

6 WORLD

- Haley loses home State South Carolina to Trump
- Israeli media report progress on reaching a temporary truce in Gaza

8 NATION

- Ritesh Pandey resigns from BSP, joins BJP
- SP chief Akhilesh joins Rahul led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra



Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Prosperous dairy sector

India largest producer of milk in the world, record increase of 58% in milk production in last 10 years; Welfare of 8 crore cattle-rearing families ensured



HT BRIEFS

Elephant calf

TEZPUR: An elephant calf was found dead in Sonitpur district of Assam, forest officials said on Sunday. A herd of 10 wild elephants along with the calf entered Bihaguri Kalitagaon in West Sonitpur Forest Division of Tezpur on Saturday night, a Forest Department official told PTI. "The Forest Department pushed back the herd, but the calf was unable to move due to injury and it was left behind by the group. The local people provided food to the calf during the night", assistant conservator of Forest (Sonitpur) Gautam Mahanta said. The age of the elephant calf was estimated to be around three years and it fell down on the field, he added.

Journalist attacked

IMPHAL: A joint statement of All Manipur Working Journalists' Union (AMWJU) and Editors' Guild Manipur (EGM) on Sunday condemned the recent brutal assault of a reporter by armed miscreants. The armed miscreants physically assaulted Kumar Nongthombam, a reporter of Image TV, a Kakching based local cable network at his rented room at Wangkhei of Imphal East district on the intervening night of Feb 23 and 24. The joint statement of AMWJU and EGM alleged that the reporter was taken away by the armed miscreants after being assaulted physically.

BJP meet

JORHAT: An advocate's meet was organised by the Legal Cell of Jorhat district unit of BJP at the auditorium of Jorhat Science Centre and Planetarium on Sunday. A BJP source said that in the programme presided over by Jorhat district BJP president Hemanta Kalita, the chief speaker was a senior Gauhati High Court advocate Bijon Kumar Mahajan. Mahajan, while speaking on various legal issues, said that to be a good citizen of the country, a person should be a good citizen of Assam. On the other hand, Kalita in his address said that BJP was the largest party in the world because of the strong organisational base and dedicated efforts of its leaders and workers. Earlier the programme began with lighting of the ceremonial lamp by state convener of BJP legal cell Jayanta Goswami. The meeting anchored by convener of Jorhat district BJP legal cell Pallab Jyoti Baruah was attended by Jorhat MLA Hitendra Nath Goswami, several lawyers of Jorhat and present and past office bearers of BJP Jorhat district unit.

There is no question of 2-time MLA leaving party: APCC chief Senior Cong leader Rana Goswami quits party post

HT Correspondent
GUWAHATI/JORHAT, Feb 25: Rana Goswami, the working president of APCC and a former two-time MLA from Jorhat, tendered his resignation as the organisational in-charge of Upper Assam and four districts in northern Assam on Sunday.

Sources close to Goswami revealed that he sent a resignation letter to APCC president Bhupen Borah, citing "various political reasons" for his unfortunate decision.

"I beg to state that unfortunately I am tendering my resignation as the organisational in-charge of Upper Assam including the districts Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and Biswanath due to various political reasons," Goswami said in his letter to Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah.

The letter also included his resignation from the role of organisational in-charge for Upper Assam and the northern Assam districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, and Biswanath.



The resignation letter was copied to AICC general secretary and Assam in-charge, Jitendra Singh.

Insiders familiar with the party's internal affairs in Assam indicated that Goswami's dissatisfaction stemmed from not being consulted on certain issues within the party.

It is worth mentioning that there was a speculation claiming that Goswami might defect from the

Congress, especially after he left the Congress leader's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra midway in Assam. However, Goswami refuted these rumours, citing poor health as the reason for his departure from the Yatra. The decision comes after Goswami held a meeting with his followers on Saturday night at his hometown Jorhat following rumours that the former MLA was planning to join the BJP or its ally

Asom Gana Parishad.

Repeated calls made to Goswami remained unanswered.

Borah told PTI that Goswami has been in the party for over 30 years and "there is no question of him leaving Congress".

"There was already a process going on to shuffle the role of the working presidents as one out of the three has decided to support the government. I don't think there is any other meaning to this resignation letter," he added.

On February 14, two Congress MLAs — Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, who was the working president, and Basanta Das, who was a minister in the Tarun Gogoi government — announced to "support the government" without leaving the grand old party.

Both the MLAs joined the group of two other Congress MLAs — Sashi Kanta Das and former minister Siddique Ahmed —, who too had "joined the government" but are a part of the opposition party's legislators. (With inputs from PTI)

Assam to stop hiring teachers in colleges with low student enrolment

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: The Assam government is planning to stop teachers' recruitment in colleges and merge those or certain departments of such institutions, where student enrolment is less, education minister Ranoj Pegu said.

The government is mulling the step of merging the institutions of higher education in line with the existing policy of amalgamation of schools where student enrolment is scanty, he said.

In a post on X, Pegu said the Higher Education Department conducted a meeting with the principals and the governing body presidents of 79 colleges having less than 500 enrolments on Saturday evening.

"...discussed possible roadmap to enhance enrolment... Enhancing gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education is a priority of the government," he said.

Accordingly, the minister has directed the higher education department to draft a policy for the merger of colleges or departments having lower numbers of students,



similar to the one by the school education department. The government is "aiming at merging colleges or departments having low enrolment and to stop recruiting teachers against vacancies in dept (department) with low enrolment". The Assam government has closed down thousands of schools in the last few years through the amalgamation process.

The education department through the amalgamation process merges one school with another for various reasons such as less number of students, poor infrastructure, lower pupil-teacher ratio and higher operational cost. (PTI)

No Mann ki Baat broadcast for 3 months in view of polls: PM Modi



NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' broadcast will not be aired for the next three months in line with political ethics in view of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

In the 110th episode of the programme, he asked first-time voters to poll in record numbers in the elections and said their maiden vote should be cast for the country. With the general elections expected in April-May, he said there is a possibility that the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) will be enforced in March like it was done in 2019, a reference to the expected announcement

of the election schedule sometime next month. The MCC guidelines of the Election Commission asks governments to not use official events or public-funded platforms for something that may be seen to give the ruling party publicity or political advantage.

The prime minister said it is a big success of the programme that it has been kept away even from the shadow of the government during its 110 episodes and asserted that the broadcast has been dedicated to the country's collective strength and achievements.

"It is a programme of the people, for the people and by the people," Modi said.

"However, following political ethics the 'Mann ki Baat' will not be broadcast for the next three months during this period of the Lok Sabha elections," he said.

"When we meet the next time, it will be the 111th episode of the 'Mann Ki Baat'," Modi added, noting the auspiciousness associated with the number. What can be better than this, he said.

The prime minister has frequently expressed confidence of retaining power in the elections.

The programme was deferred before the 2019 general elections as well. Modi also appealed to first-time voters to cast their votes in record numbers, asserting that the 18th Lok Sabha will be a symbol of their aspirations. Citizens are eligible to vote after turning 18. The youth should not (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Four held with arms and ammunition in KA



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 25: Karbi Anglong police made significant strides in law enforcement as they apprehended four individuals from various locations under the Diphu police station in the Karbi Anglong district on Saturday.

The operation resulted in the confiscation of an AK-47 rifle alongside live ammunition.

Speaking to the media, Sanjiv Kumar Saikia, the superintendent of police (SP) for Karbi Anglong, dis-

closed that the arrests followed intelligence regarding potential miscreants planning to establish an armed organisation.

Acting swiftly on this information, law enforcement conducted a three-day operation culminating in the apprehension of the four suspects from the Dilangi Nailalong and Dhansiri areas under the Diphu police station. Collaborating with authorities from Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong police successfully recovered an (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Himanta thanks Manipuri community

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday thanked the Manipuri community on Sunday for their significant contribution to the development of Assam.

Sarma's remarks came in response to a social media post by Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh, who congratulated him for including Manipuri as an associate official language in four districts of Assam.

In his post, Sarma reaffirmed Assam's commitment to strengthening its shared heritage with other states in the Northeast under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"We are grateful to the Manipuri community in Assam, who is playing a vital role in building the state," Sarma stated.

The Assam Cabinet had on Friday approved the Assam Official Language (Amendment) Bill, 2024 to recognise Manipuri as an associate official (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Interviews for CMAAA applicants to commence on Feb 28



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: The interviews of the applicants for Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhian (CMAAA) will start from February 28th in all districts and the selection of first batch of beneficiaries shall be completed very soon, said an official statement on Sunday.

As per the statement, the two day training for the District Level Committee members for selection of Beneficiaries under CMAAA, successfully concluded in Assam Administrative Staff College,

Guwahati.

"A total of approximately 925 district Level officials are involved in more than 150 numbers of district level committees across 35 districts. The detailed training of the officials in conducting the interview and management of the online portal cmaaa.assam.gov.in has been taken up at the state level under the leadership of Dr Ravi Kota IAS, addl chief secretary, Industries department and other senior officials of the department," the statement added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

'There is always a challenge to balance conservation and tourism by implementing the strategies'

Focus on front liners, systematic expansion key to Kaziranga model of conservation: Director

KAZIRANGA, Feb 25: Focus on the front liners coupled with the systematic expansion of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve in Assam has led to the emergence of a 'Kaziranga model' of conservation which has been considered a global flag bearer in forest management, its director said.

The reserve forest, which is celebrating its 50th year as a national park, witnessed that the model of conservation has helped secure the largest population of one-horned rhinoceros and wild buffalo, the highest density of tigers, Asian elephants and eastern swamp deer in the landscape, Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve director Sonali Ghosh told PTI in an interview.

"In terms of biodiversity and securing their habitat, the Kaziranga or the wilderness model has been a success as it has invested in the frontline workers who protect the



reserve forest and its resources with 30 people per square km as compared to five per sq km in the leading parks of Africa," she said.

It has the highest density of 200 anti-poaching camps with 1,500 forest personnel in the 500-square km park, Ghosh pointed out. "The trust in the forest front liners,

including women, who are manning the anti-poaching camps all through the year, has been the key to Kaziranga's conservation success," she said.

The second factor that has ensured the success of the conservation practice is the gradual expansion of the park landscape

from less than 500 sq km area to the current 1,300 sq km, which includes the northern bank of the Brahmaputra river and the addition of Burachapori and Laokhowa last year, the KNPTR director said.

The park is home to nearly 3,000 rhinos, 2,500 wild buffalo, 1,089 Asian elephants, 1,129 swamp deer and 121 tigers, besides having a species diversity of 39 mammals, 553 birds, 64 reptiles and 41 amphibians.

The strategy of expanding the area of the reserve forest for wildlife has helped the animals flourish and the long-term conservation process, she said.

"We have had ten additions to the greater Kaziranga landscape in five districts of the state, including a significant portion of the Brahmaputra river with a very unique aquatic habitat, including the Gangetic dolphins and the Indian gharial among others," she said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Tiprasa problem

Tipra Motha leaders to begin fast-unto-death stir from Feb 28

AGARTALA, Feb 25: Tipra Motha supreme Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma accompanied by party leaders, legislators and ordinary members will begin a fast-unto-death stir in Tripura from February 28 demanding a permanent constitutional solution to the problem of indigenous (Tiprasa) people, a senior leader said on Sunday.

The announcement comes a day after Debbarma, apparently upset over the delay in finding a solution to the problem of indigenous people, threatened to launch a fast-unto-death movement from Wednesday.

"The decision to launch a fast-unto-death from February 28 was taken at an emergency meeting of the party here on Sunday", party president B K Hrangkhaw told reporters. The agitation is set to kick off at Hatai Katar in West Tripura district. Hrangkhaw emphasised the citizens' right to stage peaceful demonstrations to safeguard their rights and expressed curiosity about the response (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

IOC, GAIL, ONGC fined for third straight quarter for failure to appoint directors

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: State-owned oil and gas giants including IndianOil, ONGC and GAIL (India) have been slapped fines for the third straight quarter for failing to meet listing norm requirements of having the requisite number of directors on their board.

Stock exchanges have fined oil refining and fuel marketing giant Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), explorers Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL), gas utility GAIL, and refiners Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) a cumulative Rs 32.5 lakh, stock exchange filings showed.

In separate filings, the companies detailed the fines imposed by the BSE and NSE for either not having the requisite number of independent directors or the mandated women director in the third quarter ended December 31, 2023, but were quick to point out that appointment of directors was done by the government and they had no role in it.

The companies had faced fines for the same reason in the previous two quarters as well.

The six PSUs in separate filings said they have been slapped with a fine of ₹ 5,42,800 each for the third quarter. While ONGC and its subsidiaries HPCL and MRPL, GAIL and OIL faced fines for not having the required number of independent directors on their board, IOC for not having a woman inde-



pendent director on its board.

Listing norms require companies to have independent directors in the same proportion as executive or functional directors. They are also required to have at least one woman director on the board.

For the second quarter, IOC, ONGC, OIL, GAIL, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, HPCL and Engineers India Ltd had faced a fine of ₹ 5.42 lakh.

For the latest fine, IOC in the regulatory filing said that "being a government company, the power to appoint directors (including independent directors) vests with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, and hence the non-appointment of women independent director on the Board during the quarter ended December 31, 2023 was not due to any negligence/fault by the company."

Accordingly, IOC said it should

not be held liable to pay the fines and the same should be waived-off.

"IOC regularly takes up with ministry for appointment of requisite number of independent directors (including woman independent director) to ensure compliance with corporate governance norms enunciated under SEBI (LODR) as well as the Companies Act," it said, adding, it had in the past received similar notices from the two stock exchanges and its waiver request was granted.

GAIL in the filing said "appointments are outside the purview/control of the GAIL's management."

"The non-compliance with regard to the composition of the Board was not within the control of the company and the company has been regularly pursuing with the Government of India (GoI) for appointment of requisite numbers of independent directors to meet

the compliance requirements," ONGC said.

The appointment of directors on its subsidiaries HPCL and MRPL too are done by the government.

"The company is following up with the government from time to time for appointing the required number of directors on its board and GOI is seized of the matter," HPCL said.

MRPL said it has been continuously following up with the ministry for appointment of requisite number of independent directors on the Board and "the same has been under active consideration" of the ministry.

Stating that the non-compliance was beyond the control of the company, OIL said it has requested the ministry for appointment of independent directors on the Board of the company to comply with Regulation 17(1) of the SEBI (LODR) Regulations, 2015.

The companies had cited similar reasons and remedial action when they had faced fines for non-compliance in the previous two quarters.

IOC, ONGC, OIL, GAIL, BPCL, HPCL and Engineers India Ltd were slapped with a uniform ₹ 5,42,800 fine for the second quarter as well. For non-compliance in April-June quarter, ONGC was slapped with ₹ 3.36 lakh fine, IOC ₹ 5.36 lakh and GAIL ₹ 2.71 lakh fine. HPCL and BPCL were asked to pay ₹ 3.6 lakh fine each, while OIL India had faced a penalty of ₹ 5.37 lakh. (PTI)

Exports venturing into uncharted territories of Africa, Asia, Europe: Govt

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: At a time when global trade is facing geo-political uncertainties, India's exports of goods like automobiles and gold jewellery have ventured into uncharted territories of Central Asia, Africa and Latin America, according to an analysis by the commerce ministry.

The analysis has shown that India has penetrated into what are termed as "absolutely new markets" in regions such as Africa, Central Asia, Latin America and North America during April-December 2023.

The "absolutely new markets" refer to areas where India did see any export during April-December 2022, but healthy growth of certain principal commodities like motor vehicles, two- and three-wheelers, petroleum products, sugar, gold and other precious jewellery were recorded in April-December 2023.

Exports of these commodities to the absolutely new markets during April-December 2023 stood at USD 234 million as against nil shipments during the same period of 2022.

