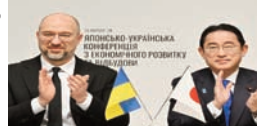



6
WORLD




- Japan hosts Ukraine reconstruction conference to showcase its support for the war-torn country


8
NORTHEAST




- At least 26 men massacred in Papua New Guinea tribal violence: Police



- Tripura CM thanks PM for ₹ 20 crore grant to MBB University




- Mizoram to soon launch flagship institutional credit programme




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HT BRIEF

Missing minors

JORHAT: In a heartening development, two minor girls who had been reported missing from Nagaon district were found on Monday at Maleng Balisapori under Bhogdoi police outpost in Jorhat. The girls, along with a minor boy from Charigaon, were rescued following a tip-off from the village's Gaon Burah. According to R. Bagliari, in-charge of the Bhogdoi police outpost, the Gaon Burah informed them about the presence of the two girls and the boy in a house in the village. Acting swiftly on the information, the police proceeded to the location and successfully rescued the minors. "The boy was reportedly in a relationship with the elder sister of one of the minor girls and would frequently visit her in Nagaon. On one such visit, the younger sister and her friend accompanied him to Jorhat, ostensibly to pursue their studies," stated the Bhogdoi police in-charge. The police informed the parents of both girls, who are en route to Jorhat to reunite with their daughters. The Bhogdoi police assured that necessary actions would be taken in coordination with the families to ensure the well-being and safety of the minors. This incident underscores the importance of community vigilance and prompt police response in safeguarding vulnerable individuals, especially minors, from potential risks and dangers.

Nyay Yatra: Cong MLA, Guwahati leader get police summon

Notice issued under Section 41A of CrPC

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Assam Police has summoned Congress MLA Jakir Hussain Sikdar and another party leader for questioning in connection with a clash that took place when Rahul Gandhi-led 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' entered Guwahati last month, officials said on Monday.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Assam Police has issued the summons to Sikdar and Guwahati City Congress general secretary Ramen Kumar Sarma and asked them to appear before it at 11:30 am on February 23.

"The case is still under investigation. We have issued notices to two persons under Section 41A of CrPC. We are looking into the role of other people in the case," a senior Assam Police official told PTI on condition of anonymity.

Along with Gandhi, other senior Congress leaders such as KC Venugopal, Jitendra Singh, Jairam Ramesh, Srinivas BV, Kanhaiyya Kumar, Gaurav Gogoi, Bhupen Kumar Borah, Debabrata Saikia and others have also been named in the FIR.



On January 23, Congress workers in presence of Gandhi and other leaders broke police barricades, which were put up after chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma threatened to file an FIR if the Yatra attempted to enter the main Guwahati city. The party workers clashed with police, who used mild lathicharge to control the situation, but failed to protect the barricades. Several police personnel and party workers were injured in the scuffle.

After dismantling the barrier, the Congress workers, however, did not proceed further with Gandhi stating that

they "can break barricades, but will not break law" and moved through its permitted route along the NH-27 in Guwahati.

This episode prompted the chief minister to term the action as "naxalite" style and instructed police to register a case. Guwahati Police lodged a suo motu FIR against Gandhi and other leaders for "wanton acts of violence".

Sarma even announced that the "instigators", including Gandhi, will be arrested after Lok Sabha polls as he does not want to "politicise" the issue before the general elections.

The chief minister, who also

holds the charge of the home department, later announced that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) will be formed to probe the case and accordingly, it was handed over to the CID.

The case was initially filed at Basistha Police Station under 10 different sections, including non-bailable ones, such as 120B (criminal conspiracy), 143 (unlawful assembly), 147 (rioting), 188 (disobedience of order), 283 (causing danger, obstruction or injury) and 353 (criminal force to deter public servant from discharging duty) of the IPC. Section 3 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984 for alleged mischief causing damage to public property has also been slapped in the FIR. Similarly, another FIR was registered against the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' and its organisers such as KB Byju, Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah and others for allegedly deviating from its permitted route inside Jorhat town, leading to a "chaotic situation" in the area. The Jorhat district police issued notices to the accused persons and several of (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

KAAC to begin eviction drive in Grazing Reserve Lands

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 19: In a significant move aimed at reclaiming and preserving grazing reserve lands, Chief Executive Member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang of Karbi Anglong announced on Monday the initiation of an eviction drive across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

This decision follows demands from various organisations, including the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), for the removal of encroachers from these lands. Ronghang revealed that the ASDC, Karbi Students Association, ASDC Youth Front, and Karbi Nimso Chingthar Asong had urged the council to take action against encroachers on Grazing Reserve (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) lands. Although the specific start date for the eviction drive was not disclosed during his statement to the media, "We have discussed it and we decided that we will begin the work (of eviction)," Ronghang stated during his interaction with reporters.

Furthermore, Ronghang announced plans for a com-



prehensive meeting on Tuesday involving political parties, social organisations, student bodies, former MPs, former CEMs, and other stakeholders to deliberate on the issue and arrive at a final decision.

The development comes in the wake of a meeting between ASDC president Chandra Kanta and the CEM at the KAAC Secretariat.

However, Kanta claimed that the CEM assured the eviction drive would commence from Tuesday, expressing satisfaction with the progress of talks.

"He (CEM) said that the eviction drive will start from tomorrow. As of now, we are satisfied as he said

he agreed 100 per cent with our demands. He said the process would take time but that's all right; we have given 30 days. The talk was successful," claimed Kanta.

Additionally, commenting on the recent incident of an attack in Kheroni Sariali on February 15, Ronghang announced that Rs 1 lakh compensation would be provided from the CEM Relief fund to the injured. He also reassured that legal action was being pursued against the perpetrators, with 18 individuals already arrested. The CEM emphasised the importance of maintaining communal harmony and peace amid ongoing (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

NE at centre of Modi govt's development agenda: Thakur



GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Monday said that the North Eastern region has been at the centre of developmental activities for the Narendra Modi-led government.

The information and broadcast minister also acknowledged the importance and contribution of the region towards the nation, especially in bringing laurels for sports events.

"When we talk about 'astha lakshmi', we mean our eight North Eastern states. These eight states are very important for the Modi government," he told reporters after inauguration of a revamped Regional News Unit of Doordarshan Assam here.

The minister maintained that the Centre has been working overtime to promote culture and heritage of the region, improve communication network, and establish new hospitals and educational institutions. On the NE states, including Assam, hosting the Khelo India University Games, which will have its formal inauguration later in the day in the presence of Thakur, he lauded the power of the region in the sporting arena.

"More than 4,500 players from over 200 universities are competing. Assam has hosted major sporting events earlier also. I am glad that the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

The Modi government started 'Act East Policy' in place of 'Look East Policy' of the previous UPA government, he said. "The UPA government had overlooked the region in its 10 years at the Centre, but our government is constantly working for it," he claimed.

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"More than 4,500 players from over 200 universities are competing. Assam has hosted major sporting events earlier also. I am glad that the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Govt invested ₹ 5 lakh cr in 10 years to transform NE: DoNER minister

KOLKATA, Feb 19: Union minister B L Verma on Monday said the central government has invested ₹ 5 lakh crore in the North East since 2014, while ₹ 11 lakh crore more will be pumped into the region for its all-round development.

This part of the country holds immense investment potential, said the Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

"Already ₹ 5 lakh crore has been invested by the government since 2014. While another ₹ 11 lakh crore is underway for the region on developmental projects to improve infrastructure," Verma told PTI on the sidelines of the North East Investors Summit. FICCI was the industry partner for the summit.

"I had met business groups of this region in one-to-one meetings and they have given encouraging feedback about their interest in investing in the region in varied sectors and sought our support to expedite their projects. Both big and medium-sized corporations have interest," he said. The interactions by the businessmen in Kolkata were focused on potential investments in small renewable energy projects, hospitality, electric vehicles, and agriculture.

Highlighting the development of the North East since 2014, Verma said, "We have seen massive infrastructural growth, with ₹ 1 lakh crore currently being in-



vested in road projects alone. The number of airports has jumped from 9 to 17, significantly improving accessibility." Underlining the focus on rail connectivity, the minister emphasized the significance of the newly inaugurated route between Akhaura in Bangladesh and Agartala in Tripura. "This is a major milestone for regional connectivity. There has also been a huge progress in waterways development for connectivity," he said.

Healthcare development also received attention, Verma said adding that an All India Institute of Medical Sciences has been (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Ops on to rescue abducted Assam miners

TINSUKIA, Feb 19: Efforts are on to trace three miners from Assam, who have allegedly been abducted by militants in Arunachal Pradesh, police said here on Monday. At least three miners were allegedly kidnapped by suspected militants from Febru Basti in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh on Sunday, Tinsukia police said. "Operations by police forces and Assam Rifles are underway. Details will be shared later," a senior officer said. Those who have been kidnapped are identified as Gyan Thapa, Lekhan Bora and Chandan Narzari but the exact number of abducted persons is not yet known, Tinsukia Superintendent of Police Abhijit Gaurav said. It is not clear whether they were engaged in illegal mining activities or not. According to reports received from Arunachal, workers at a coal mine in Febru Basti area of Changlang district were abducted by suspected ULFA (I) and NSCN militants. (PTI)

'This is not something that's going to be resolved with the stroke of a single pen or a law'

Smog towers, cloud seeding not solution to India's air pollution problem: US scientist

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Improving air quality in India requires long-term effort, a senior US scientist has said and noted cost-intensive technologies such as smog towers and cloud seeding are not sustainable solutions to the pollution problem plaguing the country.

In an interview with PTI, Richard Peltier, a member of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Air Pollution and Health Technical Advisory Group, said there is a good understanding that air pollution is "really quite bad" across India but precision is lacking due to the limited distribution of air pollution monitors.

When asked how much time is needed to control air pollution in cities such as Delhi, he cited the



example of the US.

The US implemented the Clean Air Act in the 1960s, Peltier said and added only recently has the

country developed air quality that is generally considered good.

"So, it took 50 or 60 years to get here. This is not an instantaneous

problem. This is not something that's going to be resolved with the stroke of a single pen or a law. This takes time ... It is more of a marathon than a sprint," he said.

Asked about the role of smog towers in resolving the issue, Peltier -- also an executive editor of the Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology -- said these giant air purifiers work on a small scale but are impractical for entire cities due to cost and maintenance challenges. "Do they remove air pollution from the air? Yes, they do. Do they remove an adequate amount of air pollution from the air? Absolutely not. It is like trying to dry up a big mighty river with a bath towel. You just cannot (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Bangladesh visa centre in Silchar soon: Envoy

SILCHAR, Feb 19: A Bangladesh visa centre will be opened here soon, following the demand of people of the three districts of Assam's Barak Valley, an envoy from the neighbouring country said on Monday.

Bangladesh Assistant High Commissioner at Guwahati, Ruhul Amin, said there is considerable demand for visas to Bangladesh from Barak Valley comprising Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts, and thus it has been decided to open a visa centre here.

Silchar is the Cachar district headquarters. The date of opening of such a facility is yet to be decided, but it will done soon, he said. Applications will be received, and visas for a trip to Bangladesh will be issued from here, Amin said. A proposal to start a border market at Haringar part II of Katigora will also be examined, and hopefully, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Magisterial probe ordered into looting of arms from IRB camp in Manipur

IMPHAL, Feb 19: The Manipur government has ordered a magisterial probe into the looting of arms from an India Reserve Battalion (IRB) camp at Chingarel in Imphal East district on February 13 to "ascertain the facts and circumstances leading to the incident".

An order issued by the Home Department on Sunday said "an unfortunate incident occurred on February 13 in which a mob mostly youths stormed the camp of 5th IRB located at Chingarel Tezpur and snatched away arms and ammunition leading to a confrontation between mob and security forces involving exchange of fire at the spot." As per the order, District Magistrate Imphal East Khumanthem Diana has been appointed as the Enquiry authority to "ascertain facts and circumstances" leading to

the incident and to "suggest remedial measures to avoid recurrence of such incidents in the future."

The enquiry report is to be submitted to the government in 30 days from the date of issue of the order.

Six persons were arrested by police for their involvement in the looting of arms incident. Seven IRB personnel were also suspended.

Police have so far recovered four Insas rifles, one AK Ghatak 2, magazines of SLR and sixteen small boxes of 9mm ammunition suspected to be looted from the IRB camp. The Manipur government on Sunday had also ordered a magisterial inquiry in connection with a recent mob violence in Churachandpur district over the action taken against a policeman. At least two people were killed and 30 injured in (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

NITI Aayog pitches for tax reforms, mandatory saving, housing plans for elderly

National portal should be developed to provide senior citizens access to various services: Niti Aayog

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Government think tank NITI Aayog has pitched for tax reforms, mandatory saving plan, and housing plan for elderly in India, as the population of senior citizens is projected to reach 19.5 per cent of the country's population by 2050.

In a report titled 'Senior Care Reforms in India - Reimagining the Senior Care Paradigm', NITI Aayog said a national portal for senior care must be developed for senior citizens to provide easy access of services to them.

"Since the social security framework in India is limited, most seniors depend on the income generated from their savings. Variable interest rates result in the erosion of their income, sometimes even below sustenance levels.

"Therefore, a regulatory mechanism is required to set a viable base rate for the interest accrued on senior citizen deposits," the report said.

The report emphasised that giving a further concession to older women will contribute to their financial well-being.

The elderly in India currently comprises a little over 10 per cent of the population, translating to about 104 million, and is projected



to reach 19.5 per cent of the total population by 2050.

The report also suggested that the government should reassess the reverse mortgage mechanism to increase liquidity for seniors and by making necessary amendments to the current reverse mortgage rules.

"Tax and GST reforms, etc, on senior care products (needed) to increase the ease of adoption and safeguard the elderly population from the financial burden," the Aayog said.

Population ageing is a global phenomenon, and the number of people over 60 years of age has been rising rapidly across the

world. India, too, is witnessing an exponential growth in the number and proportion of elderly people, coupled with decreasing fertility rate (less than 2.0) and increasing life expectancy (more than 70 years).

The report also called for earmarking CSR funds as a contribution to national funds for care provided to the non-affording category of the elderly in their facilities. It also stressed on developing partnerships with the private sector through various PPP models to encourage private medical care at discounted prices to senior persons across the medical care cycle, from

consultation to diagnostics to treatment. Noting that catering to the needs of the elderly population of this size is challenging, the report said it also presents an opportunity for the growth of the senior care industry, which is estimated at USD 7 billion (₹ 57,881 crore).

More than 75 per cent of elderly people in India suffer from chronic diseases and these figures indicate the potential of the home-based care market in India.

As per the report, the size of the home healthcare market in India was estimated at USD 6.2 billion (₹ 50,840 crore) in 2020 and it is projected to reach USD 21.3 billion (₹ 1.74 lakh crore) by 2027.

The home healthcare market can lead to a 15-30 per cent reduction in infrastructure and operational costs compared to hospital costs for the same treatment, it added.

"We need to ensure the social security of the elderly and add more emphasis to wellbeing and care," NITI Aayog Member (Health) V K Paul said during the release of the report.

NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Suman Bery said it is time to start thinking about the special dimensions of senior care, in addition to medical and social aspects. (PTI)

Market rally continues for 5th day; Nifty hits new peak, Sensex up 281 points

MUMBAI, Feb 19: Stock markets closed higher for the fifth consecutive day on Monday with the benchmark Sensex rising 281 points and Nifty scaling its fresh lifetime high driven by gains in financial and FMCG shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 281.52 points or 0.39 per cent to close at 72,708.16. As many as 17 Sensex shares advanced while 13 closed in the red. After a firm start, the index hit a high of 72,881.93 in day trade.

The broader Nifty closed at its all-time high of 22,122.25 points, up by 81.55 points or 0.37 per cent from the last close.

The 50-issue barometer also scaled its intra-day record high of 22,186.65 helped by gains in pharma, banking and oil shares. As many as 27 Nifty shares posted gains while 23 declined.

"The overall sentiment appears to position Nifty for a potential upward movement towards 22,500-22,600 in the short term. The immediate crucial support is situated at 22,000," said Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst, LKP Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE Midcap rose by 0.29 per cent while BSE SmallCap gained 0.77 per cent, beating bigger peers. The BSE largecap was up 0.35 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE Telecom rose by 1.52 per cent, BSE Utilities by 1.29 per cent,



BSE Consumer Durables by 1.76 per cent, BSE Services by 1.22 per cent, and FMCG by 0.84 per cent.

Among losers, BSE Metal dropped 0.87 per cent, Realty by 0.63 per cent, Capital Goods by 0.62 per cent, and IT by 0.26 per cent. Key stock indices closed in the green for the fifth straight day on Monday, gaining around 2.3 per cent. Overall market capitalisation of BSE listed shares surged to ₹ 391.69 lakh crore or USD 4.72 trillion, making investors richer by ₹ 2.20 lakh crore.

Among Sensex shares, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance, Sun Pharma, Maruti Suzuki, ITC, and Nestle were the lead gainers. On the other hand, L&T Wipro, IndusInd Bank and TCS and Tata Motors were the lead losers.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said, "Despite an unattractive risk re-

ward, the broader market continued its outperformance in expectation of improvements in private capex and optimism about political stability.

"Benign input costs and expectations of a pickup in rural demand will aid corporate earnings growth." Key Asian markets were mixed. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.8 per cent, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 lost 0.04 per cent while the Shanghai Composite index gained 1.4 per cent.

US market closed on Monday on account of President's Holiday. On Friday, US stocks closed in the red, with all three major indices logging weekly losses, as investors assessed inflation readings and company earnings.

On Friday, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) were net buyers as they purchased securities worth ₹ 253.28 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Mcap of BSE-listed firms hits new peak at ₹ 3.91 lakh cr

MUMBAI, Feb 19: Investors became richer by ₹ 2.20 lakh crore on Monday and the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms reached an all-time high of ₹ 3.91 lakh crore as buoyant sentiment sustained the stock market rally for the fifth straight session.

The 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark climbed 281.52 points or 0.39 per cent to close at 72,708.16, while NSE Nifty ended at its all-time high of 22,122.25 points, up 81.55 points or 0.37 per cent from the previous close.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of BSE-listed companies went up ₹ 2,19,581.56 crore to reach its all-time high of ₹ 3,91,69,087.01 crore.

"BSE market cap touching a record high of around USD 4.7 trillion reflects the strength of the ongoing bull run and the momentum in the market.

"The fact that the crucial Buffet Ratio (market cap to GDP) is signalling very high valuation at above 120 per cent is a matter of concern. But this is unlikely to halt the bull run in the near-term since flows into the market from domestic individual investors and DIIs continue to be strong," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

Among Sensex shares, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance, Sun Pharma, Maruti Suzuki, ITC, and Nestle were the lead gainers. On the other hand, L&T Wipro, IndusInd Bank and TCS and Tata Motors were the lead losers.

In the broader market, the BSE Midcap rose by 0.29 per cent while BSE SmallCap gained 0.77 per cent, beating bigger peers. The BSE largecap was up 0.35 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, BSE Telecom rose by 1.52 per cent, BSE Utilities by 1.29 per cent, BSE Consumer Durables by 1.76 per cent, BSE Services by 1.22 per cent, and FMCG by 0.84 per cent.

Among losers, BSE Metal dropped 0.87 per cent, Realty by 0.63 per cent, Capital Goods by 0.62 per cent, and IT by 0.26 per cent.

Key benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed in the green for the fifth straight session on Monday, gaining around 2.3 per cent.

Asian markets were mixed. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.8 per cent, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 lost 0.04 per cent while the Shanghai Composite index gained 1.4 per cent.

US market is closed on Monday on account of President's Holiday. On Friday, US stocks closed in the red, with all three major indices logging weekly losses, as investors assessed inflation readings and company earnings. (PTI)

CBDT sets ₹ 1 lakh threshold per assessee for withdrawal of old tax demands

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The income tax department has prescribed a ceiling of ₹ 1 lakh per assessee for withdrawal of small tax demands till Assessment Year 2015-16, in accordance with a scheme announced in Budget.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has issued an order giving effect to the 2024-25 budget announcement by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The budget had announced that tax demands for AY 2010-11 of up to ₹ 25,000 and for AY 2011-12 to 2015-16 of up to ₹ 10,000 will be withdrawn. Tax demands totalling about ₹ 3,500 crore will be withdrawn following the announcement.

The CBDT order said that such outstanding tax demands pertaining to income tax, wealth tax and gift tax as on January 31, 2024, shall be remitted and extinguished "subject to the maximum



ceiling of ₹ 1 lakh for any specific taxpayer/assessee".

The limit of ₹ 1 lakh would include principal component of tax demand, interest, penalty or fee, cess, surcharge.

However, the remission shall not be applicable on the demands raised against the tax deductors or tax collectors under

TDS or TCS provisions of the I-T Act. Nangia Andersen India Partner Maanesh Bawa said the directive further specifies that this waiver or cancellation does not entitle taxpayers to any claims for credit or refunds.

Additionally, the waiver or cancellation will not influence any ongoing, planned, or potential criminal legal proceedings against the taxpayer and does not grant any immunity under any legislation.

"Taxpayers are advised to access their online accounts and navigate to Pending Action > Response to Outstanding Demand to verify the status of 'Extinguished Demands' related to them," Bawa said.

Revenue secretary Sanjay Malhotra had earlier this month said that there are about 1.11 crore such disputed tax demands. (PTI)

Piyush Goyal confident of rate cut by Reserve Bank in coming months

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Union commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal on Monday exuded confidence that the Reserve Bank will cut interest rates as inflation is under control.

The RBI has been maintaining the benchmark interest rate at an elevated level of 6.5 per cent since February 2023. Goyal said that the economic fundamentals of the country are strong and inflation is under check. He said that the average inflation of 10 years in India is about 5 to 5.5 per cent.

It was the best-performing decade and because of that, the interest rate came down "dramatically" and the central bank was strengthened and had the ability to bring down the interest rate. "Of-course in the last year and a half, post Ukraine-crisis, interest rates have again gone up by 250 basis points. But now that inflation is pretty much in control, I suspect we will soon see the reversal of the rate hikes starting in India, whether it happens in the

next or the second monetary policy from now. I think it's only a matter of time," Goyal said.

