawaal", shared the news on his social media account Nadiadwala Grandson.

"It's a true honour to collaborate with the legendary Rajinikanth Sir! Anticipation

mounts as we prepare to embark on this unforgettable journey together!" the post read.

However, details regarding the film have been kept under wraps. According to a source close to the production, "It will be a Pan-India movie, and the announcement regarding the same will be made soon."

Rajinikanth's latest release is "Lal Salaam", a Tamil sports action movie. It is helmed by the actor's daughter Aishwarya Rajinikanth. (PTI)

Pankaj Udhas was reluctant to sing 'Chitthi Aayi Hai' in 'Naam': Mahesh Bhatt



MUMBAI, Feb 27: It took some convincing to persuade ghazal maestro Pankaj Udhas to appear on screen in "Naam" to perform "Chitthi Aayi Hai", a song that became synonymous with the 1986 film and skyrocketed the singer to fame, recalls filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt.

Udhas, 72, died at a Mumbai hospital on Monday after prolonged illness. His name was suggested by screenwriter Salim Khan, Bhatt said, glad he heeded that advice and brought the ghazal singer on board for the song, which he described as the "heartbeat" of the film. In the film, Udhas appears as himself singing "Chitthi Aayi Hai" during a concert. The lyrics of the song, popular to this day, were written by Anand Bakshi and the music was scored by Laxmikant-Pyarelal. "Udhas was a singer and he sang to a live audience so he was a little reluctant, unsure

whether he would be able to pull it off. We assured him that we wanted him to play himself. We didn't want him to become somebody else. I just told him (think that) you are in one of your shows in Singapore or London and you are singing a song on the stage. The only thing is we will shoot and film it," Bhatt told PTI in an interview.

"I remember I and Saroj Khan ji -- she was the choreographer -- we would shoot long takes because unlike film actors who are used to shooting in fragments, he (Udhas) was a person who would come into his own only when he would get large chunks to perform," he added. Think of "Naam" and you think of "Chitthi Aayi Hai", the "Naam" director said, adding that the heart could not be separated from the heartbeat. "I was just talking with Sanjay Dutt and we both

fondly remembered those days of shooting that song, his presence. He (Udhas) would come from the airport straight onto the set and he would shoot non-stop and then rush back to do his shows. I'm very privileged to have been touched by a man like him, his simplicity was so disarming, and his voice had the same largeness of a simple heart," Bhatt said.

Bhatt said the song comes at a pivotal point in the narrative in the second half, which was crafted carefully by Salim Khan. "We needed a song, which comes as a catalyst for the character (of Sanjay Dutt), who has fallen into the wrong hands of the underworld, and how he sets himself right and is longing to go back home," Bhatt said.

"In those days, ghazal singers of India had made a name for themselves and they would go

overseas and perform. So this (song) worked like magic with people. The song has a timeless quality," he added.

The 75-year-old filmmaker praised Udhas for his dedication and commitment. According to Bhatt, "Chitthi Aayi Hai" was hugely popular because it resonated with people who have been away from home.

"This song triggers that yearning... because there were people going away from homes overseas, to Dubai, or Bangkok, to make a living. Even people who left their villages and came to the city, they all felt they were uprooted from their near and dear ones, so the song touched that pulse. "It gave voice to that palpable feeling that was crossing the hearts of millions of Indians, who long to come back to their homes," he said. (PTI)

State units agree with Rohit's 'hunger' comment, say BCCI Ranji diktat is potential saviour

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: India skipper Rohit Sharma's assertion that Test opportunities should be only for those who show hunger for the format found resonance with state associations grappling with youngsters desperate to make a name in white-ball cricket but reluctant to grind it out in first-class games.

With the advent of IPL, the club vs country debate has been raging for years now and Rohit's stern statement came at a time when two established names in Indian cricket -- Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan -- ignored a BCCI diktat to play Ranji Trophy quarterfinals, focussing instead on their IPL preparations.

"Jin logon ko bhokh hai, hum unhi logon ko mauka denge (We will give opportunities to only those who are hungry)," Rohit declared on Monday after a series-clinching win over England in the fourth Test in Ranchi.

"Agar hunger nahi hai to unko khila ke koi matlab nahi hai (There's no point in playing those who don't have the hunger)," he said.