It added that these commodities captured a greater number of markets in the Central Asia, Africa, and European regions.

"A comprehensive examination of country-wise exports underscores a notable diversification of markets for India's merchandise exports, characterised by the exploration of new export destinations, in spite of strong global headwinds with subdued performance globally," an official said.

The official added that after evaluating the market diversification of the country's merchandise exports across major sectors at the principal commodity level, comparing the periods from April-December 2022-23 to April-December 2023-24, significant advancements in market diversification emerged in the current fiscal. These diversified markets are termed as "absolutely new", "new", and "promising". "Together, exports to these markets capture 5 per cent of India's total exports of 42 principal commodities to the world. These commodities span across 16 important sectors of India's export basket," the official added.

In the new markets, where India's exports share of goods like ceramics and allied products, aluminium, products of aluminium, two- and three-wheelers, products of iron and steel, electric machinery and equipments was meagre or nil has jumped to USD



2.17 billion during April-December 2023.

These items have captured a greater number of markets in the America, Central Asia, and African regions.

The analysis showed that the export of two- and three-wheelers has been headed to 31 new markets/countries with a total exported value of USD 110 million in the April-December 2023 period.

Similarly, in the "promising markets" such as North and South American, European, and African regions, where the share of the country's outbound shipments of these commodities was less than 1 per cent, has now increased to USD USD 8.6 billion during the first nine months period of this fiscal.

"Despite challenging global conditions, India has demonstrated notable export growth, maintaining its position in established markets while proactively exploring new ones," the official said.

This strategy not only reduces dependency on specific markets but also enhances India's competitiveness and contributes to economic development, the official added.

India's exports rose to a three-month high of 3.12 per cent to USD 36.92 billion in January despite global uncertainties, including the Red Sea crisis, while the trade deficit narrowed to a nine-month low of USD 17.49 billion.

Cumulatively, exports during the April-January period of this fiscal dipped 4.89 per cent to USD 353.92 billion. Imports contracted 6.71 per cent to USD 561.12 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 207.2 billion in the 10-month period of this fiscal as against USD 229.37 billion in April-January 2022-23. (PTI)

TN CM lays foundation stone for VinFast's EV plant in south TN

TUTICORIN (TAMIL NADU), Feb 25: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday laid the foundation stone for the electric vehicle car and battery manufacturing facility of VinFast Auto Ltd which has earmarked investments to the tune of ₹ 16,000 crore in the state.

The Vietnam-based EV maker had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Tamil Nadu for the plant, during the maiden edition of the Global Investors Meet by the DMK government in January. The foundation stone laying ceremony would be an apt example of the industry-friendly climate prevailing in Tamil Nadu and showcases the government's commitment for faster clearance of approvals as the event is conducted within 50 days of signing the MoU, an official said on Sunday.

In the initial phase, VinFast Auto Ltd would invest ₹ 4,000 crore that would generate 3,500 jobs in the Tuticorin region. The plant would have a capacity to produce 1.50 lakh vehicles once it comes into operation. "A significant milestone for South Tamil Nadu with MoUs from the Tamil Nadu Global Investors Meet 2024 being quickly converted into jobs for TN," Minister for Industries T R B Rajaa, who took part in the ground-breaking ceremony said.

"With the ground-breaking of the VinFast EV factory in Tuticorin by the Chief Minister, South Tamil Nadu has embarked on a prosperous journey," he said in a social media post. (PTI)

Monthly household consumer spending more than doubled in last decade

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: The per capita monthly household expenditure more than doubled in 2022-23 as compared to 2011-12, according to the latest study of National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). NSSO, under Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, conducted Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) during August 2022 to July 2023, an official statement said on Saturday.

The survey aims at generating estimates of household Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) and its distribution separately for the rural and urban sectors of the country, for states and Union Territories, and for different socio-economic groups.

As per the survey, the average MPCE at current prices (without imputation) more than doubled to ₹ 6,459 in urban areas in 2022-23 from ₹ 2,630 in 2011-12.

Similarly in rural areas, it jumped to ₹ 3,773 from ₹ 1,430 at current prices.

As per the study, the average MPCE at 2011-12 prices (without imputation) also increased to ₹ 3,510 in 2022-23 from ₹ 2,630 in 2011-12 in urban areas.

Similarly, it rose to ₹ 2,008 from ₹ 1,430 in rural areas at 2011-12 prices.

It showed that the average MPCE also



increased (with imputation) to ₹ 6,521 in 2022-23 from ₹ 2,630 in 2011-12 at current prices in urban areas.

Similarly, it rose to ₹ 3,860 from ₹ 1,430 in rural areas.

The average MPCE at 2011-12 prices (with imputation) increased to ₹ 3,544 in 2022-23 from ₹ 2,630 in 2011-12 in urban areas.

It increased to ₹ 2,054 from ₹ 1,430 in rural areas.

The estimates of MPCE are based on the data collected from 2,61,746 households (1,55,014 in rural areas and 1,06,732 in urban areas) in the central sample spread over all states and Union Territories.

In HCES:2022-23, the usual practice of imputation of the value figures for consumption out of home-grown/home-produced stock and gifts, loans, free collection and goods received in exchange of goods and services etc. has been continued; and accordingly, estimates of MPCE have been generated.

Besides, a provision for collection of information on the quantity of consumption for a number of items, received and consumed by the households free of cost through various social welfare programmes has been made in HCES:2022-23.

Consequently, the value figures for food items: rice, wheat/atta, jowar, bajra, maize, ragi, barley, small millets, pulses, gram, salt, sugar, edible oil and non-food items: laptop/PC, tablet, mobile handset, bicycle, motorcycle/Scooty, clothing (school uniform), footwear (school shoe etc.) received free of cost by the households through these programmes, have been imputed using an appropriate method.

Accordingly, another set of estimates of MPCE considering imputed values of these items and of consumption out of home produce, free collection, gifts, loans etc. has also been compiled for HCES: 2022-23. (PTI)

Markets to focus on global trends; may face volatility, say analysts

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: With no major domestic market-moving event scheduled this week, stock market investors would largely focus on global trends and foreign fund movement, and may face volatility amid monthly derivatives expiry, analysts said.

"We expect volatility to remain high due to the scheduled expiry of February month derivatives contracts. Besides, participants should keep a close watch on the performance of the global indices, especially the US for cues," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research at Religare Broking Ltd, said. Last week, BSE Sensex rose 716.16 points or 1 per cent to close at 73,142.8 points and inched closer to its record high level of 73,427.5.

"Markets remained volatile in the passing week but managed to end with a gain of nearly a per cent. After the initial rise, mixed global cues combined with profit taking in select heavyweights capped the momentum."

"Consequently, the benchmark indices, Nifty and Sensex, continued to oscillate in a narrow range till the end and finally settled at 22,212.70 and 73,142.80 respectively," Mishra said.

After the marginal dip, the US benchmark index, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) has resumed the uptrend and also crossed a new milestone of 39,000. With a strong base of around 38,400, we expect the prevailing tone to continue in the index and that could also help our markets to maintain the positive bias, Mishra added.

Investors are also expected to take guidance from the minutes of the February Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting released by the central bank last week. The rate-setting panel has



hinted a cautious approach towards monetary easing amid uncertainties around inflation outlook.

"On the economy front, almost all MPC members continued to express a cautious approach to monetary easing, given the uncertainties surrounding the inflation outlook," Shrikant Chouhan, Head Equity Research at Kotak Securities, said.

In the latest bi-monthly policy review held earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India's six-member panel decided to leave the key policy rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the sixth time in a row.

Analysts pointed out that factors like crude oil prices, rupee movement, quarterly GDP data to be released in India as well as in the US, and monthly global manufacturing PMI data in the coming week will also influence the market sentiment.

With Q3 FY24 results season behind us, the market focus will be on the macro developments both on the domestic and international, Chouhan said.

Besides, six IPOs worth more than ₹ 3,300 crore will be hitting the stock markets next week, including Platinum Industries and Exicom Tele-Systems public issues which will open for subscription on February 27 and IPO of Bharat Highways Infrastructure Investment Trust on February 28. (PTI)

Foreign portfolio investors infuse ₹ 18,500 crore in debt market in Feb

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) continued their bullish stance on the country's debt markets with a net infusion of over ₹ 18,500 crore so far this month, driven by upcoming inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. This came following a net investment of over ₹ 19,836 crore in January, making it the highest monthly inflow in more than six years. This was the highest inflow since June 2017, when they infused ₹ 25,685 crore.

"With introduction of India in global bond indices this year, Indian debt inflows should get steady flows going ahead. Also, further front-loading before actual inclusion in June this year is also expected. This is also in line with long-term aim to deepen our underdeveloped debt-markets," Kishlay Upadhyay, smallcase Manager & Founder Fidelfolio, said.

On the other hand, foreign investors pulled out ₹ 424 crore from equities during the period under review. Before this, they withdrew a massive ₹ 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories showed.

According to the data, FPIs made a net investment of ₹ 18,589 crore in the debt markets this month (till February 23). With this, the total investment by FPIs reached over ₹ 38,426 crore in 2024. They have been injecting money in the debt markets for the past few months.

FPIs infused ₹ 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, ₹ 14,860 crore in November, and Rs 6,381 crore in October. The upcoming inclusion in JP Morgan EMBIGD in June 2024 is a major driver for the huge inflow in the debt market, Bhuvan Rustagi, Co-Founder and COO, Per Annum and Lendbox, said.

Additionally, attractive yield, stable macroeconomic indicators and relatively stable rupee too attracted FPIs towards the debt market. JP Morgan Chase & Co. in September last year announced that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024. This landmark inclusion is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around \$ 20-40 billion in the subsequent 18 to 24 months. This inflow is expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the rupee, thereby bolstering the economy.

On equities front, FPIs pulled out ₹ 424 crore so far this month, sharply down from ₹ 25,744 crore in January. The resilience of the market is preventing FPIs from selling aggressively despite attractive bond yields in the US, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Making similar statement, Bharat Dhawan, Managing Partner at Mazars in India, said the Indian market continues to captivate international interest, signifying not only the resilience of the economy but also the trust global investors place in its growth trajectory.

In terms of sectors, FPI sell-off was significant in the banking sector, as it saw lower-than-expected results in terms of net interest margins due to competition in deposit mobilization, smallcase's Upadhyay said.

Overall, the total FPI flows for 2023 stood at ₹ 1.71 trillion in equities and ₹ 68,663 crore in the debt markets. Together, they infused ₹ 2.4 trillion into the capital market. (PTI)

PV industry growth likely to moderate to less than 5% in FY25: Tata Motors

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: The growth of the domestic passenger vehicle industry is likely to moderate to less than 5 per cent in the next fiscal, according to Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Managing Director Shailesh Chandra.

The company, however, expects electric vehicle sales to keep growing despite the slow pace of charging infrastructure development in the country.

"We had seen a very strong growth in FY23 of 25 per cent, which is likely to moderate in FY24 to about 8 per cent. Therefore, we are seeing with this high base effect, and FY25 will be slightly challenging with less than 5 per cent growth rate," Chandra said in an analyst call.

He further said, "As far as EVs are concerned, I

think the biggest challenge here is the pace at which the charging infra is growing. It is lagging behind the pace at which the EV adoption is happening." Citing other challenges, Chandra noted that while commodity prices have been stable in the past quarter or so, there is a risk that prices of certain items may go up going forward.

"So we are keeping a very close track of that," he added.

Chandra noted that in 2023 while the overall passenger vehicle industry grew 8 per cent year-on-year, while the EV sales grew by 95 to 100 per cent.

"And I think this trend is likely to continue. So companies with stronger portfolios in CNG and EVs will grow," Chandra said. (PTI)

Mahindra Holidays to invest ₹ 4,500 cr to double room capacity to 10,000

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Ltd (MHRIL) plans to invest up to ₹ 4,500 crore in the next three to four years to double its room capacity to 10,000, according to company Managing Director and CEO, Kavinder Singh.

The company is actively pursuing partnerships with state governments besides setting up new resorts, brownfield expansion and acquisitions to achieve the target to increase room count from 5,000 to 10,000 by FY30.

"We have all the strategies on the table to get from 5,000 to 10,000 rooms. We are well on our way there," Singh told PTI.

At the moment, about ₹ 835 crore of investment is underway for five greenfield, brownfield, and acquisition projects, comprising about 690 keys.

"We are very confident this investment will get scaled to at least ₹ 2,000 crore in the next year and very quickly we will scale it up to



₹ 4,000-4,500 crore in three to four years time because you need to deliver 5,000 keys by 2030," he said.

On the strategy for expansion, Singh said apart from greenfield, brownfield and acquisitions, the company is also emphasising on public-private partnership (PPP). "We have already tied up with the Uttarakhand government and identified two pieces of land to do

₹ 1,000 crore investment. Then we also have signed an MoU with the Tamil Nadu government for about ₹ 800 crore investment," he said.

Further, Singh said, "We are also at this moment of time engaged with the Odisha government and we have been allotted two pieces of land that will help us to invest at ₹ 500 crore if not more in Odisha." Besides, the company is still look-

ing at another piece of land in the Puri area, he added.

"So, PPP as a route to scale up is another weapon beyond greenfield and brownfield (expansions). The fourth weapon is acquisitions. We (are constantly) looking at resort properties, which are available and can meet our requirement, which can be refurbished to our standards is also going on," he added.

In January this year, the company had announced that it would invest ₹ 800 crore in Tamil Nadu to build three greenfield resorts over the next five to six years. It would be the second-largest investment by MHRIL, following the ₹ 1,000 crore investment in Uttarakhand last year.

MHRIL has 102 resorts across India and abroad as on June 30, 2023. Its subsidiary, Holiday Club Resorts Oy (HCR), Finland, has 33 Timeshare Properties, including nine spa resorts across Finland, Sweden, and Spain. (PTI)

Regulator warns Gurugram developers of penalty

GURUGRAM, Feb 25: The Haryana real estate regulatory authority (HRERA) has warned developers of levying penalties and freezing bank accounts in case they fail to submit documents related to progress and audit of their projects on time.

Filing of quarterly progress reports (QPR) and annual audit reports (AARs) by real estate developers is a mandatory requirement under RERA Act 2016.

The rule seeks to ensure efficient and transparent progress of constructions of projects and utilisation of funds. (PTI)

LOST

I have lost my original educational documents since 2021
Name : Bastab Kumar Khound
Village : Bortingnowsolia
District: Golaghat
P/S : Golaghat
Pin : 785626
Phone Number : 8822411044

Chief minister attends series of events, presents Silpi Award to noted artist Himanta unveils Pranab Baruah Kalakshetra in Nagaon



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 25: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma rushed to Nagaon with a day-long program and participated in a series of events on Sunday, including inauguration ceremonies and laying foundation stones of various projects in and outside the small town.

CM Sarma first landed at Nagaon Nurul Amin Stadium, where he inaugurated the newly constructed indoor stadium. Following this, he attended a program held at Pal Naam Than near Bebeja on the outskirts of the small town. On his way back to the

town, he also laid the foundation stone of a concrete road under the RIDF scheme near Haibargaon Lakshinagar Chariali.

Following these events, CM Sarma attended the inaugural ceremony of the newly constructed Pranab Baruah Kalakshetra in front of Nagaon Circuit House. While inaugurating the Pranab Baruah Kalakshetra, CM Sarma asserted that Pranab Baruah was the best Assamese oil painter and a modern individual deeply rooted in Indian traditions and heritage. Baruah alone created an artistic environment in the entire district and made it popular

among the people. The Pranab Baruah Kalakshetra is a strong step to uphold the continuity of Indian traditions and heritage of art and paintings. Sulakshana Baruah Bhuyan, the daughter of Late Pranab Baruah, delivered the welcome address. During the program, Champak Barbor, a noted artist, illustrator, and retired cartoonist of Assam Tribune, was presented with the Pranab Baruah Silpi Award, which includes a memento, an appreciation letter, and ₹ 25,000 in cash.