In case the Reserve Bank goes for a reduction in the key short-term lending rate (repo), the cost of borrowings both for corporate as well as individuals, will go down, and hence EMIs.

The RBI on February 8, for the sixth time in a row, left the key policy rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent, which may keep the cost of borrowings for both individuals as well as corporates largely stable, and lowered the retail inflation projection to 4.5 per cent for next fiscal. The next bi-monthly monetary policy will be announced on April 5.

The consumer price index was 5.1 per cent in January, down from 6.52 per cent in January 2023.

The wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation eased to a three-month low of 0.27 per cent in January, mainly due to moderation of food prices, including vegetables. (PTI)

Department of Fisheries inks pact with ONDC

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The Department of Fisheries on Monday signed an MoU with the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) platform to provide better market access for the fisheries sector. The memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in the presence of Union minister of fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying Parshottam Rupala, minister of state L. Murugan, fisheries secretary Abhilash Laksh, ONDC managing director T. Koshy and other officials.

"This is a historical MoU," Rupala said adding that the collaboration will unlock the potential of digital commerce for the Indian fisheries sector, an official statement said. Rupala also said the collaboration would serve numerous benefits for fisheries industries like reduced transaction costs, increased market reach, improved transparency, increased competition and competitiveness, innovation, and employment generation.

The collaboration aims to empower all stakeholders, including traditional fishermen, fish farmer producer organizations, entrepreneurs from the fisheries sector to buy and sell their products through ONDC in a structured manner, the statement said. (PTI)

Artha Global's Rajadhyaksha expresses inability to join 16th Fin Comm

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Artha Global's executive director Niranjan Rajadhyaksha has expressed his inability to join as a member of the 16th Finance Commission due to personal reasons, the Union finance ministry said on Monday.

The government had on January 31, appointed four members of the 16th Finance Commission chaired by Arvind Panagariya.

Apart from Rajadhyaksha, former expenditure secretary Ajay Narayan Jha and retired bureaucrat Annie George Mathew were appointed as full-time members of the commission. SBI Group's chief economic advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh was named a part-time member.

"Dr. Rajadhyaksha has expressed his inability to take up this responsibility due to unforeseen personal circumstances. Action will be taken to appoint a Member of the 16th Commission in lieu of Dr. Rajadhyaksha," a ministry statement said.

Officials said Rajadhyaksha did not attend the first meeting of the 16th Finance Commission which

was held on February 14.

The government constituted the 16th Finance Commission under the chairmanship of Panagariya on December 31, 2023. The panel would submit its report to the President by October 31, 2025. The report would be for five years commencing April 1, 2026.

Besides suggesting tax devolution between centre and states and revenue augmentation measures, the commission would review the present arrangements for financing disaster management initiatives with reference to the funds constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

The Finance Commission is a constitutional body that gives suggestions on centre-state financial relations.

The erstwhile 15th Finance Commission under NK Singh had recommended that states be given 41 per cent of the divisible tax pool of the Centre during the five-year period 2021-22 to 2025-26, which is at the same level as was recommended by 14th Finance Commission under Y V Reddy. (PTI)

Gold climbs ₹ 250; silver tumbles ₹ 500

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Gold prices climbed ₹ 250 to ₹ 62,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid a rise in the precious metal's prices in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous close, the yellow metal had ended at ₹ 62,550 per 10 grams.

However, silver tumbled ₹ 500 to ₹ 76,000 per kilogram. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 62,800 per 10 grams, up ₹ 250, taking a positive trend from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,020 per ounce, up USD 7 from the previous close.

However, silver was quoting lower at USD 23.09 per ounce, while it had closed at USD 23.39 per ounce in the previous trade.

Gold traded higher in the European trading session on Monday, helped by safe haven demand, Gandhi added. (PTI)

Oppn leaders had received alert from Apple warning them of state-sponsored attackers trying to remotely compromise their iPhones

Apple's reply on device vulnerability not totally clear: MoS IT

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The government is still waiting for a clear reply from iPhone maker Apple on iPhone alert sent to opposition political leaders around five months back on alleged hacking of their devices by state-backed hackers.

In an interview to PTL, Union minister of state for electronics and IT, Rajeev Chandrasekhar said the government has asked Apple two questions: whether their devices are safe, and if so the reason for the alert was sent to opposition members.

"In my humble opinion, this is not something that any proprietary platform will completely concede whether they have vulnerabilities in their platform. There's an instinct in any platform to deny that vulnerability exists," he said.

"We are asking a clear question, is your phone vulnerable? The answer to that is not totally unambiguous," Chandrasekhar said.

In October, several opposition leaders claimed they have received an alert from Apple warning them of state-sponsored attackers trying to remotely compromise their iPhones and alleged hacking by the government.

Among those who received the

threat notification on their iPhones were Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, party leaders Shashi Tharoor, Pawan Khera, K C Venugopal, Supriya Shrinete, T S Singhdeo, and Bhupinder S Hooda.

Trinamool Congress' Mahua Moitra, CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury, and Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi, Aam Aadmi Party's Raghav Chadha, AIMIM President Asaduddin Owaisi and some aides of Congress MP Rahul Gandhi also received the notification.

"Allegations when they were made, on that particular day we said very clearly this is for Apple to answer because it involves their device. "We certainly have no R&D (research and development) capability in the government to understand what is in the iOS and what is not, and certainly Apple is not going to tell us its proprietary technology. So we called them," Chandrasekhar said.

He said that CERT-In has made them party to the investigation.

"They have given a number of clarifications, including on the same day that this has nothing to do with the state actor. But we pressed

them further that if it has nothing to do with the state actor, then what is this notification? They have given us some clarification. They continue to... but CERT is continuing their investigation," the minister said.

An email query sent to Apple elicited no reply in this regard.

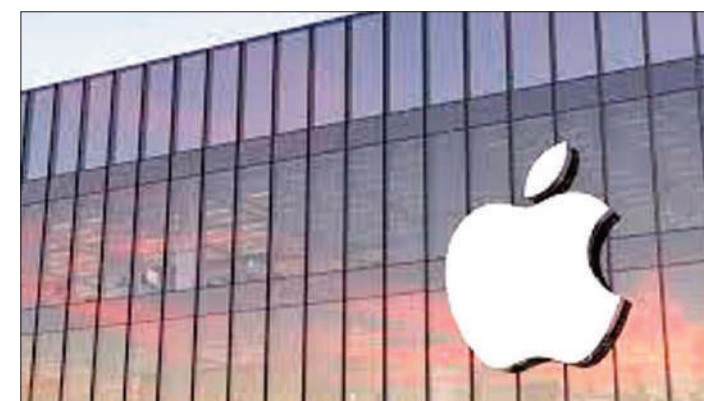
Chandrasekhar rejected allegations that the government in any way is trying to transgress privacy of people or muzzle freedom of speech and expression.

"We are absolutely clear that nothing we say in any rules, nothing we say in any law will ever transgress into or interfere with the fundamental rights of any of our citizens. As a matter of fact we support it," he said.

The government is fully committed to ensuring that internet is safe and trusted, the minister said.

He said some people take the view that free speech is an absolute right and it has to be protected which may be true for the US but the Indian constitution has reasonable restrictions on it.

"There are restrictions to it that you cannot say anything that is illegal, unlawful or against national security. There is a fundamental



right to free speech.

"Fundamental right to free speech does not mean you have a fundamental right to lie, or provoke or create public order disturbances because you are inciting violence," the minister said. There is a group of people who constantly allege censorship by government, he said, adding that the government is fully focussed on protecting the fundamental rights of citizens.

"There are some bad guys and there are some good guys in this battle for free speech. If there is any good guy in this, it is us, the government of India. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi it is very

clear... We are trustees to protect the fundamental right of every one of our citizens," the minister said.

He said allegations on government transgressing privacy or curtailing free speech are mostly politically driven.

"When they have a doubt, and they can sit and discuss... they quickly get convinced that we are absolutely on the right track," the minister said.

In response to controversy around the PIB Fact Check unit, that flags misinformation or false information pertaining to the government, Chandrasekhar said the fact check unit is not any form of

censorship but rather a tool to help platforms that are dealing with disputed government information.

"When the fact check unit says this is right or this is wrong, all platforms have to do is label it. Now there is nothing in that, that is censorship. But some people have characterised that, specifically editors guild, etc, who are looking for a cause to hang their hat on," Chandrasekhar said. Editors' Guild of India has challenged the amendments to IT Rules 2021 in June.

The guild has alleged that "amendments to the IT Rules will have deeply adverse implications for press freedom in the country".

The minister said the government wants to have a lesser role to be arbiter of disputes between consumers and the platforms.

"We had a situation in 2021, with every dispute between a consumer and a social media platform getting referred to us. We want platforms to be accountable under law, to the consumers' grievances.

"We want consumers to have the process of going to an independent regulator or to the court to have their dispute with the platform sorted not to the government," the minister said. (PTI)

NAME CORRECTION

The correct name of my mother is Bishnu Kumar Devi, however in my school documents and others, the name of my mother is wrongly stated as Bishnu Devi instead of the correct name, i.e., Bishnu Kumari Devi. Therefore, Bishnu Kumari Devi and Bishnu Devi are of the names of the same person and one person, i.e., my mother.

Tilok Bahadur Thapa, Vill.: Chandra Sing Teron, 4 mile, Dilaji Gaon, PO and PS: Diphu, Dist.: Karbi Anglong, Assam

HIRING OF VEHICLES

E-Tender Bid Number: GEM/2024/B/4642137; Dated: 15-02-2024. Item Category: Monthly Basis Cab & Taxi Hiring Services-MUV, 2500 Km x 320 hours; Outstation. Estimated Bid Value: ₹69,60,457/- Earnest Money: ₹1,39,200/- Contract Period: 2 Year(s). Bid end date at 15:00 hrs and opening at 15:30 hrs on 08-03-2024. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website http://www.GeM.gov.in.

DRM(W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Modi ki Guarantee

Prosperous Northeast



Ministry of Ports,
Shipping & Waterways
Government of India



Inauguration / Foundation Stone laying of
IWAI PROJECTS WORTH MORE THAN

₹254 cr



“ The North East is the gateway to South East Asia and we need to take advantage of this, Govt is focusing on improving all round connectivity of North-East with rest of India through Road, Rail, Telecom, Power & Waterways. ”

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

INAUGURATION

- Passenger-cum-Cargo Terminal at Bogibeel (Dibrugarh)
- Inland Water Transport Terminal at Sonamura (Tripura)
- Upgraded Terminals at Karimganj & Badarpur (Karimganj)

FOUNDATION STONE LAYING

- Construction of Compound Wall for IWAI Jogighopa terminal
- Construction of Custom Immigration office building at Dhubri

ANNOUNCEMENT

- Deployment of 6 tourist jetties in NER (NW-2)
- Deployment of 2 Electric Hybrid Catamaran at Guwahati
- Commencement of dredging operations in NER by the Dredging Corporation of India

ADVANTAGE NORTHEAST

- The terminal at Bogibeel will improve the economies of scale for existing major trade like tea, polymer, coal, fertilizer etc for upper Assam and nearby states such as Arunachal Pradesh
 - The Sonamura Terminal will attract trans-boundary trade between India and Bangladesh. Shippers and traders can avail adjacent facilities of the LCSs of Srimantapur and Bibir Bazaar in India and Bangladesh respectively
 - The Karimganj and Badarpur terminal will have major influence on traders and manufactures in districts of Cachar, Karimganj & Hailakandi in Assam and adjoining states of Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Meghalaya
 - The tourist jetties will enhance the existing infrastructure along NW-2
 - The Electric Hybrid Catamaran will introduce Green energy in inland waterways and save the environment from pollution
- The dredging works of NER National Waterways will facilitate movement in NW-2 and in River Barak, NW-16

Guwahati

● Inauguration/Launch by ●

Sarbananda Sonowal

Union Minister for Ports, Shipping & Waterways and AYUSH; Govt. of India

● In august presence of ●

Queen Ojha

Member of Parliament, Guwahati

Parimal Suklabaidya

Minister of Transport, Fisheries & Excise, Govt. of Assam

Siddhartha Bhattacharya

MLA, Gauhati East

Ramendra Narayan Kalita

MLA, Gauhati West

Atul Bora

MLA, Dispur

Dhubri

Jayanta Mallabaruah

Minister of Public Health Engineering, Skill, Employment & Entrepreneurship and Tourism, Govt of Assam

Dibrugarh

Rameswar Teli

Minister of State for Petroleum & Natural Gas, Labour & Employment, Govt of India

Prashanta Phukan

MLA, Dibrugarh

Chakradhar Gogoi

MLA, Moran

Ponakan Baruah

MLA, Chabua

Tripura

Professor (Dr.) Manik Saha

Chief Minister, Tripura

Pratima Bhoumik

Minister of State, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt of India.

Sushanta Chowdhury

Minister of Transport, Govt. of Tripura

→ VENUE ←

TUESDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY, 2024 AT PANDU PORT, GUWAHATI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Everything you've ever wanted is sitting on the other side of fear. -- George Addair

Adamant Houthis, crisis in Yemen

Yemen's Houthi rebels have demonstrated unwavering support for the Palestinians in Gaza. Unlike many Arab leaders who express insincere sympathy, the Houthi rebels, despite being from one of the world's poorest countries, have taken action by launching ballistic missiles at Israel and targeting ships passing through the Bab al-Mandab strait, a crucial pathway for global trade.

The religious leader of the Houthi rebels, Abdel-Malik al-Houthi, has made a commitment to persist with the attacks until Israel ceases its bombings in Gaza and allows unimpeded humanitarian assistance. The Houthis are delighted by the support they receive from overseas. In New York, protesters express their enthusiasm, chanting, "Yemen, Yemen, we are proud of you! Prevent another ship from proceeding!"

The neglect of the Houthi insurgents towards the welfare of their own citizens in Yemen is frequently overlooked. After ten years of fighting, the United Nations has identified the humanitarian situation in Yemen as among the worst in the world. Over half of Yemen's 33 million inhabitants, translating to several million people, urgently require help to live. A large number of these people are in the north-west area, which is governed by the Houthis.

Within the areas under their control, the Houthi rebels hinder the flow of humanitarian aid. They obstruct the process of delivering assistance, making it difficult for aid to reach those in need. They demand control over the distribution of aid and impose restrictions on international aid workers. Additionally, they impose taxes, sell aid, and charge customs fees at checkpoints. In essence, they treat the aid program, which is worth billions of dollars, as a means to generate revenue. A former UN official accurately describes the situation by stating that, similar to Gaza, the risk of famine in Yemen is a result of deliberate actions taken by the Houthis. They exploit aid as a weapon to further their own interests and exert control.

Over the past ten years, Yemen's economy has heavily relied on foreign aid for survival. Following the Houthi rebels' seizure of the capital, Sana'a, in 2014 and the subsequent war with Saudi Arabia, various United Nations agencies have provided substantial financial assistance to prevent famine in the country. However, the Houthis, who follow a Shia offshoot of Islam, typically view foreign aid workers with suspicion, often treating them as if they are Western spies.

Following military strikes by the United States and the United Kingdom on Yemeni military targets in response to Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, the Houthi rebels have issued orders for American and British citizens to evacuate the country. For now, most of those affected, including Julien Harneis, the newly appointed humanitarian co-ordinator for Yemen from the United Nations, have sought refuge in Aden. Aden serves as Yemen's largest city in the southern region and is regarded as the administrative center for the internationally recognized government. Speculation is spreading that the Houthis may take measures to close down any United Nations or aid agency that declines to withdraw its American and British staff from Yemen.

Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal knows how to turn a crisis into an opportunity

By: Sushil Kuttu

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is running circles around the Bharatiya Janata Party. Around the Modi government. Around the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate. Even around a court. Pinning Kejriwal to an ED summons for questioning in the Delhi liquor scam case is proving to be impossible. But more than frustration, there is admiration for the manner in which Kejriwal has been giving the BJP boast "Modi Hai Toh Mumkin Hai" the short-shrift.

The fact that three top AAP leaders are behind bars with charges of bail whittled down to hardly likelihood, Arvind Kejriwal's accomplishment of avoiding central investigating agencies' summons and whatever consequences thereof is something to take to the Guinness. As of now, the confidence level in AAP is the highest it will ever be. Isn't it quaint that Kejriwal used a self-imposed motion of no-confidence against his government to drum up confidence in him and prevent a court from hauling him to its august presence?

The manner and the excuses Kejriwal used to escape the Enforcement Directorate dragnet are the mark of genius — six in a row summonses. And it's his video image that presented itself before the Rouse Avenue Court. As of now, the Modi government, the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate, the judiciary, nobody can do zilch to the Aam Aadmi Party convener.

The Delhi Chief Minister inserted a no-confidence motion to cock a snook at the court summons to "physically present" himself. But, of course, the self-imposed no-confidence motion against his rule was of no consequence. It was a show of strength that followed charges that the Bharatiya Janata Party was bent on overthrowing the Kejriwal government by buying AAP MLAs at Rs 25 crore per MLA.

Kejriwal excused himself, told the court he couldn't present himself "physically" and "appeared via video conferencing" to continue to skip the sixth summons. There's nothing the Enforcement

Directorate (ED) could do. Whatever happened to the court's "legally bound" ultimatum is not known, but the court has now posted the case to be heard on March 16. Even the court got hogtied when it came to the Delhi Chief Minister's shenanigans.

March 16 spells a month to spend as he pleases in relative freedom and there's a lot the AAP can do in 30 days. Kejriwal's presence over-ground is important to the ongoing farmers' agitation. Not least because Punjab's farmers are at the forefront of the protests and AAP rules Punjab as also Delhi. Also, Kejriwal's "physical presence" is a morale-booster to the protesting farmers. Don't forget last time as many as 700 farmers met martyrdom and the Aam Aadmi Party convener's pep-talks are the best in town.

The Enforcement Directorate has charged Kejriwal with providing "lame excuses" to avoid the summons, stating that the Delhi Chief Minister was "disobeying the law and setting a wrong example for the common man, i.e., the Aam Aadmi". Does Kejriwal care? Anybody who knows Kejriwal knows that the street-smart AAP convener is least bothered about what people think of his shenanigans.

Kejriwal's trust vote was another exercise to give the ED's sixth summons the skip. The sixth summons had asked Kejriwal to appear before the ED on February 19. The five earlier summons were rejected with the excuse that the summonses were "illegal" and the Enforcement Directorate's sole aim was to arrest him and put him in a cell next to that of erstwhile Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia.

Kejriwal's impending arrest is so long expected that people have stopped thinking of it. Every time the Enforcement Directorate issues summons, there's intense speculation and then resignation. Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and Satyendra Jain, three AAP leaders are behind bars, but this man eludes anticipation. Will Arvind Kejriwal succeed in remaining free for the duration of the next few months, enough time for general elections 2024 to be over and a new government in place? (IPA Service)

UAE's journey of interfaith: From Mandirs to Mosques

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's current visit to the UAE, where he is set to inaugurate the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi today, signifies a significant milestone in a journey that commenced less than a decade ago. Back in August 2015, he undertook his inaugural visit to the Gulf nation, becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to do so since Indira Gandhi in 1981. The bilateral agenda at the time was extensive, laying the groundwork for a remarkable transformation in India's relationship with the UAE. During this visit, Modi also took the opportunity to formally request land allocation for a Hindu temple, addressing the longstanding religious and spiritual needs of the 3.5 million-strong Indian community in the UAE.

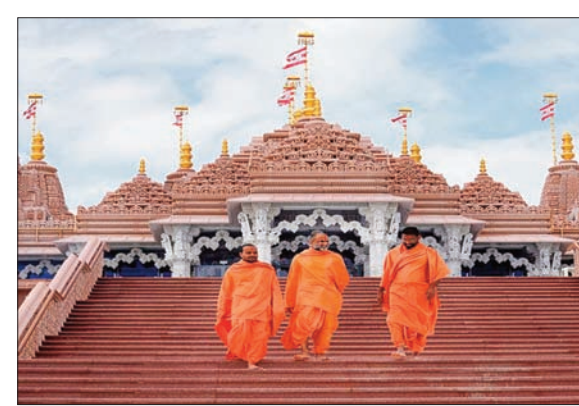
Spanning 27 acres, the majestic mandir stands tall at 108 feet, strategically situated just off the bustling Abu Dhabi-Dubai highway. It is poised to serve as a compelling visual symbol of the evolving relationship between the nations. Yet, the mandir's presence in a once predominantly conservative Muslim nation like the UAE signifies a deeper transformation within the country. Allow me to share a brief anecdote that might shed light on this profound change.

During Modi's visit to the UAE in February 2018, the decision was made to unveil a replica of the proposed mandir. The task of preparing the replica fell upon the BAPS leadership, who faced uncertainty regarding the temple architecture acceptable to the hosts. With limited time before the visit, I was entrusted with the responsibility to seek the views of the UAE leadership. Two models were crafted; the first embraced a classical design featuring seven shikharas, while

the second proposed a more discreet temple recessed within a rectangular building.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi



from the usual protocol, Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed attended the reception I hosted for India's 69th Republic Day. As he bid farewell, he shared positive news regarding the temple design. Following consultation with his elder brother, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, their response was unequivocal: "We agreed to have a Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, and it should look like a Hindu temple."

The unequivocal nature of this response reflects the UAE's steady evolution concerning religious tolerance and interfaith harmony. This transformative journey traces its roots back to the visionary founder-President Sheikh Zayed, gaining momentum particularly after the 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001. The UAE's active participation in the US-led coalition against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan marked a crucial turning point.

The momentum further accelerated post the 'Arab Spring' in 2011, where the UAE, in collaboration with Saudi Arabia and other allies, intervened to halt the Muslim Brotherhood-led government in Egypt. Subsequently, the UAE not only banned the Brotherhood but also labeled it a terrorist organization. Concrete measures were taken to eradicate its influence from mosques, madrasas, and educational institutions across the country. Initiatives like the Sawab Centre emerged as a strategic think tank combating terrorism and extremism rooted in the misuse of religion, while Hedayah was established as an International Centre for Excellence dedicated to countering violent extremism.