The hunger that he spoke about was there for everyone to see in young guns like Yashasvi Jaiswal,

Sarfraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Akash Deep and the more established Shubman Gill, all of whom sparked at various stages of the series against England.

But Rohit did make a point about the unnamed ones who don't seem to have that fire in the belly. "I concur with the Indian captain. There should be hunger in younger cricketers to play the longest format," Abhilash Khandekar, president of Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association, told PTI.

It is for those that the BCCI issued a directive earlier this month asking centrally-contracted cricketers to be available for Ranji engagements.

Several representatives from state associations admitted that Rohit was not off the mark when he said those who are not up for it should not be considered for the toughest format. But they also feel that a system needs to be in place so that such a situation never arises.

"Ranji Trophy cannot be taken lightly by any player, it is the backbone of Indian cricket. It is the most important tournament in domestic cricket. This should be followed up



in other formats in domestic cricket," Khandekar said. Another official, who did not wish to be named, went to the extent of saying that Ranji Trophy ran the risk of "a slow death if it was not made mandatory for top players to compete."

State units see the parent body's move as a case of better late than never. "I complement BCCI for this decision of compelling players to play for their state in Ranji Trophy. I see it as a case of better late than never, this is going to help domestic cricket in a big way," said Khandekar.

In the recent past, the Indian batters have been found vulnerable on turning tracks at home.

Former India captain Dilip Vengsarkar believes if elite players turn up for their respective states in Ranji Trophy whenever available, it would only make them better players of spin.

"Playing Ranji is very important. It helps you play spin better on Indian wickets, your overall skills are improved. And when you play foreign teams, it becomes easier (to face spin)," said Vengsarkar, him-

self a great player of spin.

"I feel it is a player's wish whether to play Ranji or not. If he doesn't want to play, we have enough in India to choose from, they will play and establish themselves. No one is bigger than the game. No one is indispensable," he said.

In Kishan's absence from the ongoing series, Dhruv Jurel made the most of the opportunity by coming up with two brilliant under-pressure knocks in only his second Test.

Like the MPCA chief, a state unit official proposed another step to rein in players who ignore red-ball cricket.

"This was a much needed step and should have been taken earlier. If an India player is regularly featuring in Ranji Trophy, it acts a massive motivator to the younger players in the squad.

"I would also want the BCCI to empower state units to ban those players who don't play Ranji Trophy. If a senior is dropped for once, the juniors would not dare to ignore their red ball commitments for T20 cricket," said a state unit official requesting anonymity. (PTI)

Delhi LG inaugurates DDA sports complex in Qutubgarh

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Tuesday inaugurated a DDA sports complex at Qutubgarh village, which has been adopted by him to develop as a model village, officials said.

The foundation stone of the sports complex was laid in October last year and the entire project has been completed at a cost of Rs 2.5 crore, an official statement said. The Delhi Development Authority, in a post on X, said, "Hon'ble @LtGovDelhi, Sh. VK Saxena inaugurated #DDA Sports Complex in Qutubgarh Model Village, Delhi along with Hon'ble MP Sh. @hansrajhansHRH. The complex has extensive amenities like volleyball, badminton, & kabaddi courts for male & female, an open gym & jogging tracks," it wrote.

The sports complex also includes an extended air-conditioned multipurpose hall of about 216 square metres, the statement said. "Sports play an important role to keep us fit. Realising this, the prime minister launched the 'Fit India' movement in 2019 so that fitness becomes an integral part of our daily life. The movement has become a huge success. I am confident that many players from Qutubgarh will represent India at the international level and bring laurels and medals for our country," Saxena said.

Appreciating the role of DDA in transforming Qutubgarh, the LG said that he aims to build a sports complex in every village in Delhi.

"I want children to get advanced training in various sports facilities, and both Indian Oil and Indian Army have agreed to provide experienced coaches and soon we will get to see advanced coaching facilities as well," the LG said.

The DDA has played a pivotal role in building sports infrastructure and promotion of sports in the national capital. At present, DDA has 16 sports complexes, three mini sports complexes, two public golf courses, 17 swimming pools and 40 multi-gyms, an official statement said. (PTI)

Klopp's last dance has one trophy and the Liverpool manager is targeting more

LONDON, Feb 27: Jurgen Klopp's last dance at Liverpool is off to the perfect start.