Jatin Das, a noted artist of the country, Jiten Hazarika, a noted journalist and Assamese story-

teller, and Manoj Kumar Goswami, a noted sculptor, Biren Singha, were also present at the program and spoke on the works and sacrifices of late Pranab Baruah in the field of art and paintings of the state.

Following the inaugural session of Pranab Baruah Kalakshetra, CM Sarma also inaugurated an open theatre and food hut constructed nearby. Besides, he laid the foundation stone of the new building of Nagaon Circuit House and inaugurated the newly constructed concrete walking zone at Nagaon Nehrubali. He also addressed a public rally held at Nehrubali Field. Additionally, he attended the ceremonial inauguration of the newly constructed Swahid Thogisut Stadium at Barhampur, where he inaugurated and laid foundation stones for some projects.

While addressing the gathering at Nagaon Nehrubali field, CM Sarma asserted that the BJP-led government is working for 'Ramrajya', which is not for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, or others, but for the entire nation, where poverty can be eradicated, and all, irrespective of creeds, castes, and religions, can live with dignity.

During his trip to Nagaon, the chief minister was accompanied by minister Pijush Hazarika, local MLA Rupak Sarma, BJP district president Abhijit Nath, district commissioner Narendra Kr Shah, other officials, and party workers.

Land patta distribution ceremonies held

State Revenue minister and Thowra MLA lead distribution in Demow, while Parimal Shuklabaidya oversees Morigaon district initiative



HT Correspondent
DEMOW, Feb 25: The land patta distribution ceremony was held at the Demow Jyoti Bishnu Cultural Building (Demow Public Hall) on Saturday, where State Revenue minister Jogen Mohan and Thowra MLA Sushanta Borgohain distributed land patta among the people of Demow constituency (formerly Thowra constituency). Aditya Vikram Yadav, district commissioner of Sivasagar district, delivered the welcome speech at the program. Thowra MLA Sushanta Borgohain graced the occasion as the chief guest, while State Revenue minister Jogen Mohan attended as the special chief guest.

Addressing the gathering, Jogen Mohan expressed that it was a historic day for all, emphasising that indigenous peoples had long been deprived of land patta. He highlighted the significance of Basundhara 2 in facilitating the issuance of land patta to the people. A total of 666 individuals re-

ceived land patta for the Demow constituency during the ceremony. Among the dignitaries present were Naba Jyoti Saharia, Demow circle officer; Hiranjit Bireswar Deori, executive member of Deori Autonomous Council; Pollabita Gogoi Boruah, chairman of Demow Municipal Board; Bihangi Bhagawati Das, BDO of Demow Development Block; Pranab Chetia, BJP leader; along with mouzadars, gaon buras, BJP leaders, and other notable figures.

Our Morigaon correspondent adds: On Sunday, a total of 5151 individuals were granted land patta under the Basundhara 2.0 scheme across all three constituencies of Morigaon district.

Excise, Fisheries, and Transport minister Parimal Shuklabaidya graced the function held at Tarun Ram Phukan Ground, Morigaon, for Morigaon and Laharighat constituencies as the chief guest. He emphasised the significance of the soil as the mother earth and reiterated the government's commit-

ment to providing land rights to Bhumiputras through the Basundhara scheme. Minister Baidya expressed gratitude to the district administration and all stakeholders involved in the successful implementation of the scheme. He highlighted the scheme's focus on benefiting people residing in hilly, remote, and tribal areas. He also acknowledged the challenges in the process from surveying to issuing leases and urged cooperation from the public.

The event was also attended by Morigaon MLA and PTDC chairman Ramakant Deuri, who reiterated the government's dedication to providing land patta to all eligible landless individuals who have resided in Assam for generations. He emphasised the ongoing efforts to remove encroachments, stressing that success in this endeavour requires cooperation from the people. Deuri encouraged eligible individuals to step forward to obtain land leases.

A total of 2371 people in Morigaon constituency and 251 people in Laharighat constituency received land patta. Notably, there were 15,787 applications received in Morigaon constituency and 9,378 in Laharighat constituency. The meeting was welcomed by Zila Parishad chief executive officer Lakshminandan Chaharia and attended by district commissioner Debashis Sarma and superintendent of police Hemanta Kumar Das.

10th Ahom-Rengma Brotherhood Day celebrated in Diphu

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 25: The 10th Ahom-Rengma Brotherhood Day was observed at Syu Ka-Pha Bhawan of the Tai-Ahom Culture Society complex, Dharamnala, here. The celebration was organised by the Diphu Zone Ahom-Rengma Brotherhood Committee.

Pratap Handique mentioned that during the 600-year rule of the Ahoms, a war with the Burmese broke out. The Rengma tribe played a leading role in maintaining peace during that war. They supported the Ahoms in the conflict. To commemorate the contribution made by the Rengma tribe to the Ahoms and to foster cordial relationships, the Ahom-Rengma Brotherhood Day is celebrated every year. Dr Nshoga Nyenhang Rengma, director of Higher Education, Government of Nagaland; Chow Uma Kanta Konwar, former president of the All Assam Ahom Association; and Chow Putul Chutia, president of the Tai Ahom Cultural Society, attended the occasion.

David Rengma, a social worker, also mentioned that the Ahom-Rengma Brotherhood Day is observed every year to improve relations between the two communities. It extends not only to the Ahoms and Rengmas but to all communities. Cultural demonstrations of Ahom and Rengma Nagas were displayed.

Later, a feast was held.

Joutha Sangrami Mancha opposes transfer of Charaideo Maidams

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Feb 25: The proposal to transfer the UNESCO Heritage Site candidate Charaideo Maidams from Nazira Revenue Circle of Sivasagar district to Charaideo district has sparked opposition from various organisations, particularly the Joutha Sangrami Mancha.

The Joutha Sangrami Mancha, consisting of multiple student and public organisations, including Sangrami Sena, Asom, ATASU, Brihat Asomiya Yuva Parishad, Asom Sena, Asomiya Yuva Mancha, Ujoni Asom Muslim Kalyan Parishad, TAYPA, NASS, Ahom Sena and others, held a meeting on Thursday to voice their opposition to the proposal. They issued a strong warning, stating that they would take drastic measures against political representatives if they attempted to separate Charaideo Maidam from Nazira sub-division of Sivasagar district.

The leaders of the Joutha Mancha expressed their dissatisfaction with the idea of altering the current boundaries for political reasons. They specifically mentioned Topon Kumar Gogoi, MP Jorhat, Cabinet minister Jogen Mohan, and Nazira MLA Debabrat Saikia, cautioning them against influencing such decisions. Yadav Gogoi, president of Asomiya Yuva Mancha, emphasised the government's commendable efforts to promote Charaideo Maidams as a global tourist destination and secure UNESCO Heritage Site status.

Dibrugarh MLA launches ₹ 75 cr scheme to combat erosion threat

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Feb 25: To protect Dibrugarh town from relentless erosion, Dibrugarh MLA Prashant Phukan inaugurated a Rs 75 crore protection scheme in the Mohanaghat area on Sunday.

The scheme, aimed at preventing erosion over a total of 7 km along the city through NABARD Infrastructure Development Assistance (NIDA), was launched at Mohanaghat, Dibrugarh.

Two spurs worth ₹ 24 crore and ₹ 27 crore will be constructed, along with geo bags worth ₹ 16 crore and ₹ 9 crore.

Addressing reporters, Dibrugarh MLA Prasanta Phukan stated, "We are aware of the erosion problem in the Mohanaghat area for the last couple of years. Today, work has begun to prevent erosion near the 8 number spur. Once the work is completed, the threat from erosion will be significantly reduced."

"IIT-Guwahati has provided us with advice, and based on their recommendations, we have taken measures to prevent erosion. Three categories of geo-bags and porcupines will be



used to prevent massive erosion. IIT-Guwahati conducted the survey and suggested the method, which we are implementing," Phukan added.

Erosion has been affecting Dibrugarh town due to changes in the Brahmaputra's course upstream. Previously, the river current hit Dibrugarh's Rohmor area, but now it directly affects the town area, causing erosion.

In 2020, six houses were washed away in the Mohanaghat area due to massive erosion.

Additionally, another project is underway parallelly to prevent erosion through the Asian Development Bank.

The significant earthquake of August 15, 1950, measuring 8.7 on the Richter scale, altered the Brahmaputra's course and raised the riverbed level in Dibrugarh by several meters. Consequently, the Brahmaputra's bed now lies several feet higher than the ground level of Dibrugarh town. Often, the Brahmaputra flows much higher than the ground level.

Governor Kataria reviews healthcare & development initiatives

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 25: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria, during his two-day Barak Valley tour, visited SM Dev Civil Hospital in Silchar, Cachar district. The Governor toured the blood centre, emergency ward, and OPD, taking stock of the available facilities.

Assessing the demand and supply of the blood bank, the Governor requested the hospital authority to organise a felicitation ceremony to honour the altruistic donors whose contributions have saved countless lives. He observed the patient registration process and the quality of healthcare provided in the emergency ward, interacting with patients to ensure their well-being and assess the adequacy of amenities. Additionally, he inspected the patient ward, emphasising the importance of hygiene.

At the OPD, the Governor reviewed registration procedures and medication availability, advocating for a token-based registration system for patient and hospital convenience. He also inquired about the hospital's future expansion plans to meet growing patient needs.

Subsequently, the Governor visited a dwelling house constructed under the PMAY-G scheme in Udhaharibon Gaon Panchayat, interacting with beneficiaries to understand the transformative impact of their new homes. He also assessed water and sanitation facilities, highlighting their significance in promoting dignified living standards.

Later, Governor Kataria visited the Salganga Gaon Panchayat Office, reviewing the financial utilisation by the panchayat, including the enrollment status of the MNREGA scheme within its jurisdiction.

Student struck by train

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, Feb 25: Tragedy struck in Ghuncha village under the jurisdiction of Jagiroad Police Station on Sunday morning as a student lost his life after being struck by a train. The victim, identified as Rabindra Devnath, 18 years old, was a student at Vinayak Academy in Jagiroad. The incident resulted in the unfortunate demise of the young student, whose body was subsequently transported to Morigaon Civil Hospital for postmortem examination.

NEMSU alleges anomalies in BTC Education dept

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Feb 25: Huge anomalies have been strongly alleged against the BTC Education Department by the North Eastern Minorities Students Union, Gossaigaon District Committee in a press meet convened at Gossaigaon Press Club recently.

NEMSU, in its statement, alleged that although under Clause 6.3 of the BTR Agreement, ten colleges have been provincialised recently, there seems to be a deep mystery and discrimination against Mahamaya Mahavidyalaya in Bagribari in terms of provincialisation, despite fulfilling all existing conditions, including infrastructure.

The role of BTR CEM, who is in charge of the Education Department, is deeply dissatisfactory as many teachers working in venture colleges and senior secondary schools have received financial assistance from multiple educational institutions and are also working in two educational institutions, depriving the students of acquiring proper quality education. This is a matter of serious concern.

The Students Union has demanded the inclusion of Arabic subjects in Gossaigaon College and in Bodoland University, as a large number of religious minority students, which comprise the second-largest ethnic group in BTR,

have been deprived of studying Arabic subjects.

Similarly, NEMSU demanded the introduction of quality education by appointing teachers in the ratio of students in lower and upper primary schools and filling the vacant teaching positions in higher secondary schools so that the students can avail themselves of the proper education they are lacking.

The Students Union also demanded the appointment of a permanent principal at Gossaigaon College, the appointment of TET passed-out students in schools, one-time financial assistance to teaching staff who retired after teaching for thirty to forty years without pay in the venture educational institutions set up by the people in different areas to spread the light of education, and provincialisation of the venture educational institution located in the BTC area.

The Students Union threatened that if NEMSU's demands were not heeded with utmost care, then the Students Union would launch a vigorous democratic movement in the coming days.

District Committee president Saddam Hussain, administrative general secretary Inamul Haque, vice president Keramat Ali, Baharul Alam, Ashrafur Alam, and chief publicity secretary Shakeel Ahmed were present at the press meet.



New old age home inaugurated near Tezpur Initiative honours late Durgeswari Bora's legacy

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 25: A new old age home named 'Snehalaya-Koka Aitar Apon Ghar' was formally inaugurated on Saturday at Teleria village near here under Tezpur Sadar Police station. The establishment of the facility honours the legacy of the social worker late Durgeswari Bora and serves as a testament to the commitment to caring for the elderly. Mentionable that the driving forces behind the initiative are Aijoni Bora Gogoi, daughter of late Durgeswari Bora, and her husband Dipak Gogoi, a senior teacher of Hem Barua HS School in Ghoramari area.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by Karabi Karan Saikia, CEO of the Sonitpur District Development Council. In her inaugural speech, she emphasised the

importance of providing support and care to the elderly population. Local MLA Prithviraj Rabha, along with a host of dignitaries connected with different social

fields of the district, attended the ceremony, showing solidarity and support for the noble cause. Nilim Kumar Das, president of the Village Development Committee,

QUOTE OF THE DAY

They can conquer who believe they can.
- Virgil

Assam advances Uniform Civil Code

The chief minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, has taken a significant step by repealing the outdated Assam Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act of 1935. This move is aimed at combating the prevalent issue of child marriages within the Assamese Muslim community. Sarma, known for his assertive demeanor, views this as a crucial stride towards implementing a long-awaited Uniform Civil Code (UCC), aligning with the principle of one nation, one law, enshrined in the directive principles since 1950.

The decision to repeal the act was made during a meeting of the Assam Cabinet, presided over by Chief Minister Sarma himself, indicating the government's strong stance on the matter. Consequently, all Muslim marriages and divorces in Assam will now be governed by the Special Marriages Act of 1954. Sarma's determination to erase traces of the "Sharia" from the legal framework underscores his commitment to this cause, although his demeanor often elicits mixed reactions from the people of Assam. The chief minister's actions have garnered unwavering support from his Cabinet, with ministers like Jayanta Mallabarua endorsing the move as essential for realizing the BJP's vision of a Uniform Civil Code. The state government believes that this repeal will pave the way for the actualization of the UCC, aligning with the party's electoral promises. The repeal of the Assam Muslim Marriage & Divorce Registration Act also entails the displacement of 94 Muslim registrars who were previously employed under the legislation. However, the government has announced a one-time compensation of ₹ 2 lakh each for these individuals to aid in their transition. With this repeal, Assam joins Uttarakhand as one of the few states where elements of the Uniform Civil Code are already in practice. Despite initial resistance, Muslims in the state have largely complied with the laws of the land, recognizing the consequences of non-compliance. The Uniform Civil Code remains a significant electoral agenda for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), alongside other contentious issues like the abrogation of Article 370. Chief ministers like Sarma and Pushkar Singh Dhami of Uttarakhand face pressure to deliver on these promises to bolster Prime Minister Narendra Modi's electoral ambitions.

However, as opposition forces, including regional and national parties, voice their dissent, it's evident that the road to UCC implementation is fraught with challenges. The recent uproar over the repeal of the Assam Muslim Marriage Act underscores the deeply entrenched religious sentiments and political dynamics at play.

Moving forward, chief minister Sarma must navigate these complexities sensitively, especially considering the delicate issue of child marriage within Muslim communities. Despite opposition, the government remains resolute in its pursuit of a Uniform Civil Code, emphasizing the need for a secular legal framework applicable to all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation.

Challenges and concerns: Assessing the state of Indian democracy as elections loom

The conclusion of the 17th Lok Sabha marks the commencement of preparations for the upcoming general election. Regrettably, the final parliamentary session mirrored the divisiveness witnessed in numerous previous gatherings. The ruling and Opposition parties engaged in a heated exchange of accusations, showing no willingness to find common ground. This disconcerting display has sparked apprehensions regarding the trajectory of parliamentary democracy in the nation.