In tandem with its resolute stance against extremism, the UAE has taken affirmative actions,

such as the appointment of Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, a prominent member of the royal family, as the Minister for Tolerance. Additionally, the nation has orchestrated prominent conferences featuring the involvement of religious leaders from across the globe, aimed at fostering interfaith harmony. During my tenure as Ambassador, I had the privilege of engaging with a more diverse array of religious leaders from India—Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Jain—than I had encountered in my previous 30 years of service. This exemplifies the UAE's commitment to promoting diversity and understanding among various faith communities.

In a remarkable gesture of interfaith collaboration, the UAE played host to Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed al Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, in Abu Dhabi in 2019. This historic meeting resulted in the creation of the Document of Human Fraternity, an unprecedented joint declaration representing both Catholics and Islam. Serving as a blueprint for dialogue and cooperation between the two faiths, the document laid the foundation for the House of Abraham Family. Situated in the Saadiyat Island cultural district of Abu Dhabi, this impressive complex encompasses a mosque, a church, and a

synagogue, all coexisting within the same compound. This symbolic initiative reflects the UAE's commitment to fostering understanding and unity among diverse religious communities.

In a significant stride towards fostering interfaith relations, the UAE took the groundbreaking step of signing the Abraham Accords in 2020, solidifying full diplomatic ties with Israel. This monumental decision has brought about notable changes, including the appointment of a Chief Rabbi in Dubai.

The government's commitment to shaping a new paradigm for interfaith relations is evident in the meticulous effort to systematically cleanse textbooks of any anti-Semitic references. These measures underscore the earnestness with which the UAE is dedicated to creating a more inclusive and harmonious environment for diverse religious communities.

The mandir in Abu Dhabi, with its profound message of establishing a spiritual sanctuary of global unity, seamlessly integrates into the UAE's inclusive landscape. Each of its seven shikharas symbolizes one of the seven emirates of the nation, further exemplifying the mandir's alignment with the ethos of inclusivity and unity embraced by the country. (The writer can be reached at dipaknews@gmail.com)

Tories embattled in strongholds over Sunak's misguided priorities

By: Arun Srivastava

Even before the results for the two parliamentary seats were formally made public, the message was moving around the British political and social circles that Conservatives are set for losing Wellingborough and Kingswood, supposed to be their safe seats. A deeper look into the reasons would make it clear that the outcome could not be construed as defeat for Tories or a win for Labour. Instead, it is a manifestation of no-trust in the policies and style of functioning of the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Though the top Tory leadership is maintaining a passive silence on their next move and continuance of Sunak in office till the final general election is held, what is absolutely clear is that he has lost the support of the decision-makers and Conservative financiers.

Tory donors nurse the feeling that Sunak has lost touch with the ground and is more interested in toeing USA's political and economic line than working to find solutions to the problems faced by average Britons. The results reflect double trouble for the British-Indian leader, as the Conservatives had won both seats by decisive margins in the last general election under Boris Johnson in December 2019.

Sunak trying to identify with the rightist ideas and policies of the USA has severely damaged his reputation and image. Notably, a section of UK media likes to describe him "British-Indian". What does it imply? There is a lurking impression that he is too close to the rightist Indian leader Narendra Modi. Of course, the Conservative party has strong political lineage in the rightist ideology and philosophy, but its leadership isn't as orthodox in their approach and functioning as Modi.

Sunak has suffered two heavy blows to his leadership ahead of a general election later this year as the opposition Labour Party grabbed two wins. Labour's Dan Egan won the House of Commons seat of Kingswood, south-west England, and the party's Gen Kitchen won Wellingborough, in the East Midlands region of England.

Another emerging trend saw the far-right Reform UK — the reorganised anti-immigration Brexit Party — coming third, ahead of the Liberal Democrats and Green Party.

Ground for Tory defeat from Kingswood was laid out by Sunak himself. Tory leader Chris Skidmore had resigned as an MP in protest over Sunak's green policies. True enough, it was shaping up well. Last year in July, Sunak

had signalled the government could delay or even abandon green policies that impose a direct cost on consumers, as he comes under pressure from the Conservative right to create a dividing line with Labour in the next election. He had also said the drive to reach the UK's net zero targets should not "unnecessarily give people more hassle and more costs in their lives", as he rethinks his green agenda after last week's Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election. In Wellingborough, the voter followed Tory MP Peter Bone being recalled by his constituency over claims of bullying and sexually inappropriate behaviour, which he denies.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer claimed: "The Tories have failed, Rishi's recession proves that. Labour is back in the service of working people." He may sound correct. But the Tory leadership is not willing to oblige Starmer. Undeniably, the twin defeats have come as a major blow for the Tories as they prepare for a general election, which Sunak, 43, has indicated will be held in the second half of the year.

The major reason for the defeat of Tory candidates is being cited by seasoned pollsters and Tory leaders is, averseness of the Tory members to vote for the party which is presently is being perceived as under the control of Sunak. Conservative MP and former minister in Boris Johnson's Cabinet, Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg holds the Kingswood result was "not as bad as I'd expected", as Tory voters appeared to have stayed at home. Though he was not too harsh on Sunak, he obviously deflected the reason for voters staying at home.

Sir John Curtice, Professor of Politics at Strathclyde University pointed out: "The party will be concerned not only by having lost these seats, but also by the scale and manner of its defeats. Its share of the vote fell by a whopping 37.6 points in Wellingborough, the biggest drop the party has ever suffered in a byelection it was defending".

Rishi Sunak is facing questions from inside his party on the loss of two seats. Some senior members those who guide the functioning of the party nurse the view that Tory must have some other leader to lead the party at general election. They are not sure that Sunak could counter the challenge of Labour leader Starmer. His pledge to reduce irregular migration by stopping small boats crossing into England from France is being undermined as a key government deportation policy is repeatedly held up because of accusations it breaches international law. In the

past Tory used to beat the Labour on these issues. But now they are on defensive mode.

A big chunk of Conservatives believe that the party leadership is increasingly out-of-touch and wrecking its own electoral prospects. They think Sunak — the richest person to ever hold the office of Prime Minister — is not an appropriate leader at a time when so many people in the UK are struggling financially. Sunak's pledge for reforms have not materialised on the ground.

The Tory insiders believe that the demand for Sunak's resignation might have cropped up in the wake of the twin defeats, but it is the absence of the replacement that is delaying the move. Who exactly would replace Sunak is not clear. Boris Johnson no longer sits in parliament, so it would be very hard to bring him back in time for the next election. He is also not as universally popular as his own diehard loyalists claim.

It is also alleged that he is not a team leader. He has not taken pains to keep the party together. This is another reason that Sunak has been consistently losing support at the ground level. Sunak committed major mistake by openly supporting Israel's aggression against Hamas. It is felt he should have treaded cautiously. His action gave the impression that he was supporting Zionism, which cannot be the policy of a British political party seeking power in Britain. Political experts feel that the situation in Israel, particularly with regard to the rights of Palestinians, is far too complex for such a bold position to be adopted, especially when so many people are convinced that some form of two-state solution is the only eventual answer to the problems faced in that area.

For Labour leader, Keir Starmer defeat of Tory has come as the message "the country is crying out for change". He described his party's performance in the elections as "fantastic". In a statement, he said it showed that "people are ready to put their trust in a Labour government." Labour exploited the internal dissent in the Conservative rank and also shrinking economy and discontent over a crisis gripping the country's health system.

Nevertheless, the possibility of Sunak being purged is the hot topic for discussion in the political and domestic circles. If the party can drive out the last two Conservative leaders, Liz Truss and Boris Johnson, it can also take steps against Sunak. The internal division resulting from the fear of losing the general election is likely to further drag down the Conservative vote. (IPA Service)

Electoral funding quagmire: No real progress possible with peripheral changes

By K Raveendran

The Narendra Modi government's electoral bond scheme has been thrown out of the window by the Supreme Court. That is certainly good riddance to an obnoxious and highly abused scheme. But in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's decisive ruling, a stark reality emerges — the convoluted landscape of political financing in India that requires a thorough overhaul.

Justice Sanjiv Khanna in his separate judgment has suggested a revisit the electoral trust system with new guidelines as an alternative. But on closer scrutiny, that would appear to be another futile exercise. The electoral trust scheme, already found wanting in many respects before the Modi government's treacherous electoral bonds entered the scene and held forth, has been tried, tested and found inadequate. The suggested antidote thus fails to address the chronic issues that continue to plague India's electoral funding. This prompts a compelling question: Is it not time to usher in a new era of state-funded elections that prioritizes transparency and levels the playing field for all contenders?

At the heart of the matter lies the persistent lack of transparency that shrouds the origins of political funds within the electoral trust system. This opacity has not escaped attention and has led to calls for the disclosure of the identities of contributors to electoral trusts becomes imperative in an age where citizens demand accountability and integrity in the exercise of their democratic right.

In fact, the electoral trust system's Achilles' heel is its lack of obligation to disclose the names of contributors. This glaring omission not only robs citizens of the power to make informed choices but also raises the spectre of potential conflicts of interest. Transparency International India, a stalwart in the battle against corruption, emphasizes that disclosure is the linchpin in fortifying democratic principles and preventing the erosion of public trust.

While electoral trusts were designed to streamline political funding, they constitute only a fraction of the financial behemoth that sustains political parties. Private donations, corporate sponsorships, and undisclosed contributions remain significant funding streams, perpetuating an uneven playing field that tilts the scene in favour of the financially endowed. Dr. Jagdeep Chhokar, a co-founder of Association of Democratic Reforms, has unearthed the impact of financial muscle on political outcomes, unveiling a stark reality where wealth, not merit, often dictates electoral success.

Compounding the conundrum is the sheer number of political parties in India, presenting a formidable challenge for electoral trusts to ensure fair resource distribution. Dr. Trilochan Sastry, another luminary in the ADR camp, underscores the necessity for systemic reforms in the face of a multitude of political entities with diverse funding dynamics.

Money's pernicious influence extends beyond the logistics of campaigns to the very heart of candidate selection. Financial prowess has been found to bestow substantial advantage upon well-funded candidates. This stark reality perpetuates a cycle of inequality within the political arena, where innovative ideas and merit often take a back seat to monetary might.

Studies have revealed the direct and indirect influence of money on electoral politics. The ability of a company to influence the electoral process through political contributions is much higher when compared to that of an individual.

A company has a much graver influence on the political process, both in terms of the quantum of money contributed to political parties and the purpose of making such contributions. Contributions made by individuals have a degree of support or affiliation to a political association. However, contributions made by companies are purely business transactions, made with the intent of securing benefits in return. We have been seeing this in action dramatically in recent times.

In the light of the inadequacies in both the electoral bond and electoral trust schemes, the clarion call for a paradigm shift in state-funded elections becomes resonant. A robust state funding mechanism, fortified with stringent disclosure requirements, contribution limits, and vigilant oversight, emerges as the antidote to the malaise afflicting India's electoral financing system.

A bold and comprehensive reform agenda is what is needed, one that not only addresses the past shortcomings but also paves the way for a future where political funding is a beacon of transparency and fairness. The time has come for a new narrative in Indian electoral politics — one that places the power back in the hands of the people and rejuvenates the spirit of a robust and resilient democracy. (IPA Service)

Language of love? Expanding our vocabulary can change how we understand relationships, emotions



By: Georgi Gardiner

What is love? Could those feelings you label as love be something else? What about infatuation? Obsession? A passing fancy? Being smitten? Enthrallment? Beguilement? Lust? A crush? A squish? Platonic admiration? Why do people categorize some attachments as romantic love but not others?

Suppose Holly meets someone on vacation. They quickly become romantically and sexually intimate and seem deeply compatible. Holly is from the United Kingdom, where the term "holiday romance" is commonly used and part of her vocabulary. Because she knows this term, she can apply its social scaffolding to this relationship. She understands that the rapid emotional intimacy and apparent compatibility she experienced likely sprang from fleeting circumstances that aren't meant to last.

Someone from the United States, however, where this term is rarely used, might more easily interpret this rapid intimacy as a sign of deep, significant lifelong compatibility.

Judging that you are in love can be powerful. It can affect your feelings, relationships and even your sexuality. But how do people judge whether they are in love?

This, I argue, depends on your linguistic community. That is, how the people around you talk about romance, relationships and attraction.

I am a philosopher who studies categorisation schemas – how, when and why people label things such as emotions, sexuality and health. I examine the effects of those labels on how people understand themselves and on their well-being, and how alternative taxonomies and labels can make people understand and shape the world differently.

What happens when a culture

instills a broader, more encompassing definition of love, or a narrower, more restrictive definition? How does having a richer vocabulary of words in the neighbourhood of love change how we understand it?

The social scaffolding of words

Self-ascriptions of love depend on two things. The first are introspective judgments about your feelings: Are you attracted to the person? Energised by them? Nervous around them? And the second is what you think love is: Does love require caring about the person? Thinking about them a lot? Sexual attraction? When how you feel about a person and what you think love is match up, you self-ascribe love. That is, you judge that you are in love.

Words provide social scaffolding. That is, they create expectations and norms that steer how you behave and react to other people. And vocabularies vary by culture and era.

Categorising an attachment as a "holiday romance" doesn't just describe it but can also change its course. The label affects what Holly notices and values about the time she spends together with another person and whether she is inclined to pursue a long-term relationship.

Vocabulary is empowering. Having an even more expansive vocabulary would allow Holly to experiment with different labels, and these could shape her relationships in different ways.

For example, the term "eintagsliebe", based on the German word for "mayfly" and translating to "one day's love," refers to an intense and brief relationship. "Comet lovers" have a deep romantic bond but see each other only intermittently, living far apart the rest of the time without much contact. A "holibae" is a perennial date that happens only when you're visiting home for the holi-

days. See also "zipcoding" – dating someone only when you're both in the same ZIP code.

Dictionary of polyamory
Words create possibilities, and the recent surge of interest in polyamory, or having more than one romantic relationship at a time, has introduced substantial amounts of new vocabulary.

An "anchor partner" is a central figure in your romantic life. A "nesting partner" is a partner you live with. And a "satellite partner" has emotional and physical distance from your home. Vocabularies sculpted by traditional monogamous relationships might not distinguish between these types of attachments because they see non-cohabitating partnerships only as temporary transition phases that end by breaking up or become serious by moving in.

By rejecting the mainstream social scaffolding about relationships, polyamory creates the need for more terms to describe innovative relationship structures. And those words in turn create more possibilities for how polyamorous people interpret and structure their attachments.

"New relationship energy" is the buzzing excitement of a new relationship. "Established relationship energy" is the comfort of a stable, long-term relationship. These emotions are especially salient within polyamorous relationships, where the excitement of a new relationship can arise alongside the comfort of preexisting relationships.

But monogamous relationships also benefit from these linguistic innovations. Monogamous relationships might also involve new relationship energy, established relationship energy, and nesting, anchor and satellite partnerships, even if they aren't labeled as such. Such self-understandings affect the values, emotions, commitments and beliefs people use to forge relationships.

Conceptual tourism
Conceptual schemas, or the words and concepts we have for understanding ourselves and the world around us, have permissive flexibility: People can disagree about what words like "love," "crush" and "bi-curious" mean. Disagreement doesn't mean that someone is wrong. Rather, flexibility allows us to explore different ways to understand the world and ourselves. We can be conceptual tourists.

Suppose Nell develops an ambiguous attachment to a new classmate. She finds her charming, witty and pretty, but it isn't a clear-cut case of romantic attraction.

Nell can adopt a broad or narrow definition of the word "crush," depending on whether her feelings meet how she defines a "crush." Altering what she means by a "crush" would change whether she labels herself as having a crush. This, in turn, could affect whether Nell sees herself as queer or straight.

If she knows other terms to describe her feelings, Nell might interpret them as "alterous attraction," which is the desire for emotional intimacy in a way that is neither platonic nor romantic. She might seek a "queerplatonic relationship," which resembles a conventional romantic relationship but without sex or conventional romance. Or, if her feelings are intense, Nell might self-ascribe "limerence," which is obsessive infatuation.

Self-ascribing labels affects what people notice about themselves, how they interpret their feelings and what they appreciate about their attachments. What she pays attention to fuels particular emotions and can bolster certain attitudes, like profound gratitude, that might distinguish love from crushes.

For example, if Nell interprets herself as having a crush, she may become more attuned to the excitement she feels around her classmate, which can fuel those emotions in a feedback loop. If she labels her feelings as platonic admiration, she might instead interpret herself as being nervous about impressing her new classmate.

Nell can experimentally adopt different labels – alterous attraction, queer, crush, limerence, straight and more – to see which fit best. Some labels might better match her emotions. And those labels might also change her emotions and become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Conceptual tourism can be a valuable cognitive skill. It requires the mental dexterity to inhabit rival conceptual schemas and try on new interpretative terms. Doing so can increase your self-understanding, cultivate self-determination and even help steer your heart.

Culture unavoidably provides a lexicon of attachment that shapes how you relate to other people. A culture that is more deliberate about the words it uses for different kinds of attraction can help people bond in new and more open-minded ways.

It's also a great motivator for education: Learning new words can help you improve your love life. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

The next time you compare yourself to a social media influencer, read this!

By: Manpreet

You look at that reel posted by your favorite influencer, about her extravagant trip to an exquisite island. It is appealing and irresistible to watch her dance on the beach, sip expensive wine, and wear the fanciest clothes. The sun-kissed selfie on your feed with the caption "loving my natural skin" has the most glowing skin you have ever seen. You look at yourself and wonder where it went wrong, comparing your 9-5 job, the little pores on your skin, and your second-hand car to the lives of these successful people.

University of Alberta's research confirmed that almost 90% of women compare themselves on the internet, so this is not a 'You' problem. I have faced this every second I spent on the internet, and this is not an exaggeration. The influencer culture is spreading like a fire, making a complete domain within itself, where you feel like a left-out, a loser, or a write-off. But like they say, the grass ain't greener and you probably need to look beyond those reels. If you believe that the life of influencers is flawless, confident, pristine, and composed all the time, you need to read ahead.

Most influencers are rich. Most influencers are privileged. Repeat this

Most influencers around you have a head start and belong to the upper-middle class, or even above. With the increase in social media users, brands have been pouring money to reach their target audience through these "role models", thus making them richer. Baffling as this might sound, you can charge ₹1.5 lakhs to ₹3.5 lakhs if you have 100K-1M followers. On the other hand, businesses are willing to pay you up to ₹4 lakhs per post (yes, you read it correctly) if you have more than a million followers, according to this report by CNBC TV.

Influencers often source their dresses, makeup, jewelry, home decor, and even the smallest things from the best available options. The secret to glowing glass skin is not the hydrating cream



they promote, but lots of clinical treatments and facials that will blow your money. Dr Chytra V Anand, founder of Kosmoderma Clinics, in her Cosmopolitan interview, clearly states "You will require professional treatments to achieve this, just using a home skin care regimen will not be sufficient." They have brand sponsors and collab requests, making their wardrobe full of PR packages and trial packages. But on a personal level, it is neither viable nor sustainable to attempt such a lifestyle.

The filter of technology to erase insecurities

I believe a visual might be a better representation of what the headline is about.

They are no two people. The photoshopped picture of this fitness influencer was released by herself, to enlighten the extent to which social media influencers go to create their perfect image using technology. I suffered from years of insecurities when I first started using Instagram. The looks, slim figures, picture-perfect face, and ultimate hair made me question every part of my body, pressuring me to believe that I was not enough.

There are loads of apps, that help you clear blemishes, squeeze your waist, enlarge your chest, brighten or change the color of your eyes, lighten your skin tone, chisel your face, give you cheekbones, trim your eyebrows, widen your hips and the list goes on and on. On top of that, influencers have a team of editors who specialize in polishing their images and videos to help them stay attractive. Not that it is wrong to edit for aesthetics, but remember this has been seriously linked to self-objectification. While it took a little long for me to understand this, I wish you now know that all that you are

lacking are some serious editing skills.

You are a product at the cost of your mental health

While creating content might sound like an appealing job to own, the internet is still a pretty wild place to be. Watch this video by IndaTimes, where CarryMinati admits that all he wants to be is Ajay Nagar and not Carry Minati. Imagine being in constant fear of not getting enough likes, comments, and shares on your story, and on top of that, dealing with the most terrifying objectification and shameless DMs from the audience.

This isn't just this. While you and I can walk safely on the road, influencers have to be very concerned about their security. People often imagine their social media models to have no boundaries and are readily available all the time, which is very disturbing. With their personal life on display, it makes it a topic of discussion among the public, thus putting their mental state on a very fragile and delicate pedestal.

Being an influencer requires talent, skills, and networking, but more than that it requires money, resources, the emotional and mental health of iron, and a solid plan B if your influence becomes impotent. Remember, while I don't intend to demean the importance of influencers in the orb of marketing and their efforts for their career, I aim to convey that your and my life is a collage of real events. They need not be polished and edited all the time and rather are supposed to be un-hinged and flawed. So the next time you compare yourself, think that there might be some influencers struggling with what you have – a real, genuine, and honest life. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Who is most likely to develop coronary artery disease?

By: Deep Shukla

Coronary artery disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Therapies such as statins, which target high cholesterol levels, can reduce the risk of mortality due to coronary artery disease.

These effects of statins are mediated, in part, by improving blood vessel health. However, there is a lack of therapies for coronary artery disease that directly target the endothelial cells that form the inner lining of blood vessels and influence blood flow.

Identifying genetic risk factors associated with endothelial cell function could help develop therapeutics that target blood vessels.

Research has shown that specific genetic variants are associated with an increased risk of coronary artery disease. These genetic variants regulate the expression of several genes that work together in a small number of major biological pathways.

Understudied gene plays key role in coronary artery disease

A new study using a combination of high-throughput molecular biology techniques and computational methods has identified major biological pathways and novel genes involved in endothelial cell function that could contribute to the risk of coronary artery disease.

The paper reporting the study findings appears in Nature.

Study author Dr. Jesse Engreitz, assistant professor at Stanford University, CA, explained the findings to Medical News Today:

"We found that genetic risk factors for coronary artery dis-

ease converge onto a particular pathway in endothelial cells. One of the known roles of this pathway is to tune endothelial cell responses to blood flow, and includes genes that could prove to be good targets for therapies that directly target blood vessels."

"We also found a new understudied gene, TLNRD1, that plays a key role in this pathway in humans and zebrafish but has previously eluded notice. The list of genes we identified might also prove helpful in identifying individuals who are genetically predisposed to having poor vascular health and, therefore, may respond better to existing medications," added Dr. Engreitz.