Klopp steps down as manager at the end of the season but he and Liverpool have locked up the first trophy of a possible four.

After a heavily depleted team defied the odds to win the English League Cup final by beating Chelsea 1-0 in extra time, Klopp is determined to win more silverware and the players are determined to help him.

"We just want to give our all for him. We always did," defender Joe Gomez said. "But now when the finishing line is in sight it adds that extra emphasis. It's special and hopefully it's the first (trophy) of a few we can get."

References to Klopp's last dance have started to trend on social media, likening his Liverpool farewell to Michael Jordan's final season with the Chicago Bulls in 1998, when they won the NBA championship. The season was documented in the Netflix series, "The Last Dance."

Since Klopp was hired in 2015, he has transformed a sleeping giant into a force again. The League Cup was his eighth trophy, among them a full set of major trophies including the Premier League and Champions League.

And Liverpool might not be finished. It leads the Premier League, and is still in the FA Cup and Europa League.

"I couldn't care less about my legacy. I'm not here to create one," Klopp said on Sunday. "As a manager of a football club, you are there to do the job actually."

But the League Cup final showed Klopp will leave the club in good shape. Seven of his players on the day were aged 21 or under. When Virgil van Dijk

headed in the winner in the 118th minute, he had three academy players beside him.

"We don't want to get ahead of ourselves but we are in every competition and we are going to try to win every game," Gomez said. "That's the target and we will go again."

Beside the players, Liverpool fans are savoring their final moments with Klopp.

Supporters carried flags and banners with messages of thanks to their outgoing manager as they made the short walk from Wembley Park subway station to Wembley Stadium. Singing loudly, it was a party atmosphere long before kickoff and they are hoping for one long party before finally saying goodbye.

"It has been a bit sad for everyone, but I think everyone now thinks we're going to push on and do even better than we would have done (this season)," Liverpool fan Nick Knight told The Associated Press.

His father, Andrew, added: "I think he means everything (to Liverpool). Within a few weeks or months of him arriving it was obvious they were a perfect fit and the type of football he played — high energy, playing to the final whistle — it was everything as a Liverpool fan you wanted to see."

The fans showed their appreciation long after the final whistle as they serenaded Klopp and his players on the field.

"It's not a problem if the manager leaves or whatever, (but) if these people would leave — our supporters — that would be a problem," Klopp said. "But as long as they are the way they are, Liverpool Football Club will be fine and that's the most important thing." (AP)

SAI National Centres of Excellence to induct 200 para athletes: Sports Minister

NEW DELHI, Feb 27: Aimed at promoting inclusivity and providing specialised training to para athletes in the country, the government has decided to induct 200 such athletes, including 97 women, across 10 disciplines in the SAI National Centres of Excellence, Sports Anurag Singh Thakur announced on Tuesday.

Out of 200 athletes, 68 (35 males, 33 females) will be archers and 36 (18, 18) will be in athletics.

Cycling will also have 10 male and as many female athletes.

Thakur said the success of the inaugural Khelo India Para Games in New Delhi was a significant step towards providing equal opportunities to all athletes.

"This initiative of inducting 200 Para Sport athletes in NCOEs will give further mo-



mentum to the evolution of para sports within the sports ecosystem," he said.

"The NCOEs will have expert coaches and be equipped with enhanced facilities." India had returned with its best hauls from both the most recent Paralympic Games and Asian Para Games.

The Indian athletes won 19 medals, including five gold, eight silver and six bronze, in the Tokyo Paralympic Games while at the Hangzhou Asian Para Games last year, the country won 111 medals, including 29 gold.

The break-up of the 200 para sports athletes across disciplines in NCOEs: Archery 68 (35 males, 33 females), Athletics 36 (18, 18), Cycling 20 (10, 10), Fencing 8 (5, 3), Judo 14 (7, 7), Para Powerlifting 10 (5, 5), Canoeing & Kayaking and Rowing 6 (4, 2), Shooting 20 (10, 10) and Taekwondo 18 (9, 9). (PTI)

FIFA launches 20-team lineup in global series of friendlies with Saudi Arabia hosting two pools

GENEVA, Feb 27: FIFA has teamed with Saudi Arabia to launch a new series of men's international friendlies that aim to help lower-ranked teams better prepare for one day playing at a World Cup.