India has been fortunate in maintaining democracy, distinguishing itself from many other nations. The country has earned a commendable reputation for upholding exemplary parliamentary practices. The Constitution of India, among the finest globally, encompasses crucial elements such as Fundamental Rights, citizens' Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of State Policy. These provisions serve as vital safeguards that have helped sustain democracy. However, given the present decline in parliamentary standards, concerns linger among the populace about Parliament's ability to ensure a stable democracy in the future.

The current scenario is detached from both India's internal affairs and external dynamics. Presently, India finds itself in a more favorable position than it has in decades concerning these aspects. Despite the global political environment's murkiness and ongoing conflicts such as the war in Ukraine and unrest in West

Asia, India has not suffered substantial adverse impacts. While China remains a concern requiring heightened vigilance, it doesn't pose an immediate threat. Pakistan, entangled in internal issues, presents minimal threat to India at the moment.

Undoubtedly, internal dynamics present challenges, but India has recently been fortunate to avoid significant terrorist attacks. Several internal security issues persist beneath the surface, with some proving resistant to swift resolution, although none are insurmountable.

The farmers' protest in Punjab and Haryana holds the potential to escalate, resembling a potential 'prairie fire,' but with proper management, it can be contained. The northeastern region, particularly Manipur, encapsulates longstanding issues, yet they are navigable.

While communal violence is restrained, heightened communal tensions in an election year could pose challenges. Currently, left-wing extremist violence is at a minimal level, though the prospect of resurgence looms, especially in an election year.

The prevailing concern is the apparent increase in division within the country, a situation more pronounced than in recent times. The Prime Minister himself has expressed worries about the emergence of a "North-South Divide," accusing the Opposition of promoting a narrative that threatens the unity of the

nation. Serious allegations have been directed at the Congress, with claims that it aims to create divisions based on caste, language, and religion. In the interim Budget session, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman took a personal stance, criticizing former Finance Minister and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for alleged shortcomings during his tenure. Reciprocally, the Opposition has vehemently criticized the ruling party, accusing them of disrupting

the parliamentary atmosphere and violating established guidelines for conduct. While political parties often engage in verbal sparring during election years, the current exchanges exhibit a level of venom that is concerning for both Parliament and the nation.

Departing from traditional parliamentary decorum has widened the gap between the ruling party and the entire Opposition, a regrettable development. Heightened polarization, aggravating divisive tendencies. Strategies for securing larger victory margins seem to spare no issue from scrutiny. Even the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, an event widely welcomed by most Indians, has become a focal point in the electoral arena.

Both Houses of Parliament have passed a resolution characterizing the temple's construction as a herald of a "new era of governance and public welfare." The looming

specter of 'Hindu majoritarianism,' whether intentional or not, occupies the minds of certain sections of the public. There is also a prevailing perception that the 'Mandir' defines the political landscape in this election year.

The cherished principle of federalism, highly valued by the Constitution-makers, is now under threat in the current scenario. While certain elements might be indicative of a gradual decline in democratic practices over the years, there is a distinctive difference today. The Opposition contends, and perhaps with some validity, that the central ruling administration is recklessly violating the federal principle. The Opposition's allegations encompass endeavors to impose a Uniform Civil Code, coupled with apparent efforts to promote the 'One Nation, One Election' concept, potentially aimed at diminishing the influence of regional parties.

The prevalence of defections in Indian politics, especially the orchestrated ones witnessed during this election season, poses a significant threat to the integrity of democracy and electoral processes. The ongoing attempts to lure members across party lines with inducements are eroding the foundation of the entire election system. A surge in high-profile defections, including prominent leaders from various parties joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party at the Centre, exemplifies this trend. One notable instance involves the enticement of Bihar Chief Minister, Nitish

Kumar, with the implicit assurance that he could retain his position under a new BJP-led dispensation. Similar instances of engineered defections to the ruling party are unfolding nationwide, challenging democratic principles and practices. This scenario suggests that electoral democracy is at a critical juncture, with constitutionally mandated rules and practices being disregarded without consequence.

Although no single party may bear sole responsibility, the fact that a majority of engineered high-level defections align with the ruling BJP in this election year sends a resounding message — those in power have the means to influence electoral outcomes through unconventional methods.

The absence of a rules-based order is a pressing concern, intricately linked to perceived infringements of constitutionally prescribed conduct by centrally-appointed Governors in specific States. Recent times have seen a heightened contention over the role of Governors in States governed by the Opposition. These States assert, with valid grounds, that the Centre is leveraging Governors to obstruct the policies and programs devised by Opposition-ruled regions. In certain cases and under specific circumstances, this dynamic is precipitating a near collapse of relations between the Central government and the States. The strained interactions underscore a significant issue, with implications for the delicate balance between the Centre and Opposition-ruled

States.

A dispassionate analysis is imperative in the current scenario. While it is possible that both the ruling dispensation at the Centre and the Opposition may show lapses in adhering to constitutional norms and federal principles, the primary responsibility rests with the Centre.

What is conspicuously evident, and notably deficient at present, is the dearth of a rules-based framework governing Centre-State relations and inter-party dynamics. This absence poses a significant risk of systemic upheaval. Without such a framework, there is a genuine concern that the entire system could face a destabilizing upheaval.

The current state of affairs amounts to a virtual breakdown of the constitutionally mandated rules of governance. If these trends persist, there is a looming danger that our understanding of democracy, as guided by constitutional principles, will erode. The foremost priority must be the tolerance of differences. Subsequently, every action should be aligned with the requisites of the Constitution. Thirdly, effectively navigating the intricate interplay between interests and values while steadfastly upholding a strong belief in the Constitution is of utmost importance. There are no conflicts that cannot be managed within the framework mandated by the Constitution, a vital prerequisite for the survival of India as we know it. *(The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)*

President Biden calling his Russian counterpart 'sob' is just bizarre

By: Sushil Kutty

American President Joe Biden most probably forgot his insulting words for Russian President Vladimir Putin after a couple of minutes of saying them, but the "crazy SOB" also took the insult on the chin, brushing it aside as if it was no more deserving of attention than a passing breeze on a windy day. "Vladimir Putin appeared unfazed" was the fairest assessment made of the Russian President's reaction to Biden calling him a crazy son of a dog. For, even among the community of canines, "children" are taken seriously and their parents even more so. Neither mom nor dad deserve insult.

Ultimately, though, it showed Putin was savvy and he understood Biden better than Biden understood Putin. Definitely, the two should have understood each other more than Donald Trump could get under their skins. Trump drives Biden crazy and for all we know the current White House occupant must have called Trump "crazy SOB", and not Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

Anything can happen, when it's known to every Russian that Joe Biden's cognitive faculties have been missing strength ever since Joe and Jill took up residence in the White House. Ask, and Joe wouldn't remember who he called "Crazy SOB"? Could be himself when walking past any one of the legion of White House mirrors.

More believable would be Joe Biden calling Donald Trump both mad and the son of a cunning and calculating K9. On his part, Putin kept the dogs of war leashed. That is why the Russian President should and can be trusted with the nuclear button.

The Americans will have to worry about Joe Biden with his nuclear button. The moment after Biden loses his mind and Putin his cool, all will be over and nothing will ever be good for anything to be over. The earth as we know will cease to exist.

That's the Armageddon earthlings are in for if either of these two "crazy SOB" go off the bend. Thankfully, after his political rivals had been getting their pennies pinched, President Vladimir Putin had the savvy to accept Biden's "crazy SOB" insult as an "adequate reaction" — and if Biden heard, he didn't respond. Maybe Biden's minders had had enough.

But Putin, like many concerned global citizens, including those who carry American passports, believes

Biden is pissed off because the Russian President had picked "Joe Biden for President" over the alternative "Donald Trump for President".

"Judging by what he has just said, I was absolutely right because it's an adequate reaction to my remark," Putin told 'Rossiya 1' state TV, the day after Biden said in San Francisco, "We have a crazy SOB like that guy Putin, and others, and we always have to worry about nuclear conflict, but the existential threat to humanity is climate."

That should have disturbed the weather in Moscow, even the climate of the entire Russia — minus, of course, that of Ukraine, which the "crazy SOB" thinks Russia owns — but Putin brushed it away and told 'Rossiya 1', "He can't tell me, 'Volodya, well done, thanks, you helped me a lot.' ... This reaction is absolutely adequate."

For those who don't know, 'Volodya' means "Great Ruler" and Putin was referring to himself when he spelled out the fine-print. As for what's best for Russia, Putin smiled, "I've said it once and can repeat: Biden." To add insult to injury, he had told US commentator Tucker Carlson that he "couldn't remember the last time he spoke with Biden, guessing it must have been before Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine."

In Putin's 71-year-old fertile mind, he had a "personal relationship" with the 77-year-old Donald Trump, but he considered the 81-year-old Joe Biden an "old-school politician" and, therefore, the best-fit for Russia.

Come to think of it, Joe Biden calling Vladimir Putin the vilest of names hasn't changed Putin's preference and tolerance for Biden over Trump. In 2021, at the height of the Covid 19, President Joe Biden called President Vladimir Putin a "killer" and Putin tested Biden's killer-funny bone with the repartee, "It takes one to know one." As usual there was no response and President Joe Biden was back in the Land of the Nod. This time, too, a few reports say Putin called Biden's "crazy SOB" remark as "rude" but is okay with it because President Joe Biden's affinity for sons and daughters of K9s is known worldwide.

Also, President Joe Biden shouldn't forget that Americans have more dogs for pets than Russians have nukes for strikes and drops and not every world leader is a Putin — try calling China's Xi Jinping or North Korea's Kim Jong Un "Crazy SOB" and watch the television screens turn grainy. *(IPA Service)*

BJP's nightmare begins with Congress-SP alliance in Uttar Pradesh

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Congress-Samajwadi Party alliance in Uttar Pradesh is the beginning of BJP's nightmare before the Lok Sabha elections in April/May this year. The hope hitherto generated after the January 22 Ram Temple inauguration in Ayodhya, and a prospect of falling off allies of INDIA bloc as leaves from a tree, of BJP and PM Narendra Modi's returning to power for their third term has somewhat dimmed in a fast-changing political scenario on the eve of 2024 polls.

Only a few days ago during the reply to the motion of thanks to Presidential address in Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that BJP will be winning 370 seats and NDA 405, which later rounded to 400+. Even during the BJP's National Council Meet in Delhi, he had said, "Aayega to Modi hi" (Indeed, Modi would return). However, Congress-SP alliance in Uttar Pradesh has altered the political situation in the state in such a way that would offer many sleepless nights to PM Narendra Modi, not only in Uttar Pradesh, but also in other Hindi heartland states such as Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

What exactly Congress-SP alliance has changed? Before finding an answer to this question, one needs to note the ongoing farmers' agitation that has made even the farmers of Western Uttar Pradesh restive, and most of them are not going with the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) to support BJP or NDA. They are on the agitation path against the BJP government at the Centre led by PM Narendra Modi against the denial of legal guarantee for MSP. The situation just gone against the BJP despite the fact that Narendra Modi played Bharat Ratna Politics, awarded Bharat Ratna to Chaudhary Charan Singh, which made his grandson Jayant Chaudhary desert INDIA alliance and join hands with the BJP. Desertion of RLD paved the way for Congress-SP alliance and now SP will contest on 62 seats, Congress on 17, and Azad Samaj Party (ASP) of emerging Dalit leader Chandra Shekhar Azad on 1 seat.

The three major political

groups are now arrayed in electoral battlefield in Uttar Pradesh are: NDA led by BJP; INDIA bloc led by SP; and the BSP. BJP had won 62 seats in Lok Sabha election 2019, BSP 10, SP 5 and Congress 1.

NDA ally Apna Del (S) had won 2 seats. BSP and SP had contested the election together as Mahagathbandhan allies. BSP contesting this time alone will adversely impact BSP's electoral prospect, and the party has already lost its vote share from 19.26 per cent in 2019 Lok Sabha elections to 12.88 per cent in Vidhan Sabha election 2022.

Mayawati's support base has considerably declined, and is likely to decline further. With rise of Chandra Shekhar Azad as a Dalit leader and his alliance with INDIA bloc would attract Dalit votes, which will damage BJP's prospect at a time when farmers and large chunk of OBC's are already supporting SP.

BJP's vote share in Uttar Pradesh in 2019 Lok Sabha election was 49.56 per cent, and there were 20 Lok Sabha seats where BJP's winning margin was less than 50 per cent. Congress-SP-ASP alliance and further decline of BSP's support base would make way for even closer contest with BJP on these 20 seats. There were already 16 seats with the opposition, and the loss of BSP would be gain of INDIA bloc, since Dalits of Uttar Pradesh have always been against the BJP. Thus, BJP will have to face tough battle in 36 seats.

By 2022, as the Vidhan Sabha results in Uttar Pradesh revealed, BJP's votes share has declined to 41.29 per cent from 49.56 per cent in 2019. Moreover, BJP could win only 255 seats out of 403. BJP could win 104 seats with a small margin of less than 20,000 votes. Congress-SP alliance will therefore enforce a too tough battle for BJP in these 104 Vidhan Sabha constituencies. SP+ had won 125 seats, and Congress 2, and BSP only 1 seat in 2022 Vidhan Sabha election. Hence the total number of Vidhan Sabha constituencies where BJP will have to fight a tough battle would be 231.

This Vidhan Sabha constituency wise electoral prospect of the BJP would adversely affect the final outcome in the Lok Sabha constituencies, since on an average 5 Vidhan Sabha Constituencies make a Lok Sabha Constituency.

By going through the 2019 Lok Sabha election results and the latest Congress-SP alliance, one can clearly see 36 Lok Sabha constituencies where INDIA bloc would make BJP vulnerable. However, if we consider the 2022 Vidhan Sabha election result, INDIA bloc would offer a tough electoral battle in at least 46 Lok Sabha seats.

As against fall of BJP's vote share by 8.27 per cent during 2019-2022, SP's vote share rose by 10.24 per cent to 32.06 per cent. Therefore, to retain its 62 seats BJP needs a swing in its favour by 8.27 per cent. Ram Temple inauguration in Ayodhya, and staking claims by CM Yogi Adityanath on Gyanvapi Mosque in Kashi, and Idgah Mosque in Mathura, and asking Muslims to hand them over to Hindus temples Kashi Vishwanath and Krishnajanmabhum, had initially expected to fetch electoral dividend to BJP, but Congress-SP alliance has greatly damaged its possibility. Large number of farmers, OBCs, and Dalits are turning in favour of INDIA alliance.

Since SP has its own pocket of influence is Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the alliance would boost INDIA bloc prospects under the leadership of Congress. Including UP, these four Hindi heartland states have 145 seats out of which BJP had won 123 seats in 2019 Lok Sabha elections. BJP would find it difficult to retain its seats in these states, which would also apply to its ally Apna Dal (S) in Uttar Pradesh which won 2 seats. Its ally in Rajasthan, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party had won 1 seat in 2019, which has already deserted BJP. Congress-SP alliance has put BJP in a difficult position, since PM Modi and his followers had pinned their hopes chiefly on INDIA bloc falling apart, especially after TMC in West Bengal and AAP in Punjab had announced to contest alone.

It is yet uncertain how much loss the BJP can make up by pushing Hindutva communal politics further, which the two new developments coming to the front — farmers protest and Congress-SP alliance — have pushed back to its rear. *(IPA Service)*

Coalition govt of Pakistan will have testing time over tackling economy

By: Tirthankar Mitra

More things change, the more they remain the same. Not much surprise surfaced when this old adage came true once more after the announcement of February 8 election results in Pakistan and formation of its government even as the political outfit which emerged victorious in maximum constituencies readies itself to sit in the Opposition benches.