How researchers pinpointed genetic risk factors for heart disease

Advances in genome sequencing technologies have facilitated the discovery of genetic variants associated with several diseases. These genome-wide association studies involve examining genomes from a large number of individuals to identify genetic variants associated with a particular disease.

Several of these genetic variants associated with a disease likely regulate a small number of biological pathways, with each pathway consisting of several genes that work together.

Although genetic variants have been identified for several diseases, linking genetic variants to a few converging biological pathways has been challenging. A majority of these genetic variants identified by genome-wide association studies do not code for proteins. Instead, these noncoding variants regulate the expression of multiple genes nearby that are involved in biological pathways associated with the disease.

However, identifying the spe-



cific genes regulated by each variant and playing a role in disease-associated pathways remains challenging.

Moreover, multiple cells contribute to the development and progression of a disease. Different biological pathways operate in each cell type and contribute to the disease. The specific biological pathways in a particular cell type impacted by disease-associated variants have not been fully characterized.

In other words, how genetic variants identified using genome-wide association studies affect biological function is not well understood. In the present study, the researchers investigated the biological pathways associated with genetic variants that are involved in coronary artery disease.

Dr Engreitz said: "Human genetics has been immensely successful over the last decades in identifying variants that influence risk for disease – there are now 100,000s of associations between genetic loci and particular human diseases and traits. This vast trove of insights could reveal genes that mediate disease and guide therapeutic development."

"But, it has proven extremely difficult to find the genes, cell types, and pathways underlying each of these associations. Sometimes, it can take a decade to

solve this "variant-to-function" problem for even one association," he added.

254 genes linked to coronary artery disease

More than 300 genetic variants have been identified for coronary artery disease using genome-wide association studies. These coronary artery disease-associated variants are known to impact cells associated with blood vessels and hepatocytes in the liver.

In the present study, the authors specifically examined the variants impacting the function of endothelial cells that are present in the walls of blood vessels. The researchers used laboratory cultures of genetically modified endothelial cells obtained from the human aorta, the blood vessel that carries oxygenated blood to the rest of the body.

The genome of these endothelial cells was sequenced, and then a computational model was used to map genes whose expression was influenced by the coronary artery disease-associated variant.

With the help of data on coronary artery disease-associated variants identified by previous studies, the researchers identified nearly 2,000 genes close to these variants.

Among these genes, the expression of 254 genes was regulated by the coronary artery disease-associated variants.

The researchers then identified the programs or pathways associated with coronary artery disease. They used CRISPR interference (CRISPRi) to individually inhibit the expression of each gene identified in the vicinity of the coronary artery disease-associated variants.

Subsequently, the researchers examined the changes in the gene expression profile of the endothelial aorta cells upon the inhibition of individual candidate genes.

Using computational methods, genes that showed similar patterns of changes in expression profile were categorized as coregulated genes.

These coregulated genes were classified as a biological program or pathway. The analysis generated 50 such programs, several of which were involved in processes that were not specific to endothelial cells or coronary artery disease.

Gene involved in blood flow regulation may be key

The researchers then examined programs in which the 254 genes regulated by coronary artery disease-associated variants were overrepresented. They identified five such programs, which encompassed 41 coronary artery disease-associated genes and 43 variants.

While these programs included genes that have been implicated in coronary artery disease, a majority of genes in these pathways have not yet been identified as risk factors for this condition.

In addition, all five programs were regulated by genes associated with the pathway associated with cerebral cavernous malformations (CCM), a condition involving the formation of tiny, abnormal clusters of blood vessels in the brain.

Specifically, the analysis revealed that the CCM2 gene and

other genes in the CCM pathway were involved in the regulation of all five coronary artery disease pathways.

Previous studies have shown that the CCM pathway modulates the function of endothelial cells in blood vessels and regulates blood flow.

However, CCM2 and other CCM pathway genes have not been shown to be involved in coronary artery disease. The present study found that inhibiting the expression of CCM pathways modulated the expression of genes that have been shown to be involved in coronary artery disease. These findings indicate the involvement of genes in the CCM pathway in coronary artery disease.

The researchers further examined the role of one of the novel CCM pathway genes, TLNRD1. They focused on TLNRD1 because the gene is one of the strongest regulators of the five coronary artery disease pathways. The role of TLNRD1 in endothelial cell function has not been characterized so far.

The researchers found that TLNRD1 interacts with CCM2 and, consequently, examined whether TLNRD1 performed a function similar to CCM2. The disruption of TLNRD1 in cells cultured in the laboratory altered the barrier function of endothelial cells. Such an impaired barrier function of endothelial cells has been implicated in cardiovascular diseases.

In addition, the disruption of the TLNRD1 expression in zebrafish also adversely impacted heart and blood vessel development in a zebrafish model.

These results support the role of the TLNRD1 gene in sustaining blood flow and could be a risk factor for coronary artery disease development.

New approach to genetic re-

search of heart disease

Besides aiding the identification of new therapeutic targets for coronary artery disease, the methodological approach used by the study could facilitate the discovery of novel biological pathways associated with other diseases.

Dr. Engreitz said: "In this study, we developed a new methodology to extract lessons from human genetic data. Here, we took a new approach leveraging CRISPR tools, which we use to simultaneously break every candidate gene in different endothelial cells in a dish and measure what happens to these cells. From there, we use computational models to learn which sets of genes are working together in pathways."

"With this comprehensive and systematic data, we are able to much better interpret genetic associations and here identify likely causal genes for 40 out of [approximately] 300 loci for coronary artery disease in a single pass. We think this tool will be a powerful approach for studying many other heritable diseases in the future," added Dr. Engreitz.

Dr. Cheng-Han Chen, board-certified interventional cardiologist and medical director of the Structural Heart Program at MemorialCare Saddleback Medical Center in Laguna Hills, CA, not involved in this study, commented that:

"This research has the potential to open an entirely new field of research, as it might be able to identify the molecular connections more efficiently between gene variants and clinical disease. With such a strategy, researchers would then be able to target the biological pathways through therapeutics to improve clinical outcomes." (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

The Russian opposition just lost its brightest star; What does it do now?

LONDON, Feb 19: Alexei Navalny was asked four years ago what he'd tell Russians if he were killed for challenging President Vladimir Putin.

"You're not allowed to give up," he told a documentary maker. "If they decide to kill me, it means we are incredibly strong and we need to use this power."

Russia's prison agency announced Friday that Navalny had died in the Arctic penal colony where he was serving a 19-year sentence on charges of extremism. His death sparked accusations around the world that he had been killed.

Kremlin political critics, turncoat spies and investigative journalists have been killed or assaulted in a

variety of ways. The Russian opposition has lost its brightest star with Navalny's sudden death in a prison colony. Now the question on everyone's mind: What does it do now?

Most of Russia's opposition is either dead, scattered abroad in exile or in prison at home. Remaining opposition groups and key political figures have different visions about what Russia should become, and who should lead it. There is not even an anti-war candidate on the ballot to give Putin a token challenge in next month's election for a sixth term.

With Navalny's elimination from the picture, many are wondering if this is the end of political dissent in Russia.

"Alexei Navalny was a very bright and charismatic leader. He had the talent to ignite people, to convince them of the need for change," said Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former tycoon who spent a decade in prison in Russia on charges widely seen as political revenge for challenging Putin's rule in the early 2000s.

"This is a very difficult loss for the Russian opposition," he told The Associated Press after his death.

Graeme Robertson, a professor of political science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and author of a book about Putin and contemporary Russian politics, says the biggest problem that has plagued the Russian oppo-

sition "is that it has been unable to break out from small liberal circles to attract support from the broader population."

Khodorkovsky, who lives in London, is one of several Russian opposition politicians trying to build a coalition with grassroots anti-war groups across the world and exiled Russian opposition figures. They include Russian chess legend Garry Kasparov, Mikhail Kasyanov, a former Russian prime minister and Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr. who is currently serving a 25-year prison sentence in Russia for treason after criticizing Russia's war in Ukraine.

But Navalny's team, and the Anti-Corruption Foundation he founded, are not a part of it.

"We constantly tell the guys from the Anti-Corruption Foundation ... that it would be great if we all met not only in front of television cameras, but sat down at the table," Khodorkovsky said in another interview before Navalny's death, referring to a television debate in January hosted by the independent Russian TV channel Dozhd.

While Navalny was the first leader to build a national Russian opposition, there were other opposition factions who didn't like him or his organization.

Before his death, there were public and heated disagreements on social media between members of his team and other politicians about how they could challenge Putin in

March's upcoming election.

Meanwhile, the Russian leader has continued to consolidate his grip on power, cracking down on dissent at home, imprisoning critics of the war in Ukraine, and silencing independent media.

Squabbling among the opposition, "doesn't help," said Nigel Gould-Davies, a former British ambassador to Belarus and senior fellow for Russia & Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. But, even if the opposition were united, he questioned whether "given the instruments of coercion, repression and intimidation available to the Russian state, what difference, at least in the short term, would that make?"

Putin is eyeing at least another six years in the Kremlin, which means he could effectively rule Russia for almost three decades.

Russia's remaining opposition leaders and activists, largely outside the country, are now grappling with the question of how to mount an effective challenge to the Kremlin. That would mean breaking through state propaganda to reach Russians inside the country and offer them an alternative to the Kremlin's vision of the future.

It is a difficult task, one which even Navalny struggled with after he returned to Moscow in February 2021 to face certain arrest after recuperating in Germany from a nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. (AP)

Israel's Netanyahu slams Brazilian president's comparison of Gaza war to the Holocaust



TEL AVIV, ISRAEL, Feb 19: Israel on Sunday condemned Brazil's president for comparing the war in Gaza to the Holocaust, accusing him of being antisemitic and trivializing the Nazi genocide of European Jews during World War II.

The outcry further strained relations between the countries, which have deteriorated since President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva returned to office last year. Lula has portrayed himself as a leader of the "Global South," a loosely defined group of developing countries.

Speaking to reporters at the African Union summit in Ethiopia, Lula said that "what is happening in the Gaza Strip and to the Palestinian people hasn't been seen in any other moment in history. Actually, it did when Hitler decided to kill the Jews."

Such comments strike a raw nerve in Israel, a country established as a haven for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust. Israel rejects any comparisons of its conduct in the war in Gaza to the Holocaust.

Trump rails against New York fraud ruling as he faces fines that could exceed half-a-billion dollars. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Lula's comments "trivialized the Holocaust" and "crossed a red line." He also accused Lula of being a "virulent anti-Semite."

Foreign Minister Israel Katz wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that he had summoned Brazil's ambassador in Israel for a reprimand. Katz called Lula's comments "shameful and serious."

Lula's comments came after leaders at the AU summit on Saturday condemned Israel's offensive in Gaza and called for its immediate end.

The war was triggered by an Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants, who stormed into southern Israel and killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostage. Militants still hold around 130 hostages, a fourth of them believed to be dead. Most of the others were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

The war has killed at least 28,985 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Around 80% of Gaza's population have been driven from their homes, and a quarter face starvation. The heavy death toll and widespread damage have led to mounting criticism of Israel and growing calls for a cease-fire. Lula has previously said Israel is carrying out a genocide in Gaza and has supported South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide at the U.N.'s International Court of Justice. His comment Sunday was the first time he directly compared Israel's actions to the Holocaust.

In January, during a meeting with the Palestinian ambassador, Lula condemned Hamas' attack on Oct. 7, but said there was no justification for the indiscriminate killing of civilians and pushed for a cease-fire. (AP)

At least 26 men massacred in Papua New Guinea tribal violence: Police

MELBOURNE, Feb 19: At least 26 men were massacred in tribal violence in Papua New Guinea, Australian media reported on Monday.

A tribe, their allies and mercenaries were on their way to attack a neighboring tribe when they were ambushed Sunday in Enga province in the South Pacific nation's remote highlands, Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary Acting Superintendent George Kakas told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

Kakas initially said 53 had died. But security forces later revised the death toll down to 26, ABC reported. It was not immediately clear whether any of the ambushers might be among the dead.

Bodies were collected from the battlefield, roads and the riverside, then loaded onto police trucks and taken to the hospital. Kakas told ABC authorities were still counting "those who were shot, injured and ran off into the bushes."



Police in the capital of Port Moresby did not immediately respond to the AP's request for information on the massacre. Papua New Guinea is a diverse, developing nation of 10 million mostly subsistence farmers with 800 languages in a strategically important part of the South Pacific. Internal security has become an increasing challenge for its government as China, the United States and Australia seek closer security ties.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said his government was ready to assist Papua New Guinea, which is Australia's nearest neighbor

and the largest single recipient of Australian foreign aid.

"That is very disturbing the news that has come out of Papua New Guinea," Albanese said before the death toll was revised down.

"We remain available to provide whatever support we can in a practical way, of course, to help our friends in PNG," Albanese added.

Albanese said Australia was already providing "considerable support" for Papua New Guinea and was helping train the country's police officers. Tribal violence in the Enga region has intensified since elections in 2022 that maintained Prime Minister James Marape's administration. Elections and accompanying allegations of cheating and process anomalies have always triggered violence throughout the country.

Enga Gov. Peter Ipatas said there were warnings that tribal fighting was about to erupt. "From a provincial perspective, we knew this fight was going to be on and we (alerted) the security

forces last week to make sure they took appropriate action to ensure this didn't occur," Ipatas told ABC.

Ipatas described the violence as a "very, very sad occasion for us in the province and it's a bad thing for the country." Scores of people have died in tribal fighting in the Enga region in the past year.

Port Moresby's Post-Courier newspaper has reported that high-powered firearms used in the recent fighting made it risky for police to enter the battlefields. Police said they were assisted by the military in protecting the general public and government property.

Papua New Guinea government lawyer Oliver Nobetau expected more lives would be lost in retaliation for the massacre.

"There's a big concern that this will continue on. Revenge killings tend to be a normal thing that happens," said Nobetau, who is on temporary assignment to the Sydney-based international policy think tank Lowy Institute. (AP)

Ashwin Ramaswami becomes first Gen Z Indian-American running for Georgia Senate seat



WASHINGTON, Feb 19: Ashwin Ramaswami has become the first Indian-American from Gen Z to run for a state or federal legislature in the US, indicative of a new breed of young politicians emerging from the community.

Ramaswami's parents immigrated to the US from Tamil Nadu in 1990. Generation Z (also known as Zoomers) encompasses those born between 1997 and 2012.

"I'm running for (Georgia) State Senate in order to give back to my community. I want to make sure that everyone has the same opportunities that I had growing up," Ramaswami, 24, told PTI in a recent interview.

"I want to make sure we have a new voice, people who are young, who come from unconventional backgrounds in politics because it's really important that we have people who represent us, not just people who can afford to do it," he said.

A second-generation Indian-American who has built a career in software engi-

neering, election security, and technology law and policy research, is running in the Democratic party for State Senate in District 48 of Georgia.

Ramaswami is a Democrat and he is hoping to replace incumbent Republican Shawn Still, who was indicted with former President Donald Trump for the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol.

If elected, he would be the first Gen Z State Senator in Georgia and the only Georgia state legislator with both a computer science and a law degree.

By doing so, he would also break barriers as the first Indian American in the Georgia State legislature.

"Everyone should make sure they have access to a quality education. We want to make sure people have access to jobs and the economy, entrepreneurship and also access to healthcare, reproductive rights and all these issues that matter to us. That's why I've been running," Ramaswami said in response to a question.

His parents are both from the IT sector.

"My parents both came to the US in the 1990s. They both came from Tamil Nadu. My mom is from Chennai, my dad is from Coimbatore. I've always grown up with Indian culture and also American culture growing up as well. I'm a Hindu. I've been very interested in Indian culture philosophy my whole life," he said. (PTI)

The conference is largely about reconstruction and investment in Ukraine Japan hosts Ukraine reconstruction conference to showcase its support for the war-torn country



TOKYO, Feb 19: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday pledged his country's long-term engagement in Ukraine's reconstruction, calling it a future investment, as Japan stressed its commitment to supporting the war-torn country ahead of the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion.

In his keynote speech at a conference Japan co-organized with the Ukrainian government and business organizations, Kishida said Japanese public and private cooperation will be a long-term partnership based on inclusivity, humanitarianism as well as technology and knowledge. More than 50 cooperation deals were signed by Japanese and Ukrainian government agencies and companies.

Kishida stressed the importance of investment across industries for the future of that country's development and ensuring that the support caters to Ukraine's needs.

Support for Ukraine's reconstruction is about "investing in the future," Kishida said. "The war in Ukraine is still going on at this very moment and the situation is not easy. The promotion of economic reconstruction, however, is not only an investment for the future of Ukraine but also investing in Japan and the whole globe."

Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, who heads headed his country's delegation of more than

100 people, expressed thanks for the encouragement and said that "today is the new start of cooperation between the two countries."

He said "Ukraine is not just rebuilding, we are generating new rules of the game, new approaches," he said. All eyes are on Ukraine, and "dictators and potential invaders" are also turning their eyes to see how Russia's violation of the international law is seen and how the world will react to it. About 300 people and 80 companies are to attend from the two countries, Japanese officials have said.

The Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction is co-organized by the Japanese and Ukrainian governments, Japan's powerful business organization Keidanren, and Japan

External Trade Organization, or JETRO.

The two sides issued a joint communique, stating Japan's long-term support in helping Ukraine achieve economic stability. The two countries also noted the importance of maintaining tough sanctions against Russia. Japan also announced the start of talks toward revising a bilateral investment pact and easing of travel restrictions for Japanese business visitors to Ukraine.

Japan hopes the conference will build momentum for international support for Ukraine as the war drags on and attention has diverted to the Gaza situation.

The conference is largely about reconstruction and investment in Ukraine, but it's also about Japan's national security.

Bilawal says he rejected power-sharing formula offered by PML-N over PM's post to respect people's mandate

KARACHI, Feb 19: Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has revealed that he said "No" to a power-sharing formula in which the prime minister's post would be shared between his and former premier Nawaz Sharif's parties, as he did not want to take up the top post without the people's mandate.

The 35-year-old former foreign minister was the prime ministerial face of the PPP. However, in the February 8 elections, his party came third with 54 seats in the National Assembly, behind more than 90 seats won by independents backed by jailed prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly.

The PPP and PML-N, who have formed a post-poll alliance, have failed to reach a consensus on a power-sharing formula despite several meetings between their top leadership.

Addressing a Yaum-i-Tashakur (Thanksgiving Day) rally in Thatta to celebrate the PPP's election victory in Sindh province, Bilawal said, "I was told [by PML-N] that let us be the prime minister for three years and then you can take the premiership for the remaining two years."

"I said no to this. I said I do not want to be a prime minister like this," he said. "If I become the prime minister, it would be after the people of Pakistan elect me."

Without taking any names, Bilawal said the party had decided that it would move forward with "those who have asked for its votes" and would not seek any ministries.

Bilawal also said his father Asif Ali Zardari would be the PPP's candidate for president, insisting that the former president would play his role to defuse political tension.

"To control the fire spreading in the country, we have decided that Zardari will be our candidate for the presidential election. And when he takes up the post, he will put out this fire, and will save the Centre and the provinces," he said. He said the country needed a political party that talked about people's problems, adding that the brewing economic and political crisis had divided society.

"What should happen is that politicians and all political parties should think about the people of this country instead of focusing on their personal benefit," Bilawal stressed.

He claimed that a PTI-backed candidate was made to win against a PPP leader.

He said the PPP had decided to collect the

election complaints of party workers from all over the country and raise them at appropriate forums. "If we are unsuccessful, we will come to you and protest together," he said.

Bilawal appealed to all the political parties to "stay within the system" and work for the country's betterment.

Reacting to Bilawal's comments, PML-N leader Ishaq Dar stressed that it was not appropriate to divulge details about talks between the parties vying to form the next government. He insisted that the PPP chairman had made the time-sharing formula public but "that was just one aspect and there can be more formulas".

Dar said the plan to form a government with the PPP and Muttahida Qaumi Movement - Pakistan (MQM-P) was "still on" as he pointed out that there was no other choice available to them.

The former finance minister said the committees of both political parties had held four rounds of meetings so far but nothing was finalised as yet.

"None of the committee members of both parties will make anything public till it isn't final," Dar said.

"I receive calls daily to find out about the progress but I am morally bound to not say anything till it's finalised," he said.

He said that the upcoming meeting, marking the fifth round between the two parties, could lead to a breakthrough, although he refrained from divulging specifics.

"Consultation on various proposals was underway till yesterday," Dar stated in a post shared by PML-N on X, suggesting ongoing deliberations between the parties. He further remarked that while progress had been made, both sides had yet to finalise key points of agreement.

"We are working towards consensus on critical issues," Dar affirmed, underlining the parties' efforts to forge a joint declaration regarding the composition of the next government at the federal level.

The elections have already been controversial with several serious allegations of widespread rigging to change results.

Imran Khan and his party have rejected the results claiming they had won at least 180 seats in the National Assembly and have called for peaceful protests throughout the country.

In the Balochistan province, several political parties have completely rejected the election results and have launched an indefinite shutter down, wheel jam campaign and also disrupted the traffic movement on the national highways. (PTI)

World's youngest professor concludes visit with interaction prog in BTR

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 19: The two-day visit of the world's youngest professor, Soborno Isaac Bari, concluded on Monday with an interaction program with student fraternities and teachers in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

Prof Bari arrived in Kokrajhar, the heart of Bodoland Territorial Region, on Sunday and was warmly welcomed and felicitated with a traditional aronai and bouquet by student fraternities and Bodoland University authorities at the Bodoland University complex.

Remarkably, a recipient of the 'Global Child Prodigy Award' from Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, Soborno Isaac Bari is a Bengali-American prodigy. He received recognition for his talent from former US President Obama in 2016 and from Harvard University in 2018.

Prof Bari graced the Bodoland University's second edition of the Inter-College Youth Festival, organised by the university, and interacted with students and teachers from different educational institutions across BTR districts. Nearly 5000 students, professors, and lecturers participated in the interaction session.

On Monday, Prof Bari participated in another interaction session cum public lecture program organised



by the Department of Education, Government of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) at Bodofa Cultural Complex, Chandamari in Kokrajhar. A significant number of participants, including students, teachers, and citizens from different areas, attended the session and witnessed Prof Bari's public lecture.