Announced on Monday, the 20 teams taking part in the first FIFA Series games next month include just four that ever qualified for a World Cup. They are Algeria, Bolivia, Bulgaria and South Africa.

The FIFA Series project was revealed at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar by the governing body's president, Gianni Infantino. He has targeted raising the level of play in countries outside soccer's power bases of Europe and South America and making World Cups more competitive.

World Cup will be confirmed this year when it is the only candidate in a vote by FIFA member federations. Algeria, Azerbaijan and Sri Lanka also will host pools they will each play in next month. The games hosted by 2019 Africa Cup of Nations winner Algeria also include Bolivia, South Africa, an Africa Cup semifinalist this month, and European minnow Andorra.

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In 2026, Africa will have nine guaranteed places at the World Cup instead of five, and the Asian Football Confederation will send at least eight teams instead of four. Extra entries can be earned in intercontinental playoffs. (AP)

European and South American teams have dominated all 22 men's World Cups with only three teams from outside those continents ever reaching a semi-final: the United States in the inaugural 1930 tournament, South Korea in 2002 and Morocco in 2022. The 2026 tournament being hosted by the U.S., Canada and Mexico will be the first 48-team edition instead of 32, giving more chances to teams who never qualified for a World Cup.

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India finish runners-up in Turkish Women's Cup after loss to lower-ranked Kosovo

ALANYA (TURKEY), Feb 27:

India's hopes of winning their first-ever senior title outside the SAFF region were dashed by an injury-time goal by lower-ranked Kosovo in their concluding round-robin Turkish Women's Cup match here on Tuesday. While the 1-0 victory, thanks to a strike by Erëleta Memeti (90+2), propelled 100-ranked Kosovo to nine points from three matches and gave them their second title in a row, India, placed 35 spots above their opponents in the FIFA chart, finished runners-up with six points. It was the Blue Tigresses' best performance in the tournament in three appearances.

India's Manisha Kalyan was adjudged the best midfielder of the tournament for her exemplary display throughout the competition.

It was a do-or-die match for India. For Kosovo, a team, who last tasted defeat in November 2022 (1-3 against Slovenia), a draw was enough, though they did even better. Seeking better stability in front of their own back four, India made one change to the starting XI from their previous match against Hong Kong — Sangita Basfore replaced Karthika Angamuthu. India were happy to keep their shape and contain Kosovo, though the epicentre of the battle was quite far from the Indian box.

India, while sitting on a mid-press on most occasions, chose their moments to impose a high press on the Kosovo back-four, a tactic that yielded several chances and also served to confuse the op-

position defence.

Soumya Guguloth had the best chance of the first half and perhaps even the game on the quarter-hour mark, when Pyari Xaxa managed to steal the ball at the edge of the Kosovo box, before playing it to Indumathi Kathiresan, who threaded a delicate through ball between the lines, to Soumya behind the defence.

The India winger only had Djeliza Mehmeti to beat from inside the six-yard box but managed to side-foot it straight at the Kosovo keeper. India's ploy to pressurise the Kosovo defence worked wonders, with Pyari, the striker, being the chief workhorse. She managed to make a crucial interception at the edge of the area in the 38th minute, an action that required a high boot from Donjeta Halilaj to bring her down. Manisha showed her class from the ensuing free-kick, curling it around the wall, with the ball destined for the far post. However, Mehmeti produced a diving save to keep it out.

Manisha had another chance when she sprinted down the left and attempted a laced shot across the face of the goal, which was saved by the keeper. Her shot from the ensuing rebound went wide, just seconds before the half-time whistle. If the first half seemed like a tight match-up, the second half was twice as much. Kosovo looked to implement their own high press, which often left the Indian fullbacks isolated when the ball was played out wide to them. (PTI)

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Saudi Arabia will host — though not play in — two of the four-team pools playing from March 18-26, in the kingdom's latest cooperation with FIFA after staging the seven-team Club World Cup in December. Saudi Arabia's hosting of the 2034 World Cup will be confirmed this year when it is the only candidate in a vote by FIFA member federations.

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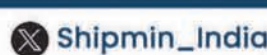
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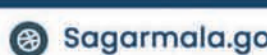
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