In so many words, it is a chronicle of a coalition foretold when Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz closed ranks to reach the magic figure of 134 seats in the National Assembly. One wonders if one would tread the path to prolixity to add that such a coalition has the blessings of the Establishment read the army headed by General Asim Munir. It boils down to the fact that Army had put its best foot forward to "manage" the elections. The new government was formed by the identical players who made up the Pakistan Democratic Alliance government post ouster of Imran Khan.

Incidentally, candidates of Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf contesting as independents won 93 seats. The PML-N won 75 seats while the PPP trailed behind it with 54 constituencies in its kitty; coming far behind Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan secured 17 seats.

Khan being in the prison cannot be the leader of the Opposition, it would be Shehbaz Sharif of PML-N the prime minister of the PDA government who would be sworn in the oaths of office the second time. There is a clear division of the spoils of a rigged poll victory. Asif Zardari, the PPP chief will be the President while the Senate chairmanship will also go to PPP together with the governorships of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The post of Speaker of the National Assembly will be part of PML-N's spoils. Not joining the government, the PPP will be voting on the no-confidence motions with the ruling party and the spending Bills as well.

The "coveted role" of the elder statesman to the alliance will be played by former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif. One wonders, whether Shehbaz Sharif will be comfortable in his crown of thorns given the fragile nature of the alliance and the fallout of the unpopular and harsh decisions he will have to take once he assumes office.

On becoming the Prime Minister, Sharif cannot shirk from unpopular economic decision as growth has slowed down in Pakistan. Since 2011, external debt has almost doubled and there has been a six-fold increase in its domestic debts.

Pakistan is en route to default in payments thereby taking it into deeper economic crisis. Hard choices, serious reforms and another IMF bailout are some of the beacons at the end of the tunnel.

The PPP already against pro-market reforms will side step sans much deftness as it is not part of the coalition government. Small wonder, it is Shehbaz Sharif and his Cabinet colleagues who will be the targets of the ire of the populace post the economic belt-tightening.

Insurgency in Balochistan and its western border of Afghanistan pose serious security challenges to Pakistan. What about India whom its powers that be often finds it convenient to dub the sources of its woes?

Before reading the thoughts of the new dispensation across the border and the power behind the throne, the army, India can view the new government with cautious optimism. Nawaz Sharif has always displayed a willingness to engage with India.

There was considerable personal warmth between Sharif and Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the latter's swearing in 2014. It was cemented by PM Modi's surprise visit to Lahore next year. Barring a few incidents, the ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control in Kashmir dating to 2021 holds. It is possible to open channels on some issues though Pakistan took a view it could have dispensed with in the wake of abrogation of Article 370.

One does not expect an overnight dropping of guard. But security gains of the past can be strengthened through limited bilateral engagements. Of course, a spanner in the works can be thrown in by the army and Imran Khan-led PTI. The latter entity remains an elephant in the room for the coalition government.

They have already raised the issue of a "stolen mandate". As soon as the NA convenes, the PTI Opposition will train its guns and fire broadsides at the alliance keeping alive the new government's crisis of legitimacy. *(IPA Service)*

Autism and Alzheimer's disease: Is there a link?

By: Zia Sherrell

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a developmental condition that can affect social interaction, communication, and behaviour.

Conversely, Alzheimer's disease is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder primarily associated with memory loss and cognitive decline.

While these conditions differ significantly in their characteristics and onset, recent research suggests autistic adults have an increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia.

This article explores the link between autism and Alzheimer's disease, examining their symptoms, diagnosis, and available support for these conditions.

Is there a link between autism and Alzheimer's disease?

In a 2021 study of public health records, researchers found that autistic middle-aged adults appear to be more likely to receive a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other dementias than non-autistic people.

Furthermore, it appears memory declines faster in autistic middle-aged adults.

Autistic middle-aged adults also have a higher likelihood of a specific gene called APOE4. This gene increases the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease in later life and can lead to early shrinkage of the hippocampus, the brain's main

memory structure.

While these findings suggest a relationship between autism and Alzheimer's disease, research is ongoing. The exact mechanisms and causal factors underlying this connection require further investigation.

What is autism?

Autism, or ASD, is a complex and lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that can affect a person's social interactions, communication skills, and behaviour. How it may affect a person varies greatly.

Communication differences are a hallmark of autism. For example, autistic people may have difficulties understanding and responding to social cues. Some may have difficulty forming relationships, making eye contact, or engaging in reciprocal conversations.

What is Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive and degenerative brain disorder that predominantly affects older adults, typically over age 65 years.

It is the most common cause of dementia, a condition involving a decline in cognitive abilities severe enough to interfere with daily functioning.

Alzheimer's disease typically begins with memory problems. People may have difficulty recalling recent conversations, appointments, or tasks.

As the disease progresses, people may experience a decline in thinking ability, including language, problem-solving, and decision making. This can



lead to challenges in communication and daily activities.

Symptoms of autism in children and adults

How autism can affect people varies widely and may manifest differently in children and adults.

Common signs of autism in children include:

- **Social challenges:** Difficulty making friends, initiating conversations, and understanding social norms can be common.

- **Communication issues:** Language delays or deficits are common. Some people may be non-speaking, while others may have limited speech.

- **Repetitive behaviours:** Many autistic children practice repetitive actions, such as hand-flapping, rocking, or repeating specific phrases or actions. These behaviours can be a source of comfort or self-regulation.

- **Sensory sensitivities:** Children may be susceptible to bright lights, loud sounds, certain textures, or strong odours.

- **Intense interests:** Intense interests in specific topics or activities can be all-consuming

and may provide a sense of predictability and comfort.

Autistic adults may also have social and communication differences. Some may thrive in structured and predictable environments and become distressed when faced with unexpected changes.

Furthermore, autistic individuals may have an increased risk of mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and mood disorders.

Symptoms of Alzheimer's disease

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disease. Early on, people experience memory loss, especially concerning recent events.

As the disease progresses, memory problems become more pronounced, affecting recent occurrences and those in the distant past. People may not recognize close family members. They may forget names, appointments, or where they place everyday objects.

A person with Alzheimer's disease may also:

- find certain tasks difficult, such as those they used to handle easily, including managing

finances, cooking, or following familiar processes

- have trouble finding the right words, following or joining conversations, or repeating themselves in conversation

- become confused about the current date or their location, even in familiar surroundings

- find basic activities difficult, such as bathing, dressing, and grooming

- experience mood changes, irritability, and changes in personality

- have communication difficulties, such as difficulty understanding spoken or written language

Eventually, people with Alzheimer's disease may lose the ability to walk, sit, and swallow. They will need caregivers to manage all aspects of care, including feeding, bathing, and toileting.

Early diagnosis of both

Early diagnosis of autism and Alzheimer's disease is crucial, as it allows for timely intervention and support.

By identifying signs of autism at a young age, healthcare professionals can initiate any needed interventions and support. For instance, speech, occupational, and behavioural therapy can help address specific challenges and enhance communication and social skills.

Some autistic children may benefit from individualized education plans tailored to their unique needs, helping them thrive in educational settings. Furthermore, behavioural interventions, such as applied be-

haviour analysis, can help manage any challenging behaviours.

In cases of Alzheimer's disease, early diagnosis allows individuals and their families to plan for the future and access appropriate care and support.

Additionally, medications and therapies that may help slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease are most effective when initiated early in the disease process.

Can you prevent or reduce either autism or Alzheimer's disease?

The precise causes of autism are still under investigation, so experts do not fully know how to reduce its chances of developing. However, early intervention strategies can improve communication, social skills, and adaptive behaviours in autistic children who need support.

Likewise, there is no guaranteed way to prevent Alzheimer's disease. That said, certain lifestyle strategies may help reduce its risk or delay its onset. These include:

- consuming a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and omega-3 fatty acids to support brain health

- getting regular physical activity, including cardiovascular and strength training

- engaging in intellectually stimulating activities, such as puzzles, reading, and learning new skills

- staying socially active and maintaining strong social connections

- managing chronic condi-

tions, such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity

- prioritizing quality sleep for optimal brain health and cognitive function

- reducing stress by employing stress management techniques, such as mindfulness or yoga

Support and community resources

Support and community resources for autistic individuals or people with Alzheimer's disease are essential for enhancing quality of life and well-being.

People can find support and information about autism from the Autistic Self Advocacy Network and The Autism Society.

Individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and their loved ones can connect with the Alzheimer's Association. This nonprofit offers many resources, including support groups, educational materials, and a helpline for information and assistance.

Summary

Autism is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that can include social difficulties, communication challenges, and repetitive behaviors.

Research suggests autistic people have an increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, a progressive neurodegenerative condition primarily affecting older adults.

More research is necessary to understand the association between the two conditions fully. (Courtesy: *Medical News Today*)

Cancer of the Gastrointestinal tract on a sharp rise in India Minimally invasive cancer surgeries changing the face of cancer treatment

By: Dr Neeraj Chaudhary

Gastrointestinal cancers impact the GI tract and the digestive system including Esophagus, stomach, small and large intestines, liver, gallbladder, pancreas, etc. These cancers can originate from any organ in the abdomen as ulcers or masses and can metastasize to the other parts in no time if go unnoticed.

While timely diagnosis increases the chances of better treatment and prolonged survival of the patient, delayed treatment impacts the outcome of the treatment and may also have adverse consequences on the quality of life. The rise in cases also show the low level of awareness due to which early detection isn't possible.

From the past few years, the incidences of gastrointestinal and HPB cancer cases have been rising at an exponential rate in our country, particularly due to the lack of awareness associated with the subject. Early diagnosis and prompt treatment have significant importance in preventing mortality from such diseases.

On the other hand, the rapidly growing advancements in the field of science and technology, newer treatment options like minimally invasive GI surgeries, Laparoscopic surgeries and Robotic surgeries have completely changed the face of cancer treatment at a greater scale. Minimal invasive GI surgeries have become a great addition to the field as they provide an innovative approach in the treatment of cancer while ensuring minimal blood loss, quicker recovery and shorter hospital stays.

Recent data shows that developing countries are facing a sharp increase in cancer incidence. But

at the same time, there have been numerous advancements in cancer care. However, the majority of our population is not able to avail of the benefits of these developments due to a sheer lack of knowledge and myths associated with the subject.

One of the biggest reasons for the rise in such cases is lack of awareness among the general public about the early signs and symptoms which leads to delayed diagnosis and treatment causing poor prognosis. Poor lifestyle choices including unhealthy dietary intake with dependence on junk food, along with binge alcoholism and erratic sleep patterns are some of the major known causes of the exponential rise in such cases. Early and prompt treatment can help prevent the rise in GI diseases.

As of the Globocan India 2020 report, gastrointestinal (GI) cancers continue to pose a significant health burden in the country. The data reveals varying incidences and mortality rates across different types of GI cancers. Colorectal cancer, a common GI malignancy, showed notable incidence, with a substantial number of new cases reported. Similarly, stomach cancer demonstrated a significant presence in the population.

The mortality rates associated with GI cancers underline the severity of these conditions, emphasizing the need for effective prevention, early detection, and treatment strategies. The Globocan India 2020 findings underscore the importance of ongoing efforts to address the challenges posed by GI cancers and to implement comprehensive public health measures to reduce the incidence and mortality rates associated with these diseases.

With the advancement of tech-

nologies, minimal access to cancer surgeries has also become commonplace. Experts can adequately resect difficult tumors including colon cancers, stomach cancer, including liver metastases which suggest a late-stage disease, with minimal incisions or even laparoscopically, in certain cases.

Some of the key diagnostic tools used for detecting GI cancers:

1. Endoscopy:

- **Colonoscopy:** This procedure involves inserting a flexible tube with a camera (colonoscope) into the rectum to examine the entire colon. It is effective in detecting colorectal cancers and polyps.

- **Esophagogastroduodenoscopy (EGD or Upper Endoscopy):** This involves the insertion of a scope through the mouth to examine the esophagus, stomach, and the beginning of the small intestine. It is commonly used for detecting esophageal, stomach, and duodenal cancers.

2. Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS):

- EUS combines endoscopy with ultrasound imaging, providing detailed images of the digestive tract and surrounding structures. EUS is particularly useful for assessing the extent of GI cancers, staging tumors, and guiding biopsies.

3. Computed Tomography (CT) Scan:

- CT scans are used to obtain detailed cross-sectional images of the abdomen and pelvis. They are valuable for detecting tumors, evaluating lymph nodes, and determining the extent of cancer spread.

4. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI):

- MRI can provide detailed images of soft tissues, making it

useful for evaluating the liver, pancreas, and other abdominal organs. It is often employed for staging and planning treatment.

5. Biopsy and Pathological Examination:

- Tissue samples obtained during endoscopy, surgery, or other procedures are examined under a microscope to confirm the presence of cancer and determine its type and grade.

6. Tumor Markers:

- Blood tests measuring specific biomarkers associated with certain GI cancers may aid in diagnosis and monitoring treatment response. Examples include CEA (carcinoembryonic antigen) for colorectal cancer.

7. PET-CT Scan:

- Positron emission tomography combined with computed tomography can be used to detect abnormal metabolic activity, helping to identify areas of possible cancer spread.

Minimally invasive surgeries have numerous advantages for patients in comparison to traditional surgeries including minimal scars, faster recovery, reduced pain, shorter duration of hospital stays, and lesser post-surgery complications. The preference for Robotic Surgery has increased after the pandemic since it reduces hospital stay and post-surgical complications.

People still need to be aware that with recent advancements in oncology, cancer is completely treatable. And early diagnosis can, not significantly increase the chances of survival, but also provide a better quality of life. (The author is the Director - GI-HPB Oncology, GI Surgery, Minimally Invasive Surgery (Robotics and Laparoscopic) & Liver Transplant, Yatharth Superspecialty Hospital, Greater Noida and Noida 110)

Chronic Kidney Diseases - Diagnosis & Treatment

By: Dr. Vishal Saxena

The burden of chronic kidney diseases in India cannot be assessed accurately. The approximate prevalence of CKD is 800 per million population (pmp), and the incidence of end stage renal disease is around 150-200 pmp. Most common cause of kidney disease is diabetes and high blood pressure. Both the diseases are related to our genetics and lifestyle, hence the emphasis is to keep our diabetes and blood pressure under control with medicines, exercise and a blend of healthy food. Blood pressure not only needs to be judiciously controlled, but weather its secondary to kidney disease also needs to be ruled out. Young people developing high bp especially needs to be screened for underlying kidney diseases often people feel depressed once diagnosed with chronic kidney disease (CKD), hence the whole idea of doctors is now to focus on a holistic approach when dealing with CKD. This involves dietary change, avoiding pain killers, quit smoking and to promptly refer to a nephrologist, once diagnosed with diabetes, high BP or any form of CKD. Certain kidney diseases are controllable/treatable hence the need to promptly diagnose the disease and treat it.

Preventive strategies play a very pivotal role in

dealing with CKD. Regular health checkups form an integral role in screening of CKD during early phase, which i think should be inculcated in schools, colleges at entry level and while joining a new job or organization. Since treating a CKD patient is more expensive these screening strategies will definitely reduce the financial burden on the patient and on the society as whole. Another most neglected area in our country is lack of physical activity/regular exercise. Regular exercise not only improves physical well being, but also is a stress buster for a lot of patients. All these measures help in creating awareness in coping with the kidney disease and allow the patient to deal with his disease with a positive mindset. Being in regular follow up with one's kidney physician helps the patient to help discuss strategies to not only control his disease but also to formulate a planned way of dealing with his ailment. India being a big country with patients having varied dietary habits, diet plays a very important role when it comes to kidney diseases; hence patients regular diet counselling is very important. Kidney diseases have a variable presentation; hence a tailor-made therapy is important for each kidney patient. (The author is a Senior Director - Nephrology & Renal Transplantation, BLK-MAX Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi)

Fillers, Botox & more: Why are to-be-weds getting extreme cosmetic procedures?