Addressing the media, Prof Bari emphasised the importance of mathematics and science in the modern world, stating that they are

crucial for understanding what goes on behind the scenes. He mentioned his efforts to engage future generations in fostering interest and proper application of mathematics and science.

Bari often appears at universities such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he teaches both physics and computer science. He authored the book 'The Love', in which he aims to dismantle prejudice and hatred stemming from religious differences

and biases.

Attendees, including student fraternities and teachers, expressed their happiness and satisfaction with the public lecture of Prof Bari at Bodofa Cultural Complex in Kokrajhar. They considered the event an impressive program, providing an opportunity to gain educational knowledge and information about modern mathematics and science, thereby aiding in the career-building of young generations.

Nehru Yuva Kendra organises District Youth Parliament in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 19: In connection with the upcoming National Youth Parliament Festival 2024, Nehru Yuva Kendra, Nagaon, organised a virtual district-level youth parliament at the Youth Development Training Centre, Nagaon, on Monday. Participants from Nagaon, Hajo, North Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, and Golaghat took part in the parliament.

The theme of the youth parliament was 'Young Voices: Engage and Empower for Nation's Transformation'. The program was inaugurated by Dr Mriganka Saikia, principal of Nagaon GNDG Commerce College, in the presence of

Randip Nandi, Nava Kumar Mahanta, Sapunti Bordoloi, and Dipak Das, who acted as jury members. Deputy director of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, P Chakravarty, welcomed all the participants, guests, and jury members on behalf of Nehru Yuva Kendra, Nagaon. The program was conducted by Iqbal Bahar Choudhury, accountant of NYK, Nagaon. Two participants from each district were selected to represent their respective districts at the state-level youth parliament.

The winners declared were Anindita Bose and Niku Ghosh from Nagaon, Salma Begum and Raz Mazumdar from Hajo, Sab-

nam Suhana and Upasana Saikia from North Lakhimpur, Sabnam Nessa and Ashta Sharma from Dhemaji, and Asmita Lahon and Sagorika Goswami from Golaghat.

It's pertinent to mention that the winners will participate in the state-level youth parliament, and the first, second, and third rank holders of the state-level youth parliament will join the National Youth Parliament in New Delhi. The three best speakers at the national level will be awarded a cash prize of ₹ 2 lakh, ₹ 1.5 lakh, and ₹ 1 lakh, respectively, and two consolation prizes of ₹ 50,000 each, as stated in a release.

Excise raid at Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Feb 19: A joint excise search, patrolling, and raid duty were conducted on Sunday by the Margherita and Digboi Excise Party under the supervision of Prasanta Dutta, DSE Margherita. The excise raids were conducted at Baruah Grant, Mirikamajuli, Powaimukh, Tipong, Ledo (road-side hotels), and Margherita town, which fall under Margherita and Lekhapani Police Stations of Tinsukia district. A total of 7 cases were detected, and the excise team seized and destroyed illicit distilled liquor (35 litres), fermented (1950 litres), and 1 DA set. During the raid, 3 persons were apprehended under Section 61(B)(a) of the Assam Excise Act.

AGP inaugurates office building in Golaghat

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: AGP, rooted in its historical birthplace of Golaghat, celebrated a momentous milestone on Monday with the grand inauguration of its state-of-the-art office building. The event, graced by the esteemed presence of Keshab Mahanta, the working president of AGP, was not merely a ceremonial affair but a poignant homage to the rich legacy of the party and the sacrifices made by countless martyrs for the nation.

Before the ribbon was cut and the inaugural plaque unveiled, the gathering paused to pay heartfelt tributes to the brave souls who laid down their lives in service of the motherland. Their memory served as a solemn reminder of the values and principles that AGP stands for.

The festivities were further enhanced by 500 former student leaders, among them illustrious personalities like Gitartha Saikia and Biswajit Gogoi, who chose to join the AGP family on this auspicious occasion. Their decision reflects not only their faith in the party's vision but also their commitment to contributing to its organisational strength.

Moreover, the day witnessed a significant influx of former members from the Congress party into



AGP's ranks. This influx is poised to invigorate the party's organisational activities and broaden its reach across the region.

In his address, Atul Bora, the minister of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, extended heartfelt gratitude to AGP Central Committee vice-presidents, general secretaries, and all office bearers and karmakartas, acknowledging their unwavering dedication and tireless efforts. Special recognition was also given to the BJP and Sammilita Ganashakti

district functionaries for their support and presence at the ceremony.

The minister also thanked Dr Nripen Barua, president of AGP Golaghat district committee, for presiding over the meeting.

The inauguration of the new office building marks not just a physical structure but a symbol of AGP's resilience, perseverance, and commitment to serving the people of Assam. It heralds a new chapter in the party's journey, one filled with promise, progress, and prosperity for all.

Governor administers oath to new VCs



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Governor cum chancellor Gulab Chand Kataria administered the oath of office

to Dr Arupjioti Choudhury as the vice chancellor of Madhabdev University and Prof Gandu Singaiah as the vice chancellor of Birangana Sati Sadhni Rajyik Vishwavidyalaya at a simple function held in the Conference Hall of Raj Bhavan here on Monday.

Earlier, secretary to the Governor Swapna Dutta Deka sought the permission of the Governor to start the proceedings of the ceremony.

The ceremony was attended by minister of Education Dr Ranajit Pegu, advisor Education, Government of Assam Prof Nani Gopal Mahanta, advisor Chancellor's Secretariat Prof MK Choudhury, commissioner and secretary to the Governor SS Meenakshi Sundaram, commissioner and secretary Higher Education Banashree Nath, secretary, Higher Education Narayan Konwar, vice chancellors of different universities, and senior officers of the state government.

Kokrajhar hosts memorial lecture honouring Ranjit Kumar Borgoyary

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 19: A deeply resonant memorial lecture honouring the esteemed social activist and former president of All Assam Tribal Sangha (AATS), late Ranjit Kumar Borgoyary, reverberated through the halls of MMB Memorial Hall in Kokrajhar Government College on Sunday, drawing a large and diverse audience.

The event, organised by the civil society of greater Kokrajhar with unwavering support from Bodo social organisations, served as a poignant tribute to the enduring legacy of the late leader, Ranjit Kumar Borgoyary.

Inaugurating the program amidst a gathering of esteemed seniors and dignitaries, state cabinet minister and Sahitya Akademi Award winner, Urkhao Gwra Brahma, underscored the immense contributions of late Borgoyary in uplifting the Bodo and tribal communities of Assam. He hailed Borgoyary as a multifaceted personality, highlighting his pivotal role as the chairman of ABSU's constitution drafting committee and the architect behind ABSU's emblem.

The occasion also witnessed the release of a commemorative souvenir titled 'Haribdwir: Ranjit Kumar Borgoyary', serving as a testament to his dedicated service and unwavering commitment to the well-being of the Bodos and other tribal peoples.

A lecture delving into the life and achievements of late Ranjit Kumar Borgoyary ensued, featuring heartfelt reflections from his closest friend and president of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Dr Surath Narzary, along with contributions from Aditya Kakhary, the general secretary of All Assam Tribal Sangha, and Pandav Rabha, an adviser of Tribal Sangha.

The event drew a distinguished gathering of intellectuals and leaders from various organisations, including Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Tribal Sangha, ABSU, Bodo Samaj, Harimu Afad, and Bathou Gouthum, who paid their respects through floral tributes and shared poignant memories of the late leader.

As the community came together to honour the memory of late Ranjit Kumar Borgoyary, his profound impact on the socio-cultural landscape of Assam resonated deeply, serving as a beacon of inspiration for generations to come.

Assam Police Krida Utsav 2024 kickstarts



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: The Assam Police Krida Utsav 2024 commenced with great pomp and splendour during a grand inauguration ceremony held at the prestigious Lachit Barphukan Police Academy in Dergaon. Steering the festivities with grace and authority, SDGP Hardi Singh presided over the event, setting the stage for an electrifying showcase of sportsmanship and talent.

With an impressive turnout of over 900 players spanning various ranks, the Krida Utsav promises to be a thrilling spectacle of skill, fitness, and unwavering determination. As participants from across Assam converge at the academy grounds, the stage is set for fierce competition, camaraderie, and the celebration of sportsmanship at its finest.

General meet of All Assam Tanti Sabha held

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 19: The Naduar and Dekorai regional committees of All Assam Tanti Sabha orchestrated a significant event with the convening of a general meeting, held at Binodan Bhawan, situated in the heart of Dekorai Tea Estate. Under the stewardship of Kartik Tanti, president of the Sonitpur district Tanti Sabha, the day-long gathering unfolded with a series of discussions and resolutions aimed at the advancement and empowerment of the Tanti community.

Sanatan Tanti, secretary of the district committee, elucidated the meeting's objectives, setting the tone for a productive exchange of ideas. A multitude of resolutions were put forth, focusing on strategies to uplift and fortify the community's socio-economic fabric.

The event garnered prestige with the presence of Sanjay Kumar Tanti, the central president of All Assam Tanti Sabha, who graced the occasion as the chief guest. In his address, he shed light on pressing issues such as education, caste certification, land disputes, and rights advocacy. With a fervent appeal, he implored all stakeholders to unite in their efforts towards fostering community development and progress.

Founded in 1978 in Moran, All Assam Tanti Sabha has since been steadfast in its commitment to the welfare of the Tanti community across the state. The meeting saw the attendance of esteemed dignitaries and office bearers representing the breadth of the Tanti community, underscoring the collective determination towards shared prosperity and well-being.

Renowned scientist passes away

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 19: Dr Birendra Kumar Saikia, a retired scientist and former deputy director of CSIR-NEIST, Jorhat, who was also a noted sportsman, passed away at his Kamarbandha Road residence here on Monday due to old age ailments. He was 93 years old. Saikia is survived by his wife Pranati Saikia, a retired vice-principal of Jagannath Barooah College (Autonomous), Jorhat, three daughters, sons-in-law, grandchildren, and a large number of relatives.

Tezpur's Chowk Bazar set for modern reconstruction after tragic fire

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Feb 19: 'Tezpur Chowk Bazar', standing as a nerve center for trade and commerce for the people of the northern belt over the years, tragically collapsed after it was gutted in a devastating fire in 2021, leaving many businessmen in an awkward condition. While discussing the historic Tezpur Chowk Bazar, it would perhaps be apt to mention that it is one of the heritage markets of the region, with a unique structure acknowledged even by outsiders.

The heritage 'Tezpur Chowk Bazar' was the sole source of livelihood for thousands of shopkeepers and their families. However, at midnight on May 9, 2021, the whole market area suddenly became a fireball due to a devastating fire that broke out following an electrical short circuit, burning everyone's hearts, including the shopkeepers, leaving them in unlimited woe. Everything

turned to ashes before their eyes. Sadly, even a shopkeeper who suffered from high blood pressure died just after this incident.

Meanwhile, besides the government, some NGOs came forward as samaritans to extend their helping hand, taking immediate steps to provide every possible financial help and relief to the victims. Though the government, during that jeopardy, tried to provide respite with a compensation of ₹ 25,000 to over 200 shopkeepers, they wanted a lasting solution ensuring the security of their age-old way of livelihood.

However, as a mark of a positive gesture, the government also started a transit market complex for the victims, which was stopped for some reasons, leaving the fateful shopkeepers in a dilemma. At this critical juncture, bringing a ray of hope for the shopkeepers, the government is planning to rebuild the historic Chowk

Bazar with a modern structure, starting from February 25 this year. Just ahead of the work, under the supervision of Housing and Urban Development minister, Government of Assam, Ashok Singhal, a team of administrative officers and engineers led by district commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra is taking stock of the status of the entire project. A temporary market shed is arranged at Dhubapukhuri parking area for the shopkeepers, who will run their business there until the reconstruction of the Chowk Bazar is completed. Already, half of the businessmen have reset their business in this area. A couple of days back, the district commissioner visited the new market area and interacted with the businessmen, assuring them that by February 2025, the maximum portion of the Chowk Bazar would be completed, enabling them to shift their businesses back to their original place gradually.

Lakhminath Bezbaruah Sishu Bhawan sets new standard in educational landscape



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 19: Lakhminath Bezbaruah Sishu Bhawan, nestled in the heart of Mandir Town in Sivasagar, has etched its name in the annals of Assam's educational history with a remarkable achievement.

The government-run primary school has become a beacon of excellence, drawing unprecedented attention from guardians across the

state.

On Monday, it was the distribution day for admission forms into KG 1, the pre-primary stage, and witnessed a scene unlike any other in Assam. Parents flocked to the school gates in droves, eager to secure a coveted spot for their children in this 'A+' category Assamese medium primary school. The rush began as soon as the notice was posted on Saturday morn-

ing, with a continuous stream of guardians braving the biting cold and harsh winds to await their turn.

Such was the fervour among the parents that many spent two days and nights camped out on Boarding Road near the school gate, taking turns with their spouses to maintain their position in the lengthy queue. Undeterred by the challenges, they even cooked their meals on-site, showcasing the un-

wavering dedication of the new generation of parents towards their children's education.

Ranjit Chutia, the distinguished recipient of the Teacher Award and the headmaster of the school, shared that a staggering 122 admission forms were distributed amidst the overwhelming demand from guardians. The admission process for new students is scheduled for February 22, coinciding with the distribution of forms for KG 2.

During a recent visit to the 35-year-old institution, the Education minister allocated a grant of ₹ 51,70,000 for the construction of a new double-story building, currently underway. Once completed, this infrastructure upgrade will provide much-needed space for the students, alleviating the cramped conditions of the current campus.

With a consistent track record of achieving the 'A+' category in Gnutosav since 2017, Lakhminath Bezbaruah Sishu Bhawan stands as a shining example of educational excellence, nurturing the minds of tomorrow's leaders with dedication and distinction.

English version of novel 'Rang' released



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 19: Dr Hitesh Deka, a noted educationist and the editor of the Assamese daily 'Dainik Asom', ceremonially released 'Beneath the Simolu Tree', the English version of the Assamese novel 'Rang', penned by the Assamese novelist and writer Sharmistha Pritam, at a prestigious function, 'Priya Pathok', held at the auditorium of Nagaon Government Boys' Higher Secondary School on Monday.

The book was published by

Simon and Schuster, an international publication, and translated by noted translator Ranjita Biswas. Former Assam DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta and noted physician Monalisa Goswami were also present at the program as special guests.

The program was mentored by Pranjal Kr Mahanta, the owner of Alibab Publications, Nagaon.

During the program, Dr Hitesh Deka, former Assam DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, physician Dr Monalisa Goswami, and others spoke on the occasion.

Tripura CM thanks PM for ₹ 20 crore grant to MBB University

Union ministry of education approved funds to 78 universities, including MBB University under Prime Minister Uchahatar Siksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA)

AGARTALA, Feb 19: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan for approving a grant of ₹ 20 crore for infrastructure building at the state-run MBB University.

The Union ministry of education approved funds to 78 universities in the country including MBB University under Prime Minister Uchahatar Siksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) for strengthening infrastructure.

"The Union ministry of education has approved a grant of ₹ 20 crore for strengthening the infrastructure of MBB University under the PM-USHA Scheme. My sincere thanks to PM Shri Narendra Modi Ji & Union Minister for Education Shri Dharmendra Pradhan Ji for this grant", Saha wrote in a Facebook post.



han Ji for this grant", Saha wrote in a Facebook post.

The MBB University started its journey in 2016-17 academic ses-

ion. It offers five post graduate and two integrated masters degree programmes.

Earlier, the chief minister hailed the prime minister and Union Urban Development Minister Hardeep Singh Puri for sanctioning ₹ 419 crore to the northeastern state for urban development.

Taking to social media on Thursday, the chief minister said an amount of ₹ 419 crore has been sanctioned for Tripura under Special Assistance to Capital Incentives (Urban planning reforms) 2023-24 by the Government of India.

Thin attendance in Manipur govt offices following tribal body's call

CHURACHANDPUR/IMPHAL, Feb 19: Offices of the Manipur government in Churachandpur and neighbouring Pherzawl districts recorded thin attendance on Monday, despite the state home department's warning that "no work, no pay" rule would be applied if employees go on unauthorised leaves.

A Churachandpur-based organisation, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) has urged the government staff in the district to refrain from attending work from Monday over the suspension of a policeman, who was allegedly seen with armed men in a video grab.

"Offices were a deserted look. Hardly any government employees were seen. Offices of the public works department, agriculture, fish-

ery and forest department in both Churachandpur and Pherzawl districts remained closed," a source said.

These two districts are inhabited mostly by Kuki community people.

"Several of the employees who went to office returned after finding no other staff," an official based in Churachandpur district told PTI.

Markets, schools and private sector establishments, however, remained open and they were not affected, he said.

The ITLF has made the call to press for its demand for the revocation of the suspension of head constable Siamlalpaul and "immediate replacement" of Superintendent of Police Shivanand Surve and Deputy Commissioner Dharun Kumar.

Head constable Siamlalpaul was kept under suspension after a video

of him with "armed men" and "sitting together with village volunteers" went viral on social media.

"State government employees should refrain from going to office... it will be their sole responsibility if any untoward incident happens," it added.

Responding to the call, a home department order said, "No work-no pay shall be enforced by all the state government offices or institutions against employees who do not attend their official duty without authorised leave".

Manipur has been rocked by ethnic violence since May last year after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. More than 180 people were killed since then. (PTI)

Thankhar to be the chief guest of Arunachal's Statehood Day function

ITANAGAR, Feb 19: Vice-president Jagdeep Thakhar will arrive in Itanagar on Tuesday on a day-long visit to Arunachal Pradesh to attend the 38th Statehood Day celebrations, officials said.

This will be Thakhar's maiden visit to the northeastern state.

The vice-president will be the chief guest at the Statehood Day celebrations at Indira Gandhi Park here, they said.

Meanwhile, capital deputy commissioner Talo Potom in an executive order has promulgated Section 144 CrPc within a radius of 500 metres around Raj Bhavan from Saturday, apprehending disturbance of public peace and tranquillity.

The order has prohibited the assembly or gathering of more than four persons. It, however, exempted government officials, security forces and invitees to the said programme. (PTI)

Mizoram to launch flagship institutional credit programme

AIZWAL, Feb 19: The Mizoram government will soon launch a flagship programme aimed at making available institutional credit for agricultural purposes and small industries, Governor Hari Babu Kamhampati said on Monday.

The 'Bana Kaih' or hand-holding policy will be implemented by syncing various schemes and initiatives of the central government, he said.

Delivery his customary address on the first day of the budget session, Kamhampati said, "Bana Kaih is an innovative policy, which will address the issue of availability of institutional credit, particularly micro-credit, both for agriculture and small industrial endeavours."

The Governor said the targeted development of agriculture and allied sectors, which contribute to about 26 per cent of the gross state domestic product (GSDP), will be the core priority of the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government headed by chief minister Lalduhoma.

Improving the marketing aspect of agricultural produce by boosting physical market infrastructure and protecting the general interest of farmers will be accorded importance as well, he said.



corded importance as well, he said.

"Horticulture, fisheries, veterinary and animal husbandry and sericulture activities, which are key means of livelihood, will also be given renewed attention," Kamhampati said.

The assembly session will conclude on March 13 and Lalduhoma, who also holds the finance portfolio, is scheduled to present the state's annual budget on February 27. (PTI)

Nagaland Speaker dismisses disqualification petition against 7 NCP MLAs

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 19: The disqualification petition filed by the Sharad Pawar faction of the NCP against the seven party MLAs in Nagaland has been dismissed by the state legislative assembly speaker, Sheringain Longkumer on the ground that the Election Commission of India recognised Ajit Pawar as the leader of the NCP.

The Sharad Pawar faction of the NCP had filed the petition against the MLAs, who were elected to the state assembly in the 2023 state assembly election on the NCP ticket, for siding with Ajit Pawar faction of NCP, which joined the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata party coalition in Maharashtra.

Dismissing the petition the speaker, in an order dated February 16, said the seven NCP MLAs — Er Pichto Shoh, P Longon, Namri Nchang, Y Mhohmo Humsot, S Toiho Yephtho, Y Mankhao Konyak and A Pongshi Phom — are not liable to be disqualified under Para 2(1) (a) of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India.



"...now that the decision of the Election Commission is at hand which appears to me that supporting the legitimate leader of the political party NCP will not amount to anti-party activities nor voluntarily give up membership of the NCP party. As such to proceed further in the case will be futile being infructuous," Longkumer said in the order.

The order also said as per the decision of the ECI, supporting the "legitimate leader of the political party of NCP" did not amount to anti-party activities or voluntarily giving up membership of the party. As such, it said proceeding with the case will be "infructuous" (unnecessary).

Drug menace, increasing suicides more serious than militancy: VPP legislator

SHILLONG, Feb 19: Voice of the People Party (VPP) legislator from Nongkrem Ardent M Basaiamwoit said on Monday that the drug menace and increase in suicide cases are more serious than the problem of militancy in Meghalaya.

He then sought to know whether extortion is one of the reasons leading to price rise in Meghalaya.

Debating on the Governor's address in the Meghalaya assembly, Basaiamwoit alleged that police are running the toll gates.

"NHAI alleged most of the toll gates are being run by the police. If police, who are supposed to deal with extortion, are engaging in extortion so where are we heading?" he asked. He also reminded that clean governance is a driving force of development.

Basaiamwoit while lauding the government's effort to create livelihood opportunities through the agriculture department, also asked the state government to ensure that launching of government schemes should not be turned into political platforms to allow party men to dominate the event. (NNN)

'Zero Scrap Mission' gaining momentum over Northeast Frontier Railway

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Railway has taken significant steps to identify and dispose of various types of scrap as part of its 'Zero Scrap Mission'. To make the mission a success, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) ensured that each division, workshop and sheds is free from scrap material.

During the drive under 'Zero Scrap Mission', the NFR has sold 12542 MT scrap rails/p-way materials and 8268 MT of miscellaneous scrap items till December 31 last year. It has also sold 12 diesel locomotives, 157 coaches and 122 wagons during this period.

Up to December 31 last year, the NFR has sold ₹ 103.55 crores worth scrap rails, P-Way material, condemned coaches, wagons and locomotives, which is 3.19% higher corresponding to last year sale value of ₹ 100.35 crores.