By: Garima Sadhwani

On 16 February, a 28-year-old soon-to-be-wed groom in Hyderabad, Laxmi Narayana Vinjam, allegedly succumbed to an anaesthesia overdose while undergoing a 'smile designing' surgery. Speaking to the media, his father Ramulu Vinjam alleged that his son had not informed the family of the smile-enhancing procedure he was undergoing, and that he fainted during the surgery.

Lately, more and more to-be grooms and brides have been opting for cosmetic surgeries. In 2023, a major pop-culture conversation online surrounding this was sparked, thanks to the show, *Make Me a Star*.

The pressure to look your personal best on the D-Day

The first episode of the Amazon Prime show's second season revolved around Sarina (played by Zayn Marie Khan), who is about to get married to an NRI (Non-resident Indian) named Aman.

While those around her keep asserting how 'normal' the procedure is, the bride ends up developing a rash, which is more common than you'd like to believe. Dr Seema Oberoi Lall, Consultant, Dermatology, CK Birla Hospital, Gurugram, sympathises with this. She says,

"The to-be-weds do want to look the best during their ceremonies. There's a lot of focus, pressure, and cameras on them."

Speaking to FIT in November 2022 about young people opting for surgeries, Dr Kedar Tilwe, Consultant Psychiatrist, Fortis Hospital Mulund & Hiranandani Hospital, Vashi, had also said that social pressure, body image issues, and criticism or bullying pushes people more and more towards permanent cosmetic treatments.

Botox, Liposuction, Body polishing: What the new age bride and grooms want

And what's the trend now? Dr Jaishree Noor, Consultant, Dermatology, Cosmetology, and Laser Expert, Marengo Asia Hospitals, Gurugram, tells FIT that the most common cosmetic surgical procedures are started weeks or months before the actual day comes. These include microdermabrasion (which is a sort of body polishing done on the face and the body) and liposuction (removal of excess fat from the body). Other common procedures, says Dr Lall, are botox, fillers, laser hair removal, other laser treatments, etc. She adds,

"A lot of people come to get their acne, pimples, and scars treated. So, most of them would require microneedling. There are others who want to get their skin tightening and lifting procedures done, which we do with radio frequency based devices."

Dr Lall also mentions that there are some procedures that people get done to help with their insecurities perhaps - getting skin boosters for "light reflection and a shine on their face," surgery for a sharper jawline, removing unbrows, hair transplants, chemical peels, hydra facials, etc.

While some of these procedures are minor and surface level, treatments like microneedling, liposuction, and botox can be invasive and major surgeries as well.

"Whoever the patient coming in may be, we want them to disclose any allergies, comorbidities, or issues they might have, any medications they might be on, etc." - Dr Jaishree Noor

Not all that glitters is gold: The many side effects

However, there's a downside to it as well. While these procedures might help you with any

insecurities or make you look more conventional, they do sometimes come with side effects. These might include:

- Burns
- Bruises
- Infections
- Scars
- Sensitive or intolerant skin
- Skin breakouts
- Hormonal problems
- Anaesthesia complications

In the worst case scenario, it can be fatal, as it proved to be in Vinjam's case.

Better safe than sorry: Doctors want you to follow precautions

Both Dr Noor and Dr Lall constantly reassure FIT that cosmetic surgeries, especially the minor ones done in the run-up to wedding festivities, are safe and do not pose any risks. But it's always better to be safe than sorry. According to Dr Lall, these are some suggestions you can follow to stay cautious:

- Ensure proper hygiene.
- Follow sun protection and avoid direct sunlight.
- Avoid dust and dirt, and ensure proper hygiene.
- Ask your doctor to perform patch tests before doing any surgical procedures.
- Take your prescribed medications.
- Check with your doctor before opting for any parlour-based treatments.
- Don't compromise on a balanced diet and hydration.
- Understand your skin type before going in for any surgical procedure.

"The most important thing to remember, though, is having realistic goals and avoiding unnecessary procedures. Also, choose your medical professional wisely, be open with them, and religiously follow-up with their suggestions." - Dr Seema Oberoi Lall. (Courtesy: *The Quint*)

Not all chest pain indicates a heart attack, some may signal an impending ischemic stroke

By: Dr. Vipul Gupta

In an endeavour to aware the public that not all instances of chest pain automatically point towards a heart attack, but could also be a brain stroke, there is a dire need to raise awareness among the public on how to distinguish heart attack from a brain stroke.

Chest pain can sometimes be a symptom of an impending ischemic stroke, making it crucial for individuals to recognize the distinction in symptoms and seek prompt medical attention. It is a prevalent issue that many individuals, especially those in older age groups with common risk factors such as hypertension, diabetes, and high cholesterol, frequently mistake the symptoms of stroke for those of a heart attack.

While the public is well-aware about the typical signs of a heart attack, signs and symptoms of stroke often go unnoticed, leading patients to approach cardiologists first.

A significant challenge arises when individuals with stroke symptoms measure high

blood pressure and attribute their condition to hypertension. While elevated blood pressure is common in stroke patients, it is a reactive response and not the root cause. Rather than focusing solely on blood pressure, it is important to target the closed blood vessel responsible for the stroke.

It is thus important to recognize stroke symptoms early and seeking treatment at hospitals equipped with stroke centers. Stroke symptoms manifest differently from heart attack symptoms. Stroke patients commonly present with weakness on one side of the body, transient weakness or numbness, sudden difficulty in understanding or speaking, slurring of speech, imbalance, inability to walk, lack of coordination, and even loss of vision in one eye.

Every minute in stroke, 2 million cells die and thus even a small delay in seeking treatment can significantly affect patient outcomes. Early interventions, such as thrombolysis and mechanical thrombectomy, can effectively reverse stroke if administered within the crucial golden hours. Thromboly-

sis involves administering clot-dissolving medicine intravenously within four to five hours of a stroke. Mechanical thrombectomy, a method gaining popularity in the last decade, involves neurointerventionists using a stent retriever device to remove clots from blocked brain blood vessels, restoring normal blood flow.

It is a known fact that 20% of strokes are attributed to cardiac problems, including arrhythmias, heart valve diseases, and previous heart attacks. Patients with these cardiac issues may consult cardiologists, leading to delayed neurological intervention and potentially impacting treatment outcomes. Such public awareness platforms serve as a crucial step in educating the public on the distinctions between stroke and heart attack symptoms.

Early recognition and prompt action are key factors in achieving successful outcomes for stroke patients. (The author is the Director- Neurointervention and co-Director-Stroke unit at Artemis Agrim Institute of Neurosciences, Gurugram)

Haley loses home State South Carolina to Trump; vows to take the battle to Super Tuesday

Haley received 39.4 per cent of the votes against Trump's 59.9 percent

CHARLESTON, Feb 25: Indian-American presidential candidate Nikki Haley lost to former president Donald Trump in her home state of South Carolina, despite giving a better-than-expected fight in the Republican presidential primary.

Refusing to give up, the 52-year-old two-time former governor of South Carolina on Saturday vowed to take the fight to the Super Tuesday states on March 5 when Republican primaries are scheduled to be held in 21 States nationwide.

With nearly 90 per cent of the votes counted, Haley received 39.4 per cent of the votes against Trump's 59.9 per cent, a gap of 20 per cent.

All the polls had earlier indicated that the former UN Ambassador was trailing by 30 per cent against Trump, who further consolidated his path to a third straight GOP nomination.

A candidate needs 1,215 delegates to bag the party's nomination. So far, Haley has won 17 delegates and Trump has won 92.

"I said earlier this week that no matter what happens in South Carolina, I would continue to run for president. I'm a woman of my word. I'm not giving up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden," Haley told her supporters in this historic city, a few blocks away from where she had launched her presidential campaign about a year ago.

"What I saw today was South Carolina's frustration with our country's direction. I've seen that same frustration nationwide. I share it. I feel it to my core. I couldn't be more worried for America. It seems like our country is coming apart. But here's the thing, America will come apart if we make the wrong choices. We need to beat Joe Biden in November," she said amidst cheers from her supporters.

"I don't believe Donald Trump can beat Joe Biden. Nearly every day, Trump drives people away, including with his comments just yesterday. Today, in South Carolina,



we're getting around 40 per cent of the vote. That's about what we got in New Hampshire too.

"I'm an accountant. I know 40 per cent is not 50 per cent. But I also know 40 per cent is not some tiny group. There are huge numbers of voters in our Republican primaries who are saying they want an alternative," Haley said, making her case for her to continue her battle against Trump.

"South Carolina has spoken. We're the fourth state to do so. In the next ten days, another 21 states and territories will speak. They have the right to a real choice, not a Soviet-style election with only one candidate. And I have a duty to give them that choice. We can't afford four more years of Biden's failures or Trump's lack of focus," Haley said.

A confident Trump celebrated his victory in Columbia, South Carolina.

"There's never been a spirit like this, and I just want to say that. I have never seen the Republican Party so unified," he told his cheering supporters. Notably, he did not

mention Haley in his speech nor did he ask her to drop from the race.

Haley in his speech in Charleston congratulated Trump on his South Carolina victory. Trump, who by now has won all four Republican primaries in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina, exuded confidence that he would defeat incumbent President Biden in November.

"We're going to be up here on November 5, and we're going to look at Joe Biden, and we're gonna look him right in the eye. He's destroying our country and we're gonna say 'Joe, you're fired. Get out. Get out, Joe. You're fired,'" Trump said amidst loud applause from his audience.

In her speech, Haley criticised both Biden and Trump.

"Does anyone seriously think Joe Biden or Donald Trump will unite our country to solve our problems? One of them calls his fellow Americans fascists. The other calls his fellow Americans vermin. They aren't fighting for our country's future. They're demanding we fight each other. YOU deserve

better!" she said.

"So I will keep fighting - for them and for you and for all of America! I'm running for president to save America! And I'm running to remind us what it means to be American. In the America I know and love, we believe in each other. And we believe in America's inherent goodness. Now is the time to renew that belief. Now is the time to remember who we are," she said.

"I'm grateful that today is not the end of our story. We're headed to Michigan tomorrow. And we're headed to the Super Tuesday states throughout all of next week," Haley said.

Following the South Carolina primary, President Biden said that Trump poses a threat to the country.

"Despite the threat that Trump poses, I will say again to the American people: I have never felt more optimistic about what we can do if we come together. Because I know that America believes in standing up for our democracy, fighting for our personal freedoms, and building an economy that gives everyone a fair shot. To Republicans, Democrats, and independents who share our commitment to the core values of our nation, join us. Let's keep moving forward," Biden said. Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison said that the results of the South Carolina Republican Primary all but confirm that MAGA extremism has taken over the Republican Party — and that Donald Trump will once again be the Republican nominee for president.

"Just like he did in 2020, Donald Trump is running on an extreme, out-of-touch agenda that rolls back the clock on our personal freedoms, undermines our democracy, and rigs the economy in favour of the ultra-wealthy — and he has become only more extreme since his resounding loss to Joe Biden last cycle. The American people rejected MAGA extremism in 2018, 2020, 2022, 2023, and will reject it again at the ballot box this November," he said. (PTI)

Israeli media report progress on reaching a temporary truce in Gaza and a hostage-prisoner exchange



TEL AVIV, Feb 25: Mediators are making progress on an agreement for a weeks-long cease-fire between Israel and Hamas and the release of dozens of hostages held in Gaza as well as Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, Israeli media reported Sunday.

Israel's War Cabinet met to discuss the proposal late Saturday, but there was no official word on what they had decided. Several Israeli media outlets, citing unnamed officials, said it tacitly approved the deal and that Israel would send a delegation to Qatar for further discussions. Hamas says it has not yet been involved in the latest proposal developed by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, but the reported outline largely matches its earlier demands for the first phase of a truce. Hamas' top political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was in Cairo last week.

Israel is meanwhile developing plans for expanding its offensive to the southernmost city of Rafah, on the Gaza-Egypt border, where more than half the territory's population of 2.3 million have sought refuge in squalid tent camps, packed apartments and overflowing shelters. Aid groups have warned of a catastrophe and the US and other allies of Israel have said it must avoid harming civilians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he'll convene the Cabinet this week to "approve the operational plans for action in Rafah", including the evacuation of civilians.

A senior official from Egypt, which along with Qatar is a mediator between Israel and the Hamas militant group, said Saturday that the draft cease-fire deal includes the release of up to 40 women and older hostages in return for up to 300 Palestinian prisoners, mostly women, minors and older people.

The Egyptian official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations, said the proposed six-week pause in fighting would include allowing hundreds of trucks to bring desperately needed aid into Gaza every day, including the northern half of the besieged territory. He said that both sides agreed to continue negotiations during the pause for further releases and a permanent cease-fire.

The prime minister's office did not respond to a request for comment on the War Cabinet's discussions or the Israeli media reports.

Negotiators face an unofficial deadline of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan around March 10, a period that often sees heightened Israeli-Palestinian tensions.

Hamas has said it will not release all of the remaining hostages until Is-

rael ends its offensive and withdraws its forces from the territory, and is also demanding the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including senior militants — conditions Netanyahu has vehemently rejected.

But an earlier proposal from Hamas outlined an initial phase that resembles the reported draft agreement, indicating the two sides might be able to converge on a temporary cease-fire.

Israel declared war after the October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages were released in a cease-fire and exchange deal in November. Around 130 remain in captivity, a fourth of whom are believed to be dead.

Families of the hostages have followed the fits and starts of the negotiations with hope and anguish.

"It feels like Schindler's list. Will he be on the list or not?" Shelly Shem Tov, the mother of Omer, 21, who is held captive, told Israeli Army Radio of her son's chances of being freed in an emerging deal.

Israel responded to the attack with a massive air and ground offensive that has driven around 80 per cent of Gaza's population from their homes, putting hundreds of thousands at risk of starvation and the spread of infectious disease. The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza says 29,606 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, two-thirds of them women and children.

The ministry's death toll doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants. Israel says its troops have killed more than 10,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has devastated the territory's health sector, with less than half of hospitals even partially functioning as scores are killed each day in Israeli bombardment.

At the Emirates Hospital in Rafah, three to four newborns are placed in each of its 20 incubators, which are designed for just one. Dr Amal Ismail said two to three newborns die in a single shift, in part because many of their families live in tents in rainy, cold weather.

"No matter how much we work with them, it is all wasted," she said. "There is no health improvement because of the conditions of living in a tent."

Netanyahu has vowed to fight until "total victory", but is under intense pressure at home to reach a deal with Hamas to free the hostages. Police used a water cannon to disperse anti-government protesters in Tel Aviv late Saturday, and 18 people were arrested. Others protested in Jerusalem. (AP)

Sunak warns of 'toxic' culture in UK politics amid threats to MPs

LONDON, Feb 25: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has warned against a growing toxic culture in politics amid reports of members of Parliament facing security threats over their voting intentions in the House of Commons related to the Israel-Gaza conflict.

The 43-year-old British Indian leader issued a statement on Saturday to condemn the hijacking of protests on the streets of the country by extremists to glorify terrorism. It came as a report in "The Sunday Times" newspaper claims that three unnamed female MPs have been sanctioned additional security after concerns about their safety.

"The explosion in prejudice and antisemitism since the Hamas attacks on the 7 October [2023] are as unacceptable as they are un-British. Simply put antisemitism is racism," said Sunak in his statement.

"Legitimate protests hijacked by extremists to promote and glorify terrorism, elected representatives verbally threatened and physically, violently targeted and antisemitic tropes beamed onto our own Parliament building," he said, with reference to an offensive projection on the



Palace of Westminster recently.

"And in Parliament this week a very dangerous signal was sent that this sort of intimidation works. It is toxic for our society and our politics and is an affront to the liberties and values we hold dear here in Britain," he said of the scenes of chaos in the Commons last week over a Gaza ceasefire vote.

While he did not make a reference to it specifically, his intervention came soon after the governing Conservatives suspended party MP Lee Anderson after he claimed during an interview that Pakistani-origin London Mayor Sadiq Khan was under the control of "Islamists".

The Opposition had demanded action over the remarks, which Labour Leader Keir Starmer branded as a "racist and Islamophobic outburst".

"This isn't just embarrassing for the Conservative Party, it emboldens the worst forces in our politics," said Starmer. The row follows an article by former home secretary Suella Braverman over the weekend that claimed Islamists and extremists were taking charge in all walks of life in Britain, attacked as "extreme rhetoric" by the Opposition parties.

Braverman, sacked from the Cabinet by Sunak last year, was reacting to Commons

Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle saying that he had selected certain amendments to a motion related to ceasefire in Gaza in a bid to ensure all options were on the table for MPs to vote on and to protect MPs' safety.

According to "The Sunday Times" report, UK Security Minister Tom Tugendhat has been working with the Home Office, the police and the parliamentary authorities to significantly enhance the safety and security of MPs. As part of the overhaul, the royal and VIP executive committee (RAVEC), which is responsible for the security of the royal family as well as senior politicians including the prime minister and home secretary, has been brought in to help assess the threat to MPs.

"Many MPs are petrified by the abuse they are facing," a senior security source was quoted as saying.

It is understood that the female MPs requiring additional security have been provided with close protection by private companies, along with chauffeur-driven cars, which are normally provided only to senior members of the cabinet and the leader of the opposition. (PTI)

Sri Lanka to end visa extensions granted to war-hit Russian and Ukrainian tourists

COLOMBO, Feb 25: Thousands of Russians and Ukrainians staying in Sri Lanka on extended visas due to the war have been asked to leave the island nation within two weeks, officials said.

The immigration controller has issued a notice to the Tourism Ministry that the Russian and Ukrainian tourists must leave the country within two weeks from February 23 as their visas have lapsed, they said.

However, President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office issued a notice that says he has ordered an investigation as to how the decision to ask them to leave had been made without a cabinet decision to revoke the previous extension of stay.

The President's Media Division said that the Sri Lankan government has not officially decided to revoke the visa extensions previously granted to these tourists.

Russian and Ukrainian tourists had been allowed extended stays in the country due to the war breaking out between the two European countries. Nearly 300,000 Russians and 20,000 Ukrainians have arrived in Sri Lanka since the outbreak of the war in 2022.

However, the number of tourists currently residing on the island nation on extended visas is not available. Authorities said the decision to allow them longer stays was then made because of flight shortages.

Immigration authorities said there have been complaints of abuse of tourist visas by Russian and Ukrainian nationals running illegal businesses, employing foreigners, and deploying payment methods for services bypassing local systems. (PTI)

Pak's poll body gears up to hold President's election by March 9

ISLAMABAD, Feb 25: Still struggling to address the rigging allegations after general elections in the country, Pakistan is now gearing up to elect the new president by March 9. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is set to hold an election for the office of the country's president by March 9, two days before the retirement of half of the 100-member Senate.

The sources said the Senate elections were also due in the first week of March, but because of the delay in the general elections of the National and provincial assemblies, the Senate elections will now be held either in the last week of March or the first week of April which means the upper house will remain dysfunctional and incomplete for some period.

According to a PPP leader, it is because of the upcoming presidential election and to ensure Zardari's win that the party has stopped its two senators, Nisar Khuhro and Jam Mahtab Dahar, from taking the oath as MPs in the Sindh Assembly. According to the formula applied for the president's election, the vote of a senator is counted as a single vote, whereas in the Sindh Assembly, one vote will be equal to nearly four votes.

In this way, Zardari will get benefit in the presidential elections. Incumbent President Dr Arif Alvi is already on an extended tenure after completing his five-year term on September 9 last year. Article 44(1)

of the Constitution says that the president will hold office for a term of five years from the day he assumes charge, but he continues to hold the office until a successor is chosen.

Dr Alvi is the country's fourth democratically elected president to complete the five-year term. The three presidents before Dr Alvi who completed their full terms were Chaudhary Fazal Elahi (fifth president, from 1973 to 1978), Asif Ali Zardari (11th, from 2008 to 2013), and Mamnoon Hussain (12th, from 2013 to 2018).

Therefore, Dr Alvi is the third consecutive president to have a full term and the first one to have an extended term due to an incomplete electoral college, which comprises the National Assembly, Senate and the four provincial assemblies. The term-wise data of senators suggests that the PML-N and the PPP stand to lose a large chunk of their members — 69 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively — as they retire on March 11 after completing their terms.

But after the February 8 polls, both the PML-N and PPP will be able to add to their tally in the Senate. The PTI, however, will be at a definite disadvantage if it fails to conduct the intra-party elections before the Senate polls, and it may have to depend on the SIC to get representation in the upper house of the parliament. (PTI)

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British Indian doctor's rock band embarks on UK-wide tour

LONDON, Feb 25: A 25-year-old British Indian doctor whose passion for music resulted in a band with some of his fellow medical colleagues has embarked on his first UK-wide tour, with the launch show in London recently proving a sell-out.

Gulzar (Gulz) Singh Dhanoya started the indie-rock band named Gulz during his university days as a medical student. It was over the COVID pandemic that the singer-songwriter plucked up the courage to put out some of his musical creations onto the audio streaming service SoundCloud and soon this one-man bedroom project struck a chord with an ever-expanding fan base. The lead singer and songwriter is now busy rehearsing with his four bandmates for their next live gig in Birmingham on March 16.

"How it usually works is that at the moment I go away and think of an idea for a song and it's very bare bones. Then we go into a studio rehearsal room and all of us together kind of think about our parts and we just keep playing it over and over. It's a great way to kind of balance our creative ideas," Gulz told PTI.

While two of his other bandmates are also National Health Service (NHS) doctors like him, two are professionals in other fields which he feels helps bring some flexibility to striking a balance with late-night hospital shifts. He admits some-



times wondering how they are all able to commit to their music with stressful full-time jobs.

"It's a huge commitment. Obviously, the working day is long and then it's fitting in shows and rehearsals and social media stuff. It's like a second job and one that doesn't realistically pay compared to a 'normal' job. It's very cliché, but it's just because we love it," he said.

Born in Newcastle to a Punjabi father born in India and mother born in Southall, west London, music was a part of Gulz's life from a very young age. From strains of Mohammed Rafi to Stevie Wonder, his musical influences were an eclectic mix — something that chimes with the kind of tunes he is now creating lyrically and musically.

"I began by sort of writing music

that sounds like the music I like and have tried to retain that in some ways. I just try to weave certain themes of my life at the time into the stuff that I'm writing, be it relationships and breakups or just having some fun," he said.

Currently based in Brighton and completing his second foundation year as a junior doctor in the National Health Service (NHS), Gulz plans to take some time off later this year to focus entirely on music for some time. Asked about the ongoing strikes by NHS junior doctors demanding better pay and working conditions, Dr Dhanoya says the band fully supports their medical colleagues in the industrial action.

"We always hope the next set of strikes will be the last one because junior doctors don't want to have to

strike. But sadly there's no other way to be heard by the government. The working conditions and pay right now are really not acceptable. There's so much responsibility that doctors have, with people's lives at stake literally, and the working conditions and pay do not reflect that at all," he said, pointing out that in real terms all his colleagues are fighting for is an extra GBP 5 an hour.

Juggling their work shifts and rehearsals, the band is all set to perform at the Sunflower Lounge in Birmingham and then their tour is slotted for his home crowd in Newcastle followed by Manchester towards the end of next month. Beyond that, Gulz is open to bookings and asking if a tour to India may be in the offing, the doctor-musician sounds very excited at the prospect of playing a gig in the country he has so far only visited with family to spend time with cousins in Punjab.

"After August, I'm out of contract, which sounds dramatic but it's actually a really good thing because it means that I've got a lot more flexibility in my time and work. So, I would love to go to India and perform, in case any promoters out there want to reach out," he said.

Meanwhile, the band — dubbed the doctors/rockers — have sold-out shows in the UK to look forward to with tickets selling out fast on their socials. (PTI)

Mizoram Assembly has been addressed by three Presidents

Vice president Dhankhar to address Mizoram Assembly today

AIZAWL, Feb 25: Vice president Jagdeep Dhankhar is scheduled to address the ongoing budget session of the Mizoram Assembly on Monday, a senior official said.

State Assembly commissioner and secretary Vanlalthingli told PTI that the vice president will address the House around 12.45 pm after attending the convocation of Mizoram University (MZU) at Tanhril on the western outskirts of Aizawl.

Dhankhar will arrive on Monday on a day visit to the northeastern state and he will return to Delhi after attending the convocation of MZU and addressing the assembly, officials said.



He will be the second vice president after M Venkaiah Naidu to address the state assembly, they said.

during the Mizo National Front (MNF) rule under former chief minister Zoramthanga on March 10, 2022.

So far, Mizoram Assembly has been addressed by three Presidents -- Dr APJ Abdul Kalam in September 2005, Ram Nath Kovind in November 2017 and Droupadi Murmu in November 2022.

As per schedule, the assembly session will start at 10.30 am on Monday and Question Hour will be held between 10.30 am and 11.30 am, Vanlalthingli said.

Taxation Minister Dr Vanlalhana will introduce 'The Mizoram Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2024', she said. (PTI)

Violence rocks Imphal, claims one



IMPHAL, Feb 25: Series of violence including bomb blasts and burning and ransacking of offices of civil society organisations rocked Imphal on recently, and also claiming the life of a student in one of the blasts.

One of the blasts that killed a student and injured another one occurred inside the premises of the All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) located inside the DM University campus in the heart of Imphal last night, around 10 pm.

The deceased has been identified as Oinam Kenegy (24) of Upokpi village in Bishnupur district who was staying at the boys' hostel inside DM University. He studied at DM College of Science.

He succumbed to splinter injuries at a private hospital in Imphal where he was rushed along with the other injured student identified as Salam Michael (24) of Keibul Lamjao of the same district. He is also a student of the same college.

The police rushed to the spot soon after the blast and took stock of the situation. They suspected perpetrators using a remote control device to trigger the blast.

Around the same time, miscre-

ants also hurled and exploded a hand grenade at the house of an individual in Imphal West district.

No sooner had the blast at the premises of the students' body took place, miscreants set on fire the office of the United Committee Manipur (UCM) where the office of the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) also housed.

The miscreants also torched the offices of Macha Leima (a women based organisation) in Imphal's Palace Compound and a school runs by the organisation, Manipur Peace and Integrity (MAPI) Council at Wangkhei and Nongpok Leingak Apunba Nupi Lup at Wangkhei Keithel Ashangbi.

The offices of Coalitions Against Drugs and Alcohol (CADA) at Pureiromba Khongnangkhang, United People's Front (UPF) and National Identity Protection Committee (NIPCO) were also vandalised.

People who witnessed some of the incidents alleged that the miscreants armed with sophisticated weapons came on four-wheelers while committing the arsons and vandalism.

Meanwhile, many including

student bodies, UCM and CO-COMI strongly condemned last night's blasts, arson and vandalism.

While condemning the blast at the AMSU office, students of various schools and colleges today carried out a protest rally on the streets in Imphal.

While chanting various slogans against the attack on the student body's office, the students demanded booking of the culprit(s) involved in the blast.

Locals of Upokpi where the deceased hailed from also formed a joint action committee (JAC) in connection with the killing of the student.

The JAC set a 48-hour deadline to the government to arrest the culprit(s) while declaring that the dead body of the student will not be accepted until the demands put forward by the JAC to the government are not addressed.

The UCM, while condemning the setting afire of its office, termed the arson as an attempt to erase the history of Manipur while claiming that many documents related to the movement for protection of the integrity of Manipur were reduced to ashes in the arson.

These documents could not be acquired now even if we pay crores and crores of rupees, UCM president Joychandra Konthoujam said in a press conference held at Manipur Press Club today.

He questioned the inaction on the part of the police and intelligence while asserting that the office was located only around 200 meters away from the Lamphel police station of Imphal West district. (NNN)

NSCN-IM condemns killing of leader

DIMAPUR, FEB 25: The NSCN-IM has strongly condemned the killing of one of its leaders in Tizit, Mon district of Nagaland, two days ago.

"The killing of Kilonser Khampei Opeiham Konyak by unidentified assailants is unfortunate and appalling. Such dastardly crime should be condemned by all," the NSCN-IM said today in a statement.

The NSCN-IM also said it is against senseless killings among the Nagas when "we should be devoting all our energies towards achieving lasting peace and reconciliation". The NSCN-IM added that this kind of killing is in contrast to what the Nagas stand for in the context of the ongoing peace process. (NNN)

Shillong Bar Association building ravaged by fire

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: A major fire engulfed the Shillong Bar Association building located behind the East Khasi Hills district office on Saturday night.

The incident, reported around 10:15 PM, saw firefighters battling the blaze for several hours.

While the cause of the fire remains under investigation, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, who visited the site, suspects electrical issues may have been involved.

"We're still determining the exact cause, but initial indications point towards electrical problems," Chief Minister Sangma stated.

Initiatives have commenced to restore peace in state: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, Feb 25: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Sunday said peace initiatives have commenced to address ethnic tensions in the state.

Emphasising the government's foremost responsibility to safeguard lives, property, and the state's integrity, Singh assured citizens of appropriate security measures in place.

"We don't need to panic...I want to assure people that security forces have been appropriately deployed in all the areas to tackle the situation," he said at the Sanaroisingi Numit (Players Day) function here. He reiterated the commitment to pursuing peace through dialogue and urged people to trust the government's efforts.

"To bring about a political solution, the process for peace and talks has started so that everyone can live in peace. We need to revive our earlier lives."

Singh also addressed pressing issues such as drug abuse and demographic shifts, highlighting the government's initiatives to combat drug addiction and maintain demographic balance.

"Around 1.5 lakh people out of 30 lakh are drug users. This is the primary reason why the state government announced the war on drugs in 2018," Singh said.

"From 2006 to 2018, some 1,400 new villages have cropped up in the state out of nowhere creating demographic imbalances," he added. Singh reiterated that the state government will identify the illegal immigrants with 1961 as the base year.



"We do politics to secure the present and future generation. We want to be very clear. We will fence the borders, cancel Free Movement Regime and identify all illegal immigrants in the state who came after 1961. It's our commitment," he said.

Singh also announced that all the gold medalists of the 36th and 37th National Games would be provided with government jobs.

He said Wushu player Naorem Roshibina Devi, who won silver at the 19th Asian Games at Hangzhou in China, would be appointed as a DSP. (PTI)

Huge cache of arms, ammunition recovered in Manipur



IMPHAL, Feb 25: The Manipur Police have recovered a huge cache of arms and explosives during search operations at two villages in Churachandpur district.

Security forces seized four firearms, one improvised long-range heavy mortar and ammunition on Saturday from the outskirts of D Haolenjang village, a police statement said.

Fake currency notes with a total face value of ₹ 1,200 were also seized from there, it said.

During another search operation, a police team recovered 10 guns, eight gelatin sticks and ammunition from Moljang village in Churachandpur, the statement issued by the police control room said.

In a separate operation, three persons were arrested from

Keisampat junction in Imphal West district after two SLR rifles were seized from their possession, an officer said.

A case has been registered against them, and the investigation is underway, he said.

Manipur has been rocked by ethnic violence since May last year and over 180 people were killed.