No Haokip Reserved in Thanging hill, Manipur government

IMPHAL, Feb 19: Manipur forest, environment and climate change department on Monday refuted Thanging hill ownership claim made by the Ukha-Loikhai village.

On February 16, chief of the Ukha-Loikhai village, Thenkhomang Haokip claimed the village as the owner of the Thanging hill in Churachandpur district while terming it as 'Haokip Reserved'. He also referred to Thanging as 'Thangting'.

"There are no records of the Haokip Reserved notified under any resolution/Act/rules as per records maintained by the state government contrary to the claim made by the self-proclaimed chief", the forest, environment and climate change said, in an order issued on Monday while discrediting the claim.

The order asserted that the claim is fabricated and holds no legal standing.

The order stated that the present day Thanging hill range, which falls within the Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forests, was notified on September 17, 1966 under section 29 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

The present day Ukha-Loikhai settlement falls within the boundary of this protected forest and the order for setting apart Ukha-Loikhai from the Churachandpur-Khoupum protected forest was cancelled by an office memorandum of the state forest department issued in November 2022. Fresh inquiry in this regard has already been initiated by the state government, the government order stated.

Contrary to the village chief's claim, there are no records of the 'Haokip Reserved' under any Resolution/Act/Rules, as per the state government's maintained records, it added.

The order emphasized that Thanging (Thang Ching) holds historical importance, leading the government to declare it a protected site under section 4 of the Manipur Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1976, through Gazette No. 376.

The order signed by special secretary (forest, environment and climate change department) RK Amarjit Singh stated alleged that the claim is a deliberate attempt to mislead the general public while labeling it as non-existent with a mala-fide intention. The claim has no locus standi and is treated as non-est. (NNN)

Governor greets people on eve of Mizoram statehood day

Guv urges people of Mizoram to embrace spirit of Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat by learning about and respecting customs and traditions of other regions

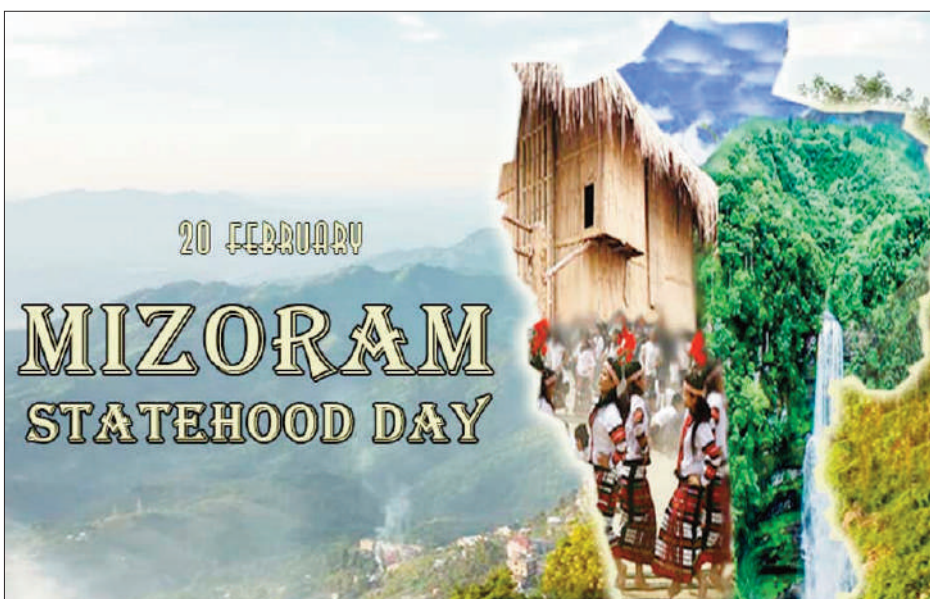
AIZWAL, Feb 19: Governor Hari Babu Kamhampati on Monday extended his greetings to the people of Mizoram on the eve of the 37th statehood day.

As part of the celebrations, a public prayer will be held at the Assam Rifles ground on Tuesday, with chief minister Lalduhoma slated to address the gathering, officials said.

In his message, the Governor emphasized the importance of understanding and appreciating the diverse traditions of different cultures.

The Governor encouraged the people of Mizoram to embrace the spirit of Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat by learning about and respecting the customs and traditions of other regions. He said such cultural exchange can enrich the collective identity of Indians.

"This programme aims to enhance mutual understanding and promote interaction between people of different states and UTs," he added.



"We have varied customs and traditions. Instead of letting these differences create alienation and misunderstanding, we can let it enhance our identity as Indians. Therefore, in the spirit of Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat, I urge all people of Mizoram to study

and be curious about other traditions and learn the good it offers," he said.

The official statehood day function will be held at Vanapa Hall in the presence of Governor Kamhampati and CM Lalduhoma.

Mizoram's first statehood

day was attended by then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on February 20, 1987 following the peace accord between the Centre and the erstwhile underground Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1986, which ended 20 years of insurgency in the northeastern state. (PTI)

SBFC

Registered Office: Unit No.-103, 1st Floor, C&B Square, Sangam Complex, CTS No. 95A, 127, Andheri Kurla Road, Village Chakala, Andheri (E), Mumbai-400059 | Telephone: +912267875300 | Fax: +91 2267875334 | www.SBFC.com | Corporate Identity Number: U67190MH2008PTC178270

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Limited on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am. at SBFC Finance Limited, 1st Floor, Ramkrishna Shopping Complex, Babu Para, Barpeta Road, Ward No - 7, Pin - 781315, Assam. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers who have failed to pay their dues. Our notices of auction have been duly issued to these borrowers. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Overdue Loan Accounts of our various Customers mentioned below with branch name. **Branch Barpeta Road:** AP00539297, AP00547031, AP005458853, AP00554659, AP00557824, AP00558613, AP00565089, AP00567782, AP00569261, AP00575210, AP00576778, AP00588644, AP00596160

This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Limited on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am. at SBFC Finance Limited, Dibrugarh Branch, C/o. Hanuman Drugs, 2nd Floor, H.S. Road, Dibrugarh, PIN-786001, Assam. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers who have failed to pay their dues. Our notices of auction have been duly issued to these borrowers. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Overdue Loan Accounts of our various Customers mentioned below with branch name. **Branch Dibrugarh:** AP00300939, AP00447401, AP00466087, AP00493414, AP00502024, AP00530988, AP00551657, AP00559371, AP00583946, AP00593579

Guwahati Branch Auction will be conducted on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: Opp: Jalukbari Jame Masjid, Above MRF Tyre showroom Jalukbari, Guwahati, Assam Pin: 781014.
Branch - Guwahati: AP00312613, AP00352501, AP00357900, AP00382515, AP00398113, AP00416324, AP00424109, AP00430555, AP00467110, AP00494054, AP00495171, AP00497352, AP00518987, AP00519553, AP00520233, AP00547768, AP00559657, AP00557587, AP00577859, AP00588015, AP00587457, AP00595042, AP00596004

Jorhat Branch Auction will be conducted on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: 1st Floor, Old Sahara branch building, Rupahi Ali Road, Near Punjab National Bank, Jorhat - 785001, Assam.
Branch - Jorhat: AP00198206, AP00210130, AP00212137, AP00247242, AP00270992, AP00273610, AP00333892, AP00341638, AP00345063, AP00357400, AP00383938, AP00392320, AP00407905, AP00430262, AP00446637, AP00447240, AP00466177, AP00467135, AP00472494, AP00486863, AP00493503, AP00497354, AP00499168, AP00502713, AP00504398, AP00510646, AP00511482, AP00512560, AP00520031, AP00520537, AP00523901, AP00526723, AP00540064, AP00547482, AP00548735, AP00555544, AP00559013, AP00568293, AP00575195, AP00577474, AP00585929, AP00586626, AP00587427, AP00589198, AP00594472

Nagaon Branch Auction will be conducted on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: First Floor, Behind Nataraj Hotel, Haibargaon, Nagaon. Pin: 782002.
Branch - Nagaon: AP00300840, AP00304522, AP00307956, AP00312323, AP00313538, AP00318621, AP00324655, AP00327525, AP00333735, AP00337342, AP00339209, AP00339416, AP00341497, AP00347462, AP00353973, AP00373792, AP00380191, AP00380317, AP00383703, AP00414691, AP00434843, AP00449263, AP00457873, AP00466562, AP00482277, AP00493144, AP00494680, AP00494953, AP00495663, AP00497907, AP00502173, AP0052292, AP00523935, AP00539053, AP00541733, AP00543140, AP00548002, AP00548610, AP00550030, AP00551031, AP00551410, AP00556792, AP00557530, AP00557580, AP00557591, AP00576476, AP00576878, AP00577497, AP00578627, AP00584715, AP00585752, AP00587442, AP00598063

Rangia Branch Auction will be conducted on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: 1st floor NT road, ward no-5, Canara Bank campus, rangia, Assam pin-781354
Branch - Rangia : AP00351096, AP00352043, AP00352618, AP00363954, AP00377095, AP00385118, AP00393213, AP00406447, AP00414394, AP00422262, AP00436935, AP00478082, AP00494393, AP00511702, AP00520828, AP00521701, AP00539342, AP00547943, AP005505224, AP00551562, AP00558864, AP00560146, AP00560269, AP00576277, AP00576567, AP00576646, AP00577295, AP00594469, AP00596326

Silchar Branch Auction will be conducted on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC finance limited Branch Address: Hospital Road, Ambicappatty Point, 1st Floor, Above Foods & Flavours, Silchar-788004.
Branch - Silchar: AP00340682, AP00340714, AP00350916, AP00369396, AP00392144, AP00407467, AP00412962, AP00447467, AP00459514, AP00478990, AP00486837, AP00505275, AP00521099, AP00526990, AP00529902, AP00543125, AP00547832, AP00556518, AP00566223, AP00566627, AP00567620, AP00575970

Sivasagar Branch Auction will be conducted on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: GNG Road, Opp Mahadevi Medical Stores, Dist: Sivasagar (Assam) Pin: 785640.
Branch - Sivasagar: AP00195892, AP00203618, AP002272180, AP00274633, AP00291301, AP00308507, AP00327989, AP00329756, AP00346619, AP00347189, AP00356556, AP00368745, AP00371102, AP00373742, AP00376663, AP00413464, AP00416737, AP00469708, AP00476170, AP00478930, AP00493014, AP00494995, AP00502179, AP00507179, AP00511853, AP00512687, AP00513913, AP00519469, AP00520439, AP00523696, AP00527942, AP00529452, AP00534305, AP00535893, AP00539326, AP00546763, AP00548843, AP00548235, AP00549917, AP00550183, AP00557299, AP00557558, AP00561512, AP00566071, AP00567384, AP00572756, AP00575104, AP00575928, AP00576497, AP00576689, AP00577899, AP00577968, AP00578026, AP00578343, AP00594914, AP00597021, AP00597510

Tezpur Branch Auction will be conducted on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC finance limited Branch Address: D.B.Mart, Opp. Spring Valley Hotel, N.C.Road, Tezpur, Sonitpur, Assam, Pin: 784001.
Branch - Tezpur : AP00330765, AP00346407, AP00353760, AP00378716, AP00399137, AP00415264, AP00470639, AP00486140, AP00487307, AP00494386, AP00503211, AP00505275, AP00507867, AP00506245, AP00507565, AP00507737, AP00507768, AP00508445, AP00508449, AP00508492, AP00509643

Tinsukia Branch Auction will be conducted on 26.02.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: 2nd Floor, Janki Complex, Chirwapatty Road, Opp: HDFC Bank, P.O.-Tinsukia, Pin-786125, Assam.
Branch - Tinsukia: AP00187970, AP00193356, AP00196581, AP00200714, AP00210482, AP00312618, AP00316439, AP00320024, AP00320025, AP00346468, AP00373225, AP00377021, AP00379370, AP00384078, AP00396719, AP00401499, AP00440963, AP00475450, AP00480880, AP00485848, AP00495075, AP00496061, AP00496498, AP00502349, AP00502500, AP00502683, AP00505990, AP00521546, AP00523890, AP00525140, AP00527959, AP00549785, AP00559095, AP00559265, AP00559704, AP00566419, AP00575437, AP00577774, AP00586845, AP00587217, AP00588069, AP00588191, AP00594883

For more details, please contact SBFC Finance Limited Contact Number(s): 1800-102-8012 (SBFC Finance Limited reserves the right to alter the number of accounts to be auctioned & postpone / cancel the auction without any prior notice.)

SC refuses to entertain PIL seeking probe into Sandeshkhali violence

One of the judges of the high court has also taken cognisance of the alleged incidents

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a PIL seeking a court-monitored CBI or SIT probe into the violence in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali village, saying the incidents cannot be compared to the savagery in Manipur.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih said the Calcutta High Court is already seized of the matter.

"The local high court will be the best to assess the situation. Let there be no dual forums," the bench said while granting liberty to the PIL petitioner to approach the high court.

As the hearing began, petitioner-lawyer Alakh Alok Srivastava said disturbing incidents have come to light where a number of women have claimed they have been raped.

The top court said one of the judges of the high court has also taken cognisance of the alleged incidents. It can consider transferring the case to the CBI, the bench said.

The petitioner said the situation in the state is so bad that even the CBI has to approach the apex court to seek trial of post-poll violence cases outside West Bengal.

"We understand your eagerness



and sympathy for the victims but monitoring of an investigation by this court is completely different," the bench said.

Senior advocate Jaideep Gupta, appearing for the West Bengal government, submitted the high court has taken cognisance of the alleged incidents and some arrests have also been made.

When Srivastava referred to the top court having formed a committee of three former women high court judges to oversee the investigation, relief and remedial measures in Manipur, where also women were sexually assaulted, the bench said, "Don't compare Manipur with this. Don't make different cases comparable."

As the bench was disinclined to

entertain the matter, Srivastava withdrew the PIL. The matter was dismissed as withdrawn.

"The petitioner who has appeared in person, after arguing the matter for some time, sought permission to withdraw this petition filed under Article 32, with liberty to seek reliefs before the Calcutta High Court. Consequently, this writ petition is dismissed as withdrawn while granting liberty to the petitioner to seek appropriate relief before the Calcutta High Court," the bench said in its order.

The plea filed by Srivastava in his personal capacity, sought compensation for the victims of the Sandeshkhali violence and action against officials of the West Bengal

Police for alleged dereliction of duty.

The plea also sought transfer of the probe and subsequent trial outside West Bengal, besides an inquiry by a three-judge committee as done in Manipur.

Sandeshkhali, a village in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, has been witnessing violent protests over allegations of sexual abuse of women by a local TMC leader and his supporters.

Several women have accused local Trinamool Congress strongman Shajahan Sheikh and his supporters of land grab and sexual assault.

Sheikh is absconding ever since a mob, allegedly linked to him, attacked Enforcement Directorate officials who had gone to search his premises in connection with a corruption case.

Earlier in the day, the apex court stayed the notices issued by the privileges committee of the Lok Sabha to the West Bengal chief secretary, DGP and others over a complaint of "misconduct" filed against them by BJP MP Sukanta Majumdar.

Majumdar was hospitalised last week following a clash between BJP workers and police after being stopped from going to violence-hit Sandeshkhali. (PTI)

SC stays proceedings against Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah, others

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The Supreme Court on Monday stayed criminal proceedings against Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and others in connection with a protest march held in the state in 2022.

Issuing notice to the Karnataka government, a bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and P K Mishra also stayed the proceedings against Congress general secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala, state ministers M B Patil and Ramalinga Reddy.

The top court also stayed the Karnataka High Court order, which had imposed a fine of ₹ 10,000 on them and directed them to appear before a special court on March 6.

"Issue notice. Returnable in six weeks. In the meantime, further proceedings against the petitioners are stayed," the bench said.

At the outset, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Siddaramaiah, submitted that it was a "political" protest and the criminal case was a violation of the right to protest under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

The senior lawyer said in a democracy right of freedom of speech and protest is paramount and is guaranteed under the Constitution and the only restriction envisaged is when public order is impacted.

Singhvi submitted that a political protest conducted peacefully without any criminal intent cannot be muzzled by using penal provisions.

At this juncture, the bench observed that if the submission is accepted, then every public protest on the road, disrupting normal life, should be allowed on the grounds of Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

"Your argument is that if a politician does it, it has to be quashed, but if there are other group of people doing demonstration, then they cannot do it. Only politicians have the right under Article 19(1)(a). How can it be quashed just because it is done by a politician?"

"Did you seek permission for the demonstration? You cannot assemble in thousands and say that you are protected?" Justice Mishra said.

Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, also appearing for Siddaramaiah, submitted that the case was about a "law and order allegation" and not a "public order allegation".

"Law and order" cannot be the basis of restriction of my fundamental right to protest. Otherwise every protest would be hazardous and every public protest will be illegal," Sibal said.

Siddaramaiah had moved the apex court against a Karnataka High Court order that has dismissed his plea to quash an FIR lodged against him and others



in 2022.

The Congress leader has challenged the February 6 order of the high court that has imposed a fine on him as well as Surjewala, Patil and Reddy, and directed him to appear before a special court on March 6.

The case was registered against the Congress leaders after they took out a march to lay siege to the then chief minister Basavaraj Bommai's residence in Bengaluru, demanding the resignation of K S Eshwarappa, who was then the rural development and panchayat raj minister in the southern state.

The agitation was staged after a contractor, Santosh Patil, died by suicide accusing Eshwarappa of demanding 40 per cent commission on a public work in his village.

According to police, the case pertained to blocking roads and causing trouble to commuters.

Holding that none of the "quintessential" ingredients of the offences alleged was made out, Siddaramaiah has said in his plea that the proceedings are an abuse of the process of law and would lead to undue harassment.

"The incident complained lasted for almost an hour and no violent action or use of criminal force has been alleged against any of the members of the procession, it is thus submitted that the prosecution cannot be allowed to continue on such frivolous incidents where no allegation of criminality has been attributed to any of the members of the assembly," the plea stated.

In his plea before the top court, Siddaramaiah has said there is no allegation that the protest led to any violence or use of criminal force to pose an imminent threat to the public at large or to anyone, including the minister. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Nyay Yatra: Cong MLA

them have already been interrogated. Referring to police cases against him and other Congress leaders in Assam, Gandhi had dared the BJP-ruled state to file "as many cases as it can", asserting that he would not be intimidated.

The Yatra, led by the Congress MP, commenced from Manipur on January 14 and will culminate on March 20 in Mumbai.

The Assam leg of the march, which started on January 18 and concluded on January 25, travelled 833 km in 17 districts.

The Yatra plans to cover 6,713 km in 67 days while passing through 110 districts in 15 states. (PTI)

KAAC to begin eviction

developments. Meanwhile, the situation regarding the undeclared bandh in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong has shown signs of improvement, with markets reopening and public transport services resuming operations.

NE at centre of Modi

University Games are happening across the region," Thakur, who also holds the Sports and Youth Welfare portfolio, said. He added that NE has always been a powerhouse in sports and players from the region have brought laurels to the nation. (PTI)

Govt invested ₹ 5 lakh

operational in Guwahati. "The North East now is no longer what it was in 2014. There has been a positive transformation in the region's social fabric, as nearly 9,000 armed militant group members have surrendered contributing to peace and stability," he said. (PTI)

Smog towers, cloud seeding

do it," he said. On fighting air pollution with cloud seeding technology, the scientist said it is not something that is sustainable and certainly not a long-term solution.

"Do you really want to have airplanes flying around 24 hours a day, every few 100 metres in the sky, seeding clouds to make it rain? And then do you really want it to rain every day? I don't think so. I think the answer is no," the scientist said.

Asked if the severity of the air pollution problem in India is underestimated due to a lack of sensors and air quality monitoring institutions, Peltier said, "I don't think we know with enough precision where the pollution is worse. There probably are not enough air pollution monitors spread out across India, especially those around major city areas that give us the confidence that we are 100 per cent sure that our model is right." "But I think we have a pretty good understanding that air pollution is really quite bad across India. It'd be nice to have more monitors though," he added.

According to independent think-tank Greenpeace India, more than 99 per cent of the country's population breathes air that exceeds the WHO standards on PM2.5. It said 62 per cent of pregnant women and 56 per cent of the country's population live in the most polluted areas. A report by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago last August said fine particulate air pollution (PM2.5) shortens average life expectancy by 5.3 years in India on an average and by up to 11 years in Delhi.

Asked if air pollution is a meteorological problem, particularly for Delhi, or a governance issue, Peltier said meteorology is not the problem but it can aggravate air pollution in specific areas.

"We cannot control meteorology but we can control emission sources. Identifying and regulating these sources are crucial for improving air quality in India, even under challenging meteorological conditions," he said.

The US scientist also said though it is challenging to convey, there is a clear relationship between high air pollution levels and higher mortality. Peltier said, "Epidemiologically, we know the link between air pollution exposure and mortality, particularly from cardiovascular disease, lung cancer, stroke, and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)." "While it's challenging to convey this connection to individuals, the scientific community agrees on the clear relationship between increased air pollution and higher mortality rates," he added. (PTI)

Bangladesh visa centre

there will be a positive outcome soon, he said. The market was proposed to be set up on 500 bighas of land on the bank of the Surma river at Katigorah in Cachar district. The Bangladesh government was considering opening two such markets to establish goodwill and coordination among the people living in the border areas of the two countries, he said.

"Our government always emphasises on maintaining a good relationship with India," Amin added. (PTI)

Magisterial probe ordered

firing by security forces on February 15, after a mob barged into a government complex housing the deputy commissioner and superintendent of police offices, torched vehicles and ransacked property, hours after the suspension of a head constable.

"The state government is of the opinion that it is necessary to institute a magisterial inquiry to ascertain facts and circumstances leading to the crimes/violence/vandalism/arson of seditious nature and loss of lives, intimidation and threats to the lives of the DC and SP, Churachandpur..." an official order said.

The probe would "ascertain the facts and circumstances leading to loss of lives and properties" and "suggest remedial measures to avoid recurrence of such incidents in the future", it said.

Head constable Siamlalpal was placed under suspension after a purported video of him with "armed men" went viral on social media.

The inquiry report should be submitted within 30 days, the order said. (PTI)

Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi assumes charge as vice chief of Army Staff

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi, who has vast operational experience along the frontiers with China and Pakistan, on Monday assumed charge as Vice Chief of the Army Staff, succeeding Lieutenant General MV Suchindra Kumar.

Lt Gen Dwivedi is the front-runner to become the Army Chief when incumbent General Manoj Pande retires on May 31.

Prior to taking over as Vice Chief of the Army Staff, Lt Gen Dwivedi was serving as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Northern Command from 2022-2024 in an "extremely challenging operational environment", the Army said in a statement.

An alumnus of Sainik School, Rewa, Lt Gen Dwivedi was commissioned into 18 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles in 1984, a unit he later commanded.

"The General officer has had a unique distinction of balanced exposure of both Northern and Western Theatres," the Army said. In his illustrious career spanning 39 years, he has held command appointments in challenging operational environments, spanning the length and breadth of the country.

He commanded his unit in Kashmir Valley as well as in Rajasthan.

Lt Gen Dwivedi was the Sector Commander and the Inspector General of Assam Rifles in an intense counter terrorism environment in the north east.

He commanded the Rising Star Corps with an operational role along the western borders. Lt Gen Dwivedi commanded the prestigious Northern Army in an extremely challenging operational environment along both the northern and western borders, the Army said in a statement.

As Northern Army commander, he

provided strategic guidance and operational oversight for planning and execution of sustained operations along the northern and western borders, besides orchestrating the dynamic counter-terrorism operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

During this period, the General officer was actively engaged in the ongoing negotiations with China in resolving the vexed border issue, the Army said.

He was also involved in modernisation and equipping of the largest Army command of the Indian Army, where he steered the induction of indigenous equipment as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India).

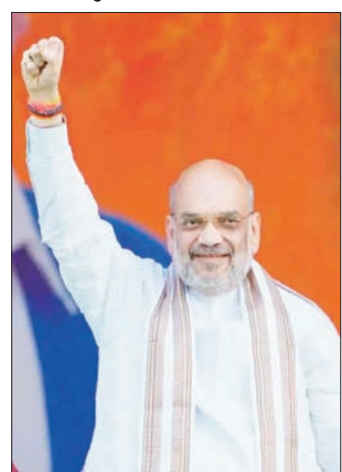
The Army said that he synergised with people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh for "convergent nation-building outcomes" and infrastructure development.

Besides the challenging command assignments, Lt Gen Dwivedi has tenanted important staff appointments in headquarters Armoured Brigade, Mountain Division, Strike Corps and Integrated HQ (Army). "As Director General Infantry, he had steered and fast-tracked capital procurement of weapons for the three services, leading to significant and visible capability enhancement for our armed forces," the Army said.

As Deputy Chief of the Army Staff (Information System and Coordination), the General officer gave impetus to automation and absorption of niche technologies in the Indian Army, it said.

Being a technology enthusiast, he worked towards enhancing the technical threshold of all ranks in the Northern Command and pushed for 'critical and emerging technologies' like Big Data Analytics, AI, Quantum and Blockchain-based solutions, it said. (PTI)

'Saved million of lives' Modi govt developed early disaster warning systems: Amit Shah



NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has introduced a multi-dimensional disaster management plan and under this vision, the government raised prompt response forces and developed early warning systems that helped save millions of lives, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Monday.

Shah also said that to build a disaster-resilient country, the prime minister has adopted a zero-casualty approach in India's response to calamities and the disaster response teams now operate as fully professional forces driven by the goal of securing every life.

"PM @narendramodi Ji introduced a multi-dimensional Disaster Management Plan. Under this vision, the Modi govt raised prompt response forces and developed vigilant early warning systems leading to saving millions of lives," he posted on 'X' with the hashtag "Disaster Resilient Bharat".

The home minister said that powered by the visionary leadership of Modi, the country today can tackle any disaster and due to the government's 'Mission Zero Casualty', even the devastating force of the Cyclone Biparjoy could not take any life.

The cyclone hit Gujarat in June last year.

"PM @narendramodi Ji harnessed the power of Bharat's youths to build a disaster-resilient nation. The Modi government trained millions in disaster management, which boosted the morale of our forces and made our societies capable of fighting disasters," he said. (PTI)

Myanmar poachers' boat hits rock as they were inebriated

PORT BLAIR, Feb 19: A police investigation into the death of six Myanmarese poachers, whose bodies were found in remote Narcondam island in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, revealed that 10 people from the neighbouring country had entered Indian waters illegally to collect marine wealth on February 12, a senior officer said.

Of the 10 Myanmarese nationals, six died of 'starvation' and 'intoxication', while two are still missing in the dense forest and two arrested, the officer said.

The startling revelation came following the interrogation of one of the arrested poachers identified as Aung Kyaw Myint, he said.

The bodies were found lying a few metres from the shore in a forest on the small Narcondam island on Saturday.

Located in the easternmost part of India, Narcondam in North and Middle Andaman district is only 126 km from Myanmar's Coco Island.

Police sources said, these Myanmarese nationals were employed by one Kyaw Zar Win, a resident of Labutta (a town in the Ayeyarwady Region of south-west Myanmar), who had provided advance payments to them and organised essential supplies such as fresh water and fuel for their voyage, expected to last 15-20 days.

The dinghy, under the command of Myo Lwin Oo (boat captain), departed from Labutta in Ayeyarwady, Myanmar, on February 2 (evening), to collect marine wealth in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They carried 200 kg of rice, 1,000 litres of high-speed diesel and other essential items.

"On February 5 morning they reached the

Enroute Andaman, 2 still missing



open sea in Myanmar. Later they continued their journey and after two days they reached Little Coco Island on February 7 and halted there till February 11. On February 11 they started their journey and reached Narcondam Island at about 10 pm on February 12", the senior police officer said.

During interrogation, Aung Kyaw Myint revealed that while they were at Little Coco Island they got 4-6 bottles (suspected to be spirit) from the seashore of Little Coco Island. Throughout the entire journey, the other members (except Aung Kyaw Myint) consumed liquor.

"Following the consumption, the master Myo Lwin Oo and eight other members started behaving abnormally. As the master and other associates were under the influence of alcohol and due to darkness their dinghy hit a rock at Narcondam Island. They took their belongings including mobile phones, some ration items and liquor with them. On the next morning on February 13, they left the shore area and reached the

upper land area of the island," a senior police source said.

"Aung Kyaw Myint disclosed that as the health condition of Bo Bo Lwin worsened, he and Lwin decided to surrender on February 14. Myint and Lwin left the group and surrendered before the police outpost at Narcondam Island. They were brought to Port Blair where Bo Bo Lwin was admitted to G B Pant Hospital and is undergoing medical treatment. The ration they were carrying is believed to be damaged after their dinghy met with an accident," a police officer said.

"The poachers had entered the Indian waters with the intent to collect marine wealth in Andaman waters. They lack the necessary travel documents or fishing permissions from the competent authorities to engage in fishing within Indian territorial waters. Their clandestine entry into the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to collect marine resources is considered illegal by the joint interrogation team", a senior CID officer said.

Narcondam (part of North and Middle Andaman district) Island is close to Myanmar. It is formed of andesite and located in the easternmost part of India. It is classified as a dormant volcano by the Geological Survey of India (GSI). The island is small, covering an area of approximately 7.6 square kilometres and is a hunting ground for poachers from Myanmar.

The bodies of six Myanmarese nationals were brought to GB Pant Hospital in Port Blair with the help of the Coast Guard and further investigation is going on. The Union Home Ministry and the External Affairs Ministry have been informed, the officer added. (PTI)

'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya' nears ₹ 100 crore-mark at box office

MUMBAI, Feb 19: Shahid Kapoor and Kriti Sanon-starrer 'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya' has raised Rs 98.06 crore gross at the global box office, the makers said on Sunday.

The film, written and directed by first-time filmmakers Amit Joshi and Aradhana Sah, released on February 9.

Production house Maddock Films shared the movie's three-day collection on its official X page.

"Your love is making this family entertainer triumph at the Box Office. Go watch this blend of romance, comedy, & family drama for complete entertainment!" the banner captioned a poster stating the film raised Rs 98.06 crore in worldwide gross in nine days.

"Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya" features Shahid in the role of Aryan, an engineer who decides to marry a robot, named Sifra, played by Kriti. The movie also stars veteran actors Dharmendra and Dimple Kapadia. (PTI)



There's hope for Hindi cinema only if we stop making films for money: Naseeruddin Shah

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Veteran actor and thespian Naseeruddin Shah expressed his disappointment in Hindi cinema and said there was hope for it to get better only if films were made without the intention of earning money.

Speaking at 'Meer Ki Dilli, Shahjahanabad: The Evolving City' here on Saturday, Shah said Hindi filmmakers have been making the same kind of films for the last 100 years.

"It really disappoints me that we take pride in saying Hindi cinema is 100 years old but we have been making the same films. I have stopped watching Hindi films, I don't like them at all," the 73-year-old said.

Shah added that Indians all over the world go to watch Hindi films because it is their connection with their home but soon everyone will be fed up.

"Hindustani food is loved everywhere because it has sub-

stance. What substance do Hindi films have? Yes, they are being watched everywhere... They say, 'how exotic, how Indian, how colourful'. Soon they will be bored of it because there is no substance," the "Masoom" actor said.

He believes it is the responsibility of "serious filmmakers" to show the reality of society.

"There is hope for Hindi cinema only if we stop seeing them as means for making money. But I feel it's too late now. There is no solution any more because the films that are being watched by thousands will keep being produced and people will keep watching them, god knows till when."

"So those who want to make serious films, it's their responsibility to show today's reality and in such a way that they don't get a fatwa or ED doesn't come knocking on their doors," Shah said.

He noted that Iranian filmmakers made films despite suppression from the authorities and Indian cartoonist RK Laxman kept making cartoons during the days of emergency. (PTI)



Felt like a celebration: Raam Reddy on Berlinale screening of 'The Fable'



NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Director Raam Reddy says it felt like a celebration to screen "The Fable" at the 74th Berlin International Film Festival with the film's star cast.

The film, his second feature, is shot on 16 MM in Uttarakhand and set in 1989. 'The Fable' follows the journey of Dev (Manoj Bajpayee) who discovers mysteriously burnt trees in his sprawling estate of fruit orchards nestled in the Indian Himalayas.

The film had its world premiere at the

festival on Friday.

"The premiere of 'The Fable' at Berlinale was incredible. The premiere sold out in less than an hour and our second screening today with almost 1,000 seats is also sold out. But most importantly, it felt like a celebration, and after all our hard work, the excitement and intrigue felt by the audience was beautiful for me to finally experience first hand," the filmmaker said in a statement.

"It was amazing to have Manoj ji and my lovely cast and crew with me during

this dream-come-true moment. We feel like a family, and the bonds we all share as a team made the premiere all the more special," the 34-year-old director added. Reddy's film, produced by PRSPCTVS PRODUCTIONS & MAXMEDIA, was screened in the Encounters segment of the festival, which runs from February 15 to 24.

The film also features Hiral Sidhu, child actor Awan Pookot and Tillotama Shome in a special appearance. (PTI)

VARUN DHAWAN, NATASHA DALAL EXPECTING FIRST CHILD

MUMBAI, Feb 19: Actor Varun Dhawan and his wife Natasha Dalal are expecting their first child together. The 36-year-old actor shared the news on Instagram on Sunday and posted a picture with Natasha showing off her baby bump. "We are pregnant. Need all your blessings and love. #myfamilymystrength," Dhawan wrote in the caption. Several industry colleagues, including actors Sonam Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar, Arjun Kapoor, Samantha Ruth Prabhu and filmmaker Karan Johar, sent their best wishes to the couple.

Dhawan will be next seen in action drama "Baby John", scheduled for release in theatres on May 31. The actor is also awaiting the premiere of his OTT series "Citadel India", co-starring Ruth Prabhu. (PTI)



SANYA REMEMBERS SUHANI BHATNAGAR: 'She was so special, talented'

MUMBAI, Feb 19: Actor Sanya Malhotra on Sunday condoled the death of Suhani Bhatnagar, who played young Babita Phogat in Aamir Khan-starrer wrestling drama "Dangal". According to Bhatnagar's family, the 19-year-old actor was suffering from Dermatomyositis, a rare inflammatory disease that causes skin rash and muscle weakness. She was admitted to All India Institute of Medical Sciences on February 7

and died on February 16 after medical complications. Malhotra, who played the grown-up version of Babita Phogat in the Nitesh Tiwari-directed movie, remembered Bhatnagar in a post on her Instagram Stories. "I can't believe it's real. There was no one quite like our Suhani. She was so special, so talented, and way too young to have left us so soon. Rest in peace Chotu My deepest condolences to Pooja, Puneet and the entire family,"

the actor wrote. Bhatnagar was a resident of Sector-17 in Faridabad. Her last rites took place at the Ajrona crematorium ground in the city. The young actor became a prominent face after appearing in "Dangal", the 2016 biographical drama about a wrestler who mentors his two daughters to success. The movie also featured Zaira Wasim as young Geeta while Fatima Sana Shaikh played the elder version. (PTI)

I was grateful but being famous was horrible: Kate Winslet on 'Titanic'

LOS ANGELES, Feb 19: Kate Winslet became an overnight star with "Titanic" in 1997 but the actor still cannot shake off the scrutiny that she faced in her twenties.

In an interview with Net-A-Porter, the 48-year-old actor recalled the constant media attention that came with the success of the James Cameron-directed film which featured her alongside Leonardo DiCaprio. The film won 11 Oscars. "I felt like I had to look a certain way, or be a certain thing, and because media intrusion was so significant at that time, my life was quite unpleasant,"

Winslet said. "Journalists would always say, 'After 'Titanic', you could have done anything and yet you chose to do these small things. And I was like, 'Yeah, you bet your f***ing life I did! Because, guess what, being famous was horrible.' I was grateful, of course. I was in my early twenties, and I was able to get a flat. But I didn't want to be followed literally feeding the ducks," the actor said.

Winslet, who went on to build a successful career and won the best actress Oscar for her role in "The Reader", said she has become accustomed to her fame over the years.

But despite the intrusions on her personal life as a young actress, Winslet went on to say that she remains grateful to have been a part of the film. She explained that she now appreciates the passion that fans have for the movie, even if it means she can never take another boat ride in peace. "I wear it really lightly," she said of her fame. "It's not a burden, any of it. ['Titanic'] continues to bring people huge amounts of joy. The only time I am like, 'Oh god, hide', is if we are on a boat somewhere."

This is not the first time Winslet has spoken about the downsides of her "Titanic" fame. In a 2022 in-

terview, the actress recalled being hurt by the negative remarks that many people in the entertainment industry made about her weight following the film's release. "Apparently I was too fat," she said, before reflecting on how she would have handled such treatment from media if it happened today. "I would have said to journalists, I would have responded, I would have said, 'Don't you dare treat me like this. I'm a young woman, my body is changing, I'm figuring it out, I'm deeply insecure, I'm terrified, don't make this any harder than it already is.'" (PTI)



OUR TEAM BALANCE HAS IMPROVED: RCB SKIPPER MANDHANA

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: RCB skipper Smriti Mandhana says her team's balance has improved considerably after acquiring new players and it should help them do a better job in the second season of the Women's Premier League (WPL), starting February 23.

Royal Challengers Banaglore had endured a tough inaugural season in 2023 as it lost six of the eight matches and finished fourth in five-team competition. The second season will be played in New Delhi and Bengaluru.

RCB had spent close to 2.5 crore to acquire services of many impact players like Ekta Bisht (left-arm spinner), Kate Cross (pacer), Georgia Wareham (leg-spinner), Sabbineni Meghana (all-rounder), Simran Bahadur (medium-pacer), Sophie Molineux (left-arm spinner) and home-grown talent Shubha Sathesh (all-rounder).

"I would definitely want it to be better than the first season. From RCB's point of view, quite a few players were released and we brought in new players. So, the balance has improved for sure, and we are hoping to live up to our potential," Mandhana told JioCinema.

The team had released seven players: Komal Zanzad, Poonam Khennar, Preeti Bose, Sahana Pawar, Dane van Niekerk, Erin Burns, and Megan Schutt.

The stylish batter said playing the domestic season has not



only prepared her well for the upcoming WPL, it also she helped her identify a few good players. "Playing in the domestic season helped me practice well and we saw quite a few

girls against whom we've not played previously. I was able to recommend a few names to my franchise after seeing these girls." RCB had released a few members and bought as many as

six new players during the WPL auction last December.

"Last year, when we joined the team two days before the tournament, we didn't know about 90% of the players. We

didn't know what they did and what they didn't. This year, it was important to know their strengths and weaknesses so that we can play better. The WPL is a short tournament and it's difficult to change things when it's on."

Asked if she considers RCB as title contenders, the southpaw said: "We don't want to think too far ahead. We definitely want to do better than last year and are motivated to do it. The people at our franchise are very nice and have supported us immensely, so more than anything else, we want to win the trophy for them."

"The way they backed us even after four losses last season, the conversation revolved around our well-being. So, as players, it is very important that we respect the backing we are getting, and also try to win the trophy for our fans who supported us so much last season."

Opening the batting, Mandhana could manage only 149 runs with a highest score of 37 in the first WPL season.

"Last year, I was not able to deliver the performance expected of me. This time, I don't want to repeat the mistakes of last year and give the team a platform from where we can launch. Our batting line-up is very good. As a captain, I know the players better this time," she said. Royal Challengers Bangalore will open their campaign against UP Warriors in Bengaluru on February 24. (PTI)

Cannot be aggressive all the time, need to soak in pressure: former England captains slam 'Bazball'



LONDON, Feb 19: Former England captains Nasser Hussain and Michael Vaughan have criticised the team's 'Bazball' approach in the ongoing Test series against India, saying the visitors need to apply themselves based on match situation instead of being guided by a one-dimensional philosophy of aggression.

India registered their biggest-ever Test win, annihilating England by 434 runs in the third Test in Rajkot on Sunday. Chasing 557 to win, the tourists were bundled out for 122. The home side leads 2-1 in the five-match series with games left in Ranchi and Dharamsala.

"This was the worst defeat under (Ben) Stokes and Brendon McCullum, and one that exposed their method. They cannot take the aggressive at every opportunity, they have to pick their moments," Vaughan wrote in his column for "Telegraph.co.uk".

Hussain echoed the sentiment. "Bazball is about being attacking but it is also about soaking up pressure," Hussain said on 'Sky Sports'.

In contrast, India's Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has two double hundreds in the series so far, Shubman Gill (91) and debutant Sarfaraz Khan played mature knocks in Rajkot, taking time to settle in before going for their strokes.

"They need to look at the way Jaiswal and Shubman Gill played on day three. They soaked up the pressure for 30 or 40 balls, and then they started to get boundaries."

"That is what Test batting is about. India have scored 875 runs in 228.5 overs. No one can tell me it's been boring watching India bat here," Vaughan said.

Things have gone downhill for England since winning the series-opener in Hyderabad. The visiting team's batters have displayed poor judgement, giving away the advantage to the hosts. "...surely a defeat this heavy has to be a wake-up call for Ben Stokes and his players."

"England make out that everything is positive but they need to be having conversations about how to bat better," Vaughan said.

Out-of-form batter Joe Root has been in the eye of the storm for his dismissal in the third Test. His reverse-scoop off Jasprit Bumrah straight to sec-

ond slip had sparked a collapse of sorts in the first innings.

"The way they played this week has gifted India a victory. I couldn't believe my eyes the way they batted on day three, especially Joe Root's shot," Vaughan said.

Hussain, Vaughan and another former captain Alastair Cook questioned the timing of the shot by Root, given that England were trailing by 221 runs.

"One thing Joe will look at is the timing of that. (Ravichandran) Ashwin wasn't there, India are down a bowler; (Ravindra) Jadeja is playing off the back of an injury; Bumrah is playing three Tests in a row and there is talk of him needing a rest."

"Get Bumrah into his second or third spell, take it deep and then play the shot later in the day," Hussain wrote.

Root had played a similar shot with much success during the Ashes last year.

"When he played it to the first ball at Edgbaston, I didn't mind it at all because it was all about how many runs England were going to score that day to set up a game," Cook said on 'Sky Cricket'.

"It sent a real message to everyone in the changing room that 'England's best player is going to take on Australia. Root will be sitting in his room tonight going, 'I think I got that one wrong'."

At the end of day three of the second Test, pacer James Anderson had asserted that England will chase down 332 runs in 60-70 overs only for them to lose by 106 runs. Ben Duckett was as bullish last week, declaring that "the more the better" when talking about targets.

"They have to be careful that people around don't think they are smug, or above their station...they are in a bubble. All that matters is their dressing room, and fun. There is a bit more to Test cricket than that."

"This England team are hell bent on doing things their way, and 'saving Test cricket'...But ultimately they have to be better than that now. They didn't win in New Zealand, they didn't win the Ashes, and if they carry on like this, they are going to lose in India."

Cook and Hussain, however, felt that England are capable of turning it around in the next two games. (PTI)

Ministry approves foreign training for paddlers Diya, Swastika

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell has given its go-ahead to paddlers Diya Chitale and Swastika Ghosh to travel to South Korea and Japan for advanced-level training.

While Diya will head for Paju-si in South Korea to train under Shin Min Sung, Swastika will be coached by Qiu Jian Xin in Osaka, Japan.

The MOC also approved proposals for competition for shuttlers Kiran George and Anupama Upadhaya, doubles women's team of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand and shooter Rudranksh Patil.

While Kiran and Anupama will participate in the BWF Orleans Masters, the pair of Treasa and Gayatri along with their coach and physio will head to Germany to compete in the BWF German Open.

India rifle shooter Rudranksh will head to Dortmund to compete at the International Saison Start for Shooters (ISAS 2024) events.

The MOC also approved proposals of table tennis players Sathiyam Gnanasekaran and Manika Batra for financial assistance for participation in WTT Feeder events.

While Sathiyam will head to Beirut, Lebanon to take part in WTT Feeder and WTT Feeder 2 events, Manika, along with her coach, will travel to participate in WTT Singapore Smash followed by 2 WTT Feeder Tournaments in Beirut. (PTI)

Vidarbha qualify for Ranji Trophy knockout stage

NAGPUR, Feb 19: Spin bowling all-rounder Aditya Sarwate produced another impressive show as Vidarbha registered a comfortable 115-run win over Haryana on the fourth and final day to qualify for the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals from group A, here Monday. Vidarbha (33) grabbed six points from what was their fifth win in the tournament to finish on top of Group A and were followed by Saurashtra (29). Sarwate, who had scored 99 in the first innings, made a valuable 42 in the second essay to help Vidarbha add 92 runs to their overnight total of 113/4.

They set the visitors a victory target of 296 after being dismissed for 205 in 71.4 overs.

Vidarbha then dished out a superlative bowling effort with left-arm spinner Sarwate also starring with the ball, taking two wickets for 38 runs to go with his first-in-



nings figures of 3/59.

Off-spinner Akshay Wakhare (3/30) snapped three as the hosts bundled out Haryana for 180 in 34.3 overs. Pacer Umesh Yadav (2/37), Aditya Thakare (1/47) and Yash Thakur (1/21) were the other wicket-takers.

Chasing the total, Haryana failed to capitalise on the starts

and lost wickets at regular intervals to be reduced to 113 for 5 in the 25th over.

Number 9 batter Anshul Kamboj, in fact, emerged as their top-scorer with an entertaining 25-ball 46, studded with five fours and three sixes.

Vidarbha had scored 423 in their first innings and in re-

sponse, Haryana had posted 333.

Left-arm spinner Anukul Roy bagged his fifth five-wicket haul as Jharkhand thrashed Rajasthan by 89 runs in their Group A contest. Jharkhand, defending 248, had left Rajasthan gasping for breath at 120 for six in their second innings on day 3.

On Monday, the hosts returned to complete the task with the 25-year-old Roy claiming two more wickets to complete a fine five-wicket haul at the Keenan Stadium. Varun Aaron (1/22) provided the first breakthrough in the morning when he removed overnight batter Samarjit Joshi (23), who was caught by Nazim Siddiqui in the 54th over.

Mahipal Lomror too could just another 18 runs to his overnight score of 30 before being a victim of Roy, who cleaned up Aniket Choudhary (0) for his fifth victim. (PTI)

World TT Championships: Indian women's blank Uzbekistan 3-0, men lose to South Korea

BUSAN, Feb 19: Indian women's team eased past Uzbekistan while the men endured successive defeats with the loss to South Korea in the World Table Tennis Team Championships here on Monday.

Ayhika Mukherjee and Sreeja Akula were rested from the rubber, providing an opportunity to Archana Kamath and Diya Chitale.

They both won their respective singles while senior team-

mate Manika Batra also had it easy against her opponent to make it a 3-0 win for India.

Archana defeated Rimma Gufranov 11-7, 11-3, 11-6, while Manika stormed past Markhabo Magdieva 11-7, 11-4, 11-1.

Diya on the other hand faced tough resistance before prevailing over Rozalina Khadjieva 11-6, 10-12, 11-4, 11-6.

Having started off their campaign with a 2-3 loss to China, Indian women's team now have

secured two wins on the trot to occupy second spot in the Group 1 standings.

They will next face Spain in their concluding Group 1 league fixture on Tuesday. They earlier defeated Hungary 3-2.

The men's team of veteran Sharath Kamal, reigning national champion Harmeet Desai and G Sathiyam lost their respective singles to go down meekly in its third group stage tie against third seeds Korea.

Harmeet, who is India's top-

ranked player at 67, went down to world number 14 Jang Woo-jin 4-11, 10-12, 8-11.

Sathiyam was then brushed aside by world number 16 Lim Jonghoon 5-11, 7-11, 7-11.

Sharath managed to put up a fight, taking the second game but couldn't capitalise on the momentum losing 9-11, 11-8, 6-11, 5-11 to Lee San Su.

After winning their opening tie against Chile, Indian men lost 1-3 to Poland on Sunday. (PTI)

IIT-Madras names former ESPN V-P as CEO of Center of Excellence in Sports Science and Analytics

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The IIT-Madras has appointed its alumnus and former ESPN vice-president Ramesh Kumar as CEO of its Center of Excellence in Sports Science and Analytics.

The centre is being set up with support from the "Institute of Eminence" initiative of the Government of India and is envisioned as a global platform for fostering innovation in sports technology and delivering products and solutions to enhance athlete performance and also serve general fitness and health consumers.

"We are delighted that CESSA (Center of Excellence in Sports Science and Analytics) will be led by Ramesh, an industry veteran with a proven track record of impact. This

aligns with our commitment to be at the forefront of sports tech helping athletes, coaches and all stakeholders," said Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Madras Dean (Alumni and Corporate Relations) Mahesh Panchagnula.

Kumar, an alumnus of IIT-Madras (BTech (ME), 1992 batch), comes with more than three decades of industry experience with an initial corporate stint with the Tata Group in India and close to 24 years in the sports industry.

As global head of ESPN-Cricinfo, Kumar provided leadership to drive global digital leadership, innovation and growth of the digital sports brand. He also drove overall strategic leadership for ESPN India and South Asia opera-

tions as head of ESPN (India and South Asia).

"I am excited to join the Center and leverage the deep tech knowledge and domain strengths in the fields of AI, ML, data science, IoT/sensors, computer vision technology and biomechanical analysis to envision solutions and products for sportspersons, general athletes, media platforms, sports fans, sporting federations and players in the sports education domain," Kumar said.

CESSA is already collaborating with leading institutes nationally and globally focussed in the field of sports science, technology and engineering such as Sports Authority of India, National Centre for Sports Science Research,



Inspire Institute of Sports, Northwestern University and the University of Birmingham.

The centre is equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure and undertakes teaching and research. It aims to incubate 25 start-ups a year and serve as a central data, insights and analytics hub to provide sports-related analytics service to various stakeholders in the sports industry worldwide.

According to IIT-Madras officials, the centre will also create and deliver products and solutions across media platforms and work with sporting federations and bodies (creating their platforms and enhancing on ground experience and working with other media platforms) to increase fan engagement.

"CESSA will also be establishing an incubator ecosystem for Sport Tech start-ups. This will be supported by inter-disciplinary faculties accomplished in the field of modelling, data science, IoT and AI and wearables and biomechanics. The centre will also deliver high quality Sports science and education courses and sports coaching products targeted at students and coaches through various strategic collaborations," a senior official said.

"Over the next few years, CESSA will also take the lead in carrying out cutting-edge research in sports science and analytics in collaboration with leading institutes in the world," the official added. (PTI)

Five domestic stalwarts bring curtains to illustrious Ranji careers



End of an Era

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The ongoing Ranji Trophy season marks the end of an era in domestic cricket with five heavyweights bidding adieu to the game, leaving a huge void to fill.

Bengal legend Manoj Tiwary, Jharkhand duo of big-hitting Saurabh Tiwary and express pacer Varun Aaron, Mumbai stalwart Dhawal Kulkarni and Vidarbha's Ranji Trophy-winning captain Faiz Fazal have decided to bring curtains to their illustrious domestic careers. The reasons for their retirement are varied, ranging from not having anything to play for (IPL contract or national call-up), to embarking on new adventures or focussing on politics.

For Aaron, Manoj and Faiz life came a full circle as they said goodbye at the same venue they began their domestic journeys.

But needless to say, domestic cricket will be poorer without the quintet turning out.

One of the doyens of domestic cricket, Bengal's Manoj Tiwary said goodbye to his "beloved 22 yards" after leading his state to a comprehensive win over Bihar on Monday. Tiwary served his state for over 19 years, the 38-year-old had taken Bengal to the finals of the Ranji Trophy last season.

An aggressive batter, he has over 10,000 first class run in his kitty. As a captain, he always led from the front, helping Bengal become a force to reckon with.

The absence of the supremely experienced duo Aaron and swash-buckling Saurabh Tiwary will be a big void Jharkhand will have to fill. Tiwary, a left handed middle order batter, made his first-class debut while he was still a teenager in the 2006-07 Ranji Trophy season. Over the last 17 years, the Jharkhand captain became a prolific run-getter in domestic cricket,

playing 115 first-class matches amassing 8030 runs in 189 innings at an average of 47.51 including 22 hundreds and 34 fifties.

"I think, if you are unable to make in the national team or IPL, it is best time to leave space for talented youngsters," Tiwary said while announcing his retirement last week. One of the country's fastest bowlers, Aaron has been unable to realise his potential due to persistent injuries that included a series of stress fractures in the back and the legs.

But the pacer, who grabbed everyone's attention with the 153kmph delivery in the 2010-11 Vijay Hazare Trophy final, still managed to snare 173 first class wickets in the 66 games he played at an average of 33.27.

"This might be my last game in front of my family and the people of Jamshedpur, because we don't often play white-ball games here (Keenan Stadium).

"I had started my career here, so

this is quite emotional for me," Aaron, who wrapped his red-ball career with a match haul of five wickets, was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. Fazal hangs his boots after 21 year's service to Vidarbha, having contributed immensely to their legacy. The elegant opener famously led them to their maiden Ranji Trophy title in 2018. He was the side's leading run getter that season.

Fazal began his first-class career with a bang, scoring 151 on debut in Plate Group match against Jammu and Kashmir in December 2003. Since then the southpaw has been ever-present at the top of the Vidarbha batting order thanks to his impeccable technique.

He collected 9183 runs in first class cricket, 3641 runs in List A games and 1273 in T20s and retires as Vidarbha's leading run-getter in both List A cricket and first-class cricket.

The 38-year-old also played one ODI for India in 2016, against Zimbabwe, scoring an unbeaten 55 but never got selected for the national team again. Known for his swing, movement and accuracy with the new ball, Mumbai's Kulkarni quickly established himself as one of the most reliable seam bowlers in domestic cricket. A big-match player, Kulkarni eked out several outstanding performances in his 17-year domestic career including five-fors in three Ranji Trophy finals.

So important is Kulkarni's experience in the team that the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) requested the medium pacer to put off his retirement until the end of the season. The 35-year-old played 95 First-Class matches and has taken 281 wickets at an average of 27.31. (PTI)

Sports foster unity in diverse country like India: Himanta



GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said sports foster unity among people and provide an opportunity for players to interact and understand their counterparts from different regions.

Highlighting the initiatives by his government to boost sports, he pitched for hosting another edition of the National Games in the state.

Declaring the Khelo India University Games (KIUG) 2023 open, Sarma said, "In a rich and diverse country like ours, sports with its inherent transforming potential is strengthening unity among people and giving impetus to 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat'."

He maintained that continuous interaction, travel for competition, matches and training are giving the players an opportunity to visit and

understand different regions.

"This is immensely contributing to national integration. I am sure this edition of KIUG will further develop brotherhood and friendship and bring the players closer to the natural beauty and rich biodiversity of Northeast region," Sarma added. Mentioning of several national and international tournaments hosted by Assam in the previous years, the CM urged that the state should be given another opportunity to host the National Games in 2025 or 2026, having already organised it once in 2007.

He also dwelt on the investments being made in sports infrastructure in the state, in line with the prime minister's vision.

Besides large sports complexes in and around Guwahati, such infrastructure are coming up at all dis-

trict headquarters and all 126 legislative assembly constituencies in the state, Sarma added.

More than 4,500 players from over 200 universities are competing in this fourth edition of KIUG.

Besides Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim are hosting the Games which will conclude on February 29.

The KIUG is a part of the Indian government's Khelo India initiative that was launched in 2016, focussing on promoting grassroots sports and identifying young talents from across the country.

The participants are vying for 262 gold, 263 silver and 297 bronze medals in 20 sports disciplines with competitions being held in 18 venues across seven Northeastern cities. (PTI)

Olympics and world medallists among 500 cyclists to take part in Asian Track C'ships from Feb 21

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Around 500 participants, including 42 Indians and a few Olympics and world championships medallists, will vie for top honours in the Asian Track Cycling Championships, which will be held here from February 21 to 26.

India will be hosting the continental championships for the second time in two years and sixth overall after 1989, 2005, 2013, 2017 and 2022.

New Delhi was the venue of the championships on four occasions while Ludhiana hosted the continental event in 2005.

Pakistani cyclists will miss the championships as they are "facing difficulties in getting travel documents because of the delay in government formation after the general elections in their country."

"Pakistani cyclists were to take part in the championships and our ministry of external affairs have given clearance to them. But they have informed us that they are not coming as their ministry formation is yet to be done," Asian Cycling Confederation secretary general Onkar Singh said at a press conference.

"They (Pakistani cyclists) said they can't do the visa process now," said Onkar, a former secretary general of Cycling Federation of India (CFI).

This edition of the championships holds added significance as it serves as the final continental track event before the Paris Olympics. The points collected by the riders from the championships will be counted

for the Olympic qualification process.

No Indian, however, is within a striking distance of making it to the Paris Olympics.

"The performance of our cyclists have improved a lot in recent times and they need top class competitions. It is a prestigious continental championships and we are proud of hosting it," said CFI Secretary General Maninder Pal Singh.

"We are confident that the event will provide an exciting platform for the athletes to compete at the highest level and inspire the next generation of cyclists.

"We are going in the right direction and our target is for our cyclists to qualify for the 2028 Olympics."

The championships will be staged at the state-of-the-art Cycling Velodrome at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Complex here.

Cyclists from 18 countries will compete across various categories, including elite men and women, junior men and women, and para events. Asia's leading nations such China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Kazakhstan and Iran will be among top medal contenders.

"At least four or five Olympics or World Championships medallists will be in the fray in this championships," Onkar said.

The Indian team, led by the formidable sprint team comprising former junior world number one Ronaldo Singh along with David Beckham, Rojit Singh and Esow Alben, will fancy podium finish. (PTI)

Bumrah likely to be rested, fit-again Rahul set to be back for Ranchi Test

RAJKOT, Feb 19: Lead India pacer Jasprit Bumrah is likely to be rested, while batter K L Rahul is expected to come back after recovering from a quadriceps injury, in the fourth Test against England beginning February 23 in Ranchi. Bumrah is the leading wicket-taker in the five-match series with 17 scalps and single-handedly bowled India to victory in the second Test. The hosts lead 2-1 in the five-match rubber. "The team will travel to Ranchi tomorrow and Bumrah is likely to be given rest," said a BCCI source while also informing that Rahul is nearing full fitness and should be a part of the squad in Ranchi.

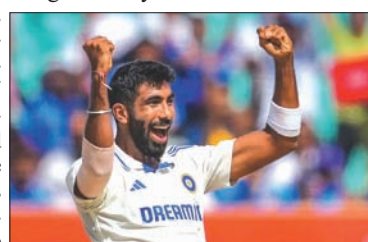
The decision to rest Bumrah doesn't come as a surprise considering he bowled 80.5 overs in the first three Tests. As part of workload management, India had also rested Mohammed Siraj from the second Test in Visakhapatnam before he returned to play a part in

India's record 434 run win over the visitors in Rajkot on Sunday.

India are well-placed to seal the series in Ranchi but if they are not able to, the home team will desperately need the services of Bumrah for the fifth and final

Test in Dharamsala beginning March 7. Rahul, who missed the second and third Test after complaining of pain in his right quadriceps, had reached 90 percent fitness last week, according to an insider. "He is reaching his match fitness and should be available for Ranchi Test," the source added.

Rahul was among India's best batters in the opening Test in Hyderabad before going down with the same injury that he suffered during the IPL last year. Since his comeback after four months on the sidelines, the batter has delivered for India across formats. He was the only centurion for India in the drawn two-Test series in South Africa in December. (PTI)



Newly retired Tiwary calls for greater emphasises on Ranji Trophy

KOLKATA, Feb 19: A day after his retirement from cricket, Bengal star Manoj Tiwary raised concerns over the IPL-centric approach of young cricketers and strongly advocated for greater emphasis on Ranji Trophy. The 38-year-old Tiwary, who served Bengal for about two decades and represented India in 12 ODIs and three T20Is, had recently posted on X that Ranji Trophy should be "scrapped" but did not elaborate on the subject as he was an active BCCI cricketer. He was fined 20 per cent of his match fee for that remark.

He also had a Facebook live in the midst of the match where he said he would come out in the open after taking retirement. "I can observe that young players have adopted an IPL-centric mindset," Tiwary said, referring to central contracted players opting out of playing domestic cricket. "Those who don't play IPL often go to Dubai or other places whenever they find some free time. However, this trend is diminishing the significance of the prestigious Ranji Trophy.

"Now, expressing any opinion might lead to a ban. I have already been penalised with a 20 percent reduction in my match fee for just one post."

Ishan Kishan's reluctance to play first-class cricket and focus only on the IPL forced the BCCI to make a minimum number of Ranji Trophy games mandatory for players in order to be eligible for the cash-rich league's lucrative auction pool. "In hindsight, I feel that the directive issued by the BCCI might not have been given had I not posted it on X. Perhaps my post prompted the BCCI secretary to put the players under pressure now. "The seriousness they have shown by taking this step in the crucial stage of the Ranji Trophy indicates their concern that many players, especially high-profile ones who have succeeded in the IPL with limited first-class cricket, are not giving enough importance to the Ranji Trophy," Tiwary said.

"I could have spoken up earlier, but it seems that the BCCI is no longer governed by sportspersons; it's now run by politicians. I am associated with a political party, but I am also a sportsman.

"I don't want to engage in a fight; I simply want the Ranji Trophy to be prioritised, as it is slowly losing its importance."

'Essence of IPL has lost'

Tiwary further went on to criticise the approach of young cricketers. "The new-age cricketers adopt a 'Bazball' approach, swinging the bat aggressively from the first ball. Personally, I dislike this approach because it focuses solely on winning or losing.

"However, there is a scope to save a match, especially when facing a potential loss. They are aiming to secure an IPL contract or improve their strike rate to attract attention. "I won't blame the players; it's a situation that has emerged. The essence of IPL seems to have been lost. "IPL is a massive platform for all of us, but I also request the BCCI president and secretary to increase the significance of the Ranji Trophy. (PTI)

Delhi end season on high with dramatic win over Odisha

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Left-arm spinner Sumit Mathur took a five-wicket haul on debut as Delhi defeated Odisha by seven wickets on a dramatic day four to end their Ranji Trophy campaign on a high.

Sumit, who took four wickets in the first innings, ended with a match haul of nine as Delhi recorded their third win of the season. Delhi finished third in the standings behind Madhya Pradesh and Baroda. Had not been for the unexpected loss to Puducherry in the tournament opener, Delhi could have qualified from Group D. Odisha on the other hand finished seventh in an eight team group.

With both teams not in the race to advance in the compe-

tion, the game was headed for a dull draw on day three but the events on the final day made the game more than interesting. Having taking a slender 11-run first innings, Delhi came out to bowl on day four with a lot of purpose and bowled out Odisha for 133 to enforce a result.

After Odisha's top three perished without scoring, Sumit ran through the visitors' batting line up. Rookie pacer Himanshu Chauhan and Pranshu Vijayar collected two wickets each to play their part in the game.

Set a target of 123, Delhi got home in 20.3 overs with Ayush Badoni and Yash Dhull remaining unbeaten on 40 and 16 respectively. (PTI)

How Sarfaraz mastered spin: 500 balls per day in nets and a 1600km car journey

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Sarfaraz Khan's dominating performance against England's spinners in just his debut Test was no fluke. It was the culmination of over 15 years of hard work that involved playing 500 deliveries everyday under the watchful eyes of his zealous father Naushad Khan.

With two confident half centuries in his debut Test in Rajkot, Sarfaraz has shown that he is here to stay in the Indian team. The 26-year-old got his Test cap after years of toiling in the domestic circuit and also honing his skills at his father's 'Macho Cricket Club'.

The hard work and systematic planning of the past few years, especially during the two COVID-19 lockdowns, paid off against the likes of Tom Hartley, Joe Root and Rehan Ahmed in Rajkot.

"It has taken playing 500 deliveries per day from off, leg and left-arm spinners across Oval, Cross and Azad Maidans in Mumbai," said a coach who has seen the Mumbaiaika's growth from close quarters.

"...during (COVID) lockdown, he undertook a car journey covering 1600km. From Mumbai to Amroha, Moradabad, Meerut,

Kanpur, Mathura and Dehradun, he travelled and played on proverbial 'akhadas' where the ball turns square with one shooting up and few staying down," he added.

The Sarfaraz that was manoeuvring the spinners with ease, honed his skills the tough way. The credit for the final product lies not just with Naushad though.

Coaches of Bhuvneshwar Kumar (Sanjay Rastogi), Mohammed Shami (Badrudin Sheikh), Kuldeep Yadav (Kapil Deo Pandey), Gautam Gambhir (Sanjay Bhardwaj) and father of India A captain Abhimanyu Easwaran (RP Easwaran) have also contributed in their little way to make Sarfaraz a finished product. They all arranged for Sarfaraz's net sessions against spinners, especially during the COVID lockdown.

"During lockdown, Naushad called me as we are both from Azamgarh and we played club cricket in Mumbai when I was employed with the Indian Navy. So, when he wanted his son to get practice, I felt it's my duty," Kapil Pandey told PTI.

"During lockdown, Sarfaraz played Kuldeep a lot at our Kanpur Academy. They did lot of net sessions together. I would



arrange T20 matches as that season, Mush-taq Ali T20 was main tournament.

"Having grown up playing on Mumbai's red soil, Sarfaraz has the perfect game against spin and uses his feet well," he added.

Shami's coach Badruddin also spoke about his part in helping Sarfaraz attain mastery of spin.

"Yes, I arranged for his training and nets

in Moradabad. No doubt both the father and son worked hard. I arranged for his stay in a hostel and got him to play a number of games."

Another coach who has seen Naushad train his sons -- Sarfaraz and India U-19 star Musheer -- spoke about the gruelling training regimen that the two players endured even on non-match days.

"From a young age, he has been playing hundreds of balls. So when Mumbai didn't have a match, Naushad prepared an astro turf wicket at home where Sarfaraz practised against pacers. But the moment he has to play spin, they go to the Maidans and do open field training," he said.

"Even for red-ball training, Naushad would give Sarfaraz simulation training. Suppose Mumbai play Tamil Nadu in Chennai, the bowlers would be asked to create roughs with spikes and then he would be asked to play on a track that resembles a day four pitch with wide cracks," he explained.

The combined effort seems to have got the desired results as was evident from the commanding manner in which Sarfaraz tackled the visiting spinners in Rajkot. (PTI)