The violence erupted on May 3 after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mostly in the hill districts. (PTI)

Manipur CM announces government jobs for 133 sports persons

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: A total of 133 sport-persons who brought laurels for India and Manipur would be provided with state government jobs suitable to them.

This was announced by Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh while speaking as chief guest at the Players' Day (Sannaroisingi Numit) observation 2024 at Indoor Hall in Khuman Lampak Sports Complex, Imphal on Sunday.

Chief minister N Singh said that the state government offers a post of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) to Naorem Roshibina Devi (Female) Wushu player from Manipur who was presented with the prestigious Arjuna Award 2023 by the President of India, Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan on January 9, 2024.

This is encouraging in her efforts in the field of sports which she is trying to enter in the forthcoming Olympic games eyeing a medal.

Naorem Roshibina Devi has won one Silver Medal in the 19th Asian Games held in Hangzhou, China in 2023; One Silver Medal in the World Wushu Championship in Texas, United States of America in 2023; and one Gold Medal in the Moscow Wushu Stars Championship in Moscow, Russia in 2023.

2 Cong MLAs, equal number of NPP legislators join BJP in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, Feb 25: In a boost to the ruling BJP in Arunachal Pradesh ahead of polls, two Congress MLAs and as many legislators from the National People's Party (NPP) joined the ruling BJP on Sunday.

The Congress and NPP now have two MLAs each in the 60-member assembly.

Senior Congress MLA and former union minister Ninong Ering (Pasighat West seat) and Wanglin Lowangdong (Borduria-Bogapani constituency) joined the saffron party during a function at its headquarters here.

NPP's Mutchu Mithi (Roing seat) and Gokar Basar (Basar constituency) also became a part of the BJP at the event, which was attended by chief minister Pema Khandu.

With Sunday's development, the BJP now has 53 MLAs in the House, while three independent MLAs extend outside support to the government.

The Lok Sabha elections and assembly polls will be simultaneously held in the northeastern state later this year. (PTI)



Sangma stressed the importance of striking a balance between ecology and economy

Meghalaya CM to review coke plant applications amid environmental concerns

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma said that he would personally scrutinize the applications of five coke plants recently granted Consent to Establish (CTE) by the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) and take necessary action if any norms are violated.

However, he cautioned against labelling coke plants or industries as 'villains', emphasizing Meghalaya's need for economic growth, investments, and job creation.

The Meghalaya chief minister's remarks came in response to a zero-hour notice raised by UDP MLA Nujorki Sungho during the assembly session, expressing concern over the MSPCB's decision to grant fresh CTE to five coke plants in East Jaintia Hills district.

Sungho highlighted the negative environmental impact of



coke plants, referring to the region as the "cancer capital".

In his response, Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma assured that norms must be followed, and any violations would face necessary action according to the law.

He pledged to personally review each application and convene a meeting with the

MSPCB to address the matter.

However, CM Sangma stressed the importance of striking a balance between ecology and economy, acknowledging the need for livelihoods and economic growth while considering environmental concerns.

He cautioned against demonizing all industrial activities,

noting that while there are concerns, not every plant or industry should be labelled as harmful.

The Meghalaya CM emphasized the need for a nuanced approach and highlighted various factors contributing to health issues in the state, cautioning against oversimplifying the situation.

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NOTICE

This is for general information to all the eligible candidates who have applied for various Grade-III and Grade-IV posts against the advertisement No. ACEH/E(G)/30/2023-24/5, Dtd. 20/10/2023, that the Written Test for Grade —III posts shall be held on as detailed below:-

Sl. No.	Name of Post	Date & Time of Written Test	Venue of Written Test	Date of issue of Admit Card/Calling letter
1.	L.D. Assistant	10/03/2024 Morning 9:00 AM to 12:00 Noon	D.A.V. H.S. School, Diphu. Rengbonghom H.S. School, Diphu.	29/02/2024
2.	Computer Operator	10/03/2024 Afternoon 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM	Rengbonghom H.S. School, Diphu.	29/02/2024
3.	Section Assistant	11/03/2024 Morning 9:00 AM to 12:00 Noon	D.A.V. H.S. School, Diphu. Rengbonghom H.S. School, Diphu	29/02/2024
4.	Welder	11/03/2024 Afternoon 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM	D.A.V. H.S. School, Diphu.	29/02/2024
5.	Plumber	11/03/2024 Afternoon 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM	Rengbonghom H.S. School, Diphu	29/02/2024

All the eligible candidates are requested to collect their Admit Cards / Calling Letter from the office of the undersigned during office hours as per dates mentioned as above and it is mandatory to bring the Admit Card to the Examination Hall for appearing in the written Test.

It is to be mentioned here that no Admit Card / Calling Letter shall be sent to the candidates by post individually.

Sd/-
Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.
Cum
Member Secretary,
Interview and Selection Board.
Dated Diphu, the 23/02/2024.

Memo No. ACEH/E(G)/30/2023-24/1/- A,

Ritesh Pandey resigns from BSP, joins BJP

LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Ahead of the upcoming general elections, BSP Lok Sabha MP from Ambedkar Nagar Ritesh Pandey on Sunday resigned from the party's primary membership and joined the BJP in New Delhi.

In his resignation letter addressed to BSP president Mayawati, Pandey said he has come to the conclusion that the party does not need his service as neither has he been called for meetings for a long time nor has the party leadership spoken to him.

He shared his resignation letter on X.

"For a long time, neither am I being called to attend party meetings nor has the party leadership spoken to me. I made numerous efforts to get in touch with and meet you (Mayawati) and the top leadership of the party but it did not yield any result," Pandey said in his letter.

"During this time, I continuously met workers and supporters of other parties in my area and was also involved in various works going on in the constituency. Hence, I have come to the conclusion that the party does not need my service and



presence," he said.

"So, I do not have any other option apart from resigning from the primary membership of the party. The decision to break the relationship with the party is a difficult decision from the emotional point of view," he added. Pandey further urged Mayawati to accept his resignation.

Hours later, he joined the BJP in the presence of senior party leaders, including Uttar Pradesh in-charge Baijayant Jay Panda, national general secretary Tarun Chugh, Uttar Pradesh unit chief Bhupendra Singh, Rajya MP

and party's national media in-charge Anil Baluni.

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak was also among those present.

Welcoming Pandey into the party fold, Baluni said impressed by the BJP's policies and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, a large number of political and social workers want to join the party.

"In this series, a very important personality, Ritesh Pandey, the BSP MP from Uttar Pradesh's Ambedkar Nagar Lok Sabha constituency, has joined the BJP today," Baluni said at a

press conference at the BJP headquarters here.

"A strong wind is blowing in favour of Prime Minister Modi," he added.

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pathak said Pandey has taken a "courageous step" by joining the BJP.

He said Pandey decided to join the BJP after seeing the all-round development of the country and to contribute to the prime minister's resolve to make India a developed nation.

"I heartily welcome Ritesh Pandey into the BJP family and assure you that the way Ritesh Pandey has taken the courageous step of becoming a BJP member, he will unite the youth of Uttar Pradesh to fulfil Prime Minister Modi's dream of making India a developed country," Pathak said.

"Crores of youths of the country are ready to work with Prime Minister Modi today, accepting him as their leader," he said. Pathak said Pandey, a management graduate, dedicated his life to social work apart from studies.

"His father Rakesh Pandey, who is a member of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, was the Lok

Sabha MP from Ambedkar Nagar in the past. While working with him and participating in social activities, Ritesh Pandey became popular and was elected to the Lok Sabha from Ambedkar Nagar," he added.

Speaking at the press conference, Pandey thanked the BJP leadership for giving him the party's primary membership with "a lot of love and respect".

"I have come forward to work and contribute to Prime Minister Modi's vision for a 'Viksit Bharat' under his leadership," he said.

"I want to thank respected Nadda ji for giving me a place in this family. I would also like to thank the home minister of the country who guided me throughout this journey," he said.

Pandey said he will work with "full dedication" under the BJP leadership and help the party achieve its target of winning 400-plus seats in the Lok Sabha polls.

BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh said he is confident that Pandey will carry forward the prime minister's vision for a 'Viksit Bharat'. (PTI)

Independent fact-finding team stopped by police on way to Sandeshkhali



KOLKATA, Feb 25: Six members of an independent fact-finding committee led by former Chief Justice of Patna High Court L Narasimha Reddy were stopped by police as they were proceeding to troubled Sandeshkhali area in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district to probe alleged incidents of atrocities on women.

Citing Section 144 CrPc was in force in parts of Sandeshkhali and it would not be prudent to allow them access to the area even in groups of four-five, senior police officers stopped their convoy at the Bhojhat area, which is around 52 km from the riverine area, on Basanti Highway.

Reddy, accompanied by former IPS officer Raj Pal Singh, former National Commission for Women member Charu Wali Khanna, advocates O P Vyas and Bhavna Bajaj, and senior journalist Sanjeev Nayak, sat on the wayside vowing to proceed to the area as high drama unfolded.

The six were detained by police and taken in a vehicle and later released, a police officer said.

"This is completely illegal. We have told the police personnel as law-abiding citizens we will not break rules. No curfew has been imposed in Sandeshkhali. So we can go in two groups. At least two of our women members should be allowed to visit the females who had bore the brunt of atrocities of musclemen enjoying political patronage and impunity from police action in all these days till the media unravelled the shocking truth", Reddy said.

Claiming they were given a copy of the section 144 order as they set off for the journey, he said "The administration cannot stop civil society members of the country to interact with victims of human rights violation. What they (administration) are scared to hide".

He recalled the panel members had been stopped from visiting certain pockets of Howrah, signed by clashes between two groups under Ram Navami, halted at Howrah Bridge last year though others from the ruling party were allowed to go.

Another member of the group told reporters they would "peacefully sit on one side of the road", without hindering the movement of vehicles till being allowed to proceed.

Khanna said "What they have done is nothing but murder of democracy. They have illegally detained us." The group comprising former judge, bureaucrats and journalist was slated to visit Sandeshkhali on February 25 to also probe alleged incidents of Trinamool Congress leaders grabbing residents' land to convert into Bheris (fish farm).

They were scheduled to visit Majherpara, Natun para, Patra para and Naskarpura Ras temple under the jurisdiction of Sandeshkhali police station limits. The committee is slated to submit a report to the constitutional authorities.

Asked about the police action against the fact-finding team, Sujit Basu, one of the two West Bengal ministers who visited Sandeshkhali for the second day on Sunday, told reporters, "I don't have any knowledge or information about that".

Meanwhile, ISF leader Ayesha Bibi was arrested from Sandeshkhali on Sunday for her alleged involvement in burning poultry farms of arrested local TMC leader Shibaprasad Hazra, an officer said.

A few days back a fact-finding team of BJP consisting of Union minister Annappurna Devi, Pratima Bhowmik, MP Sunita Duggal, Kavita Patidar, Sangeeta Yadav and Rajya Sabha member and former director general of police of Uttar Pradesh Brij Lal was stopped by police from entering Sandeshkhali.

On Saturday, a TMC delegation consisting of two West Bengal ministers Partha Bhowmik and Sujit Basu visited different parts of the riverine area, interacted with locals and promised their grievances will be addressed expeditiously.

They had also promised all the guilty involved in alleged atrocities will be brought to book and the ruling party has 'zero tolerance' to wrongdoings of a section of local leaders. (PTI)

K'taka: BJP, Congress grappling with challenges to pick winning horses for LS elections

BENGALURU, Feb 25: The BJP and the ruling Congress -- the key contenders in the Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka -- are grappling with the challenges of finding winning candidates in several constituencies with stakes high for the two national parties.

The BJP had swept the 2019 general elections, bagging 25 of the total 28 seats in the state, while an independent backed by the party had also emerged victorious.

The Congress and the JD(S) headed by former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, which were running a coalition government back then and fought the election together, had come a cropper winning just one seat each.

But the political scene has changed significantly: The Congress scored a thumping victory in the Assembly elections in May last year and now appears battle-ready, determined to put up a strong show in the Lok Sabha polls.

It is also a role reversal of sorts for JD(S) which joined the BJP-led NDA in September last year and wants to prove that it's still a force to reckon with, particularly in South Karnataka.

The coming poll is also seen as a "litmus test" for state BJP President B Y Vijayendra, who has the onerous task of leading the party to retain its supremacy in the Lok Sabha elections.

Both the BJP and the Congress have their share of challenges, with finding winning horses on top of this list.

The BJP is facing resistance against fielding sitting members of Lok Sabha once again in some constituencies while also facing alliance compulsions to accommodate its new partner JD(S), according to party sources.

The Congress, which won 135 out of a total 224 seats in the Assembly elections, is keen to field some Ministers but they are shying away, admitted a senior ruling party leader.

The BJP, banking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma, is aiming to win all 28 seats, while a resurgent Congress is targeting to bag 20 by highlighting that it has walked the talk by implementing five guarantee schemes.

The Congress had initially tasked ministers with identifying potential candidates but the party's state President and deputy chief minister D K Shivakumar had said recently that reports received were not satisfactory.

Shivakumar has said that the party has decided to commission one more survey to identify winnable candidates.

A Congress leader said having faced a rout in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and witnessing the defeat of several top leaders

including M Mallikarjun Kharge, Veerappa Moily, and K H Muniyappa, despite being in power in the state in alliance with JD(S), many senior leaders don't want to enter the fray, as the party's prospects at the national level still don't look promising.

The Congress' performance in this election is another key test of sorts for Shivakumar, who has made no secret of his ambition to become Chief Minister, amid speculations of change in guard mid-way of the Assembly term.

According to BJP insiders, the party is having some trouble in seats such as Bidar, Bellary, Haveri, Udupi-Chikmagalur, Dakshina Kannada, Koppal, Davangere, Chamarajanagar, Belgaum and Bijapur, where the party either is facing resistance mostly from within against fielding the sitting LS member, or there is lack of clarity as who the candidate should be.

Chamarajanagar MP V Srinivas Prasad and Haveri MP Shivakumar Udasi have already announced retirement from electoral politics after the current term ends.

"However, candidates related issues may not majorly impact party's prospects in several of these segments as PM Modi is the key and main factor for the BJP's election fight and campaign, along with the Hindutva factor this time with consecration of Ram Lalla idol at Ram Mandir in Ayodhya," a party functionary said.

With winning momentum on our side along with having a strong central leadership, despite any initial troubles, everyone will ultimately fall in line and work for the victory of the candidate decided by the party, whoever it is, old or new," he said.

Ensuring a BJP sweep is also crucial for veteran leader B S Yediyurappa's son Vijayendra to consolidate his position as the party's state President and silence critics who have questioned his selection for the post.

The BJP will also have to make space for its alliance partner JD(S), by ceding some seats to the party in the old Mysuru region (south Karnataka) from where the regional party draws its strength from. Seat sharing talks are on between both parties.

Though there is no official confirmation, as per information available so far, JD(S) may contest in three to four seats. There may be chances of a candidate from the JD(S) contesting under the BJP symbol.

For the BJP and JD(S) alliance to click, it goes without saying that ground level coordination and understanding among their workers and transfer of votes to each other are essential. (PTI)

SP chief Akhilesh joins Rahul led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra

AGRA (UP), Feb 25: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav joined Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Agra on Sunday, days after the two parties reached a seat-sharing arrangement in Uttar Pradesh for the Lok Sabha polls.

Party workers of the SP and the Congress raised slogans in their support as the two leaders, accompanied by Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, waved at the crowd gathered here for the yatra.

Attacking the government in his address on the occasion, Yadav said, "Today, farmers are standing against the government. The government is scared of the power of farmers. In the coming time, the BJP will be removed and the INDIA coalition government will give respect to farmers."

He added that the BJP has not given the backward classes, Dalits and minority communities the respect they deserve.

Senior Congress leader in Uttar Pradesh Pradeep Mathur was also present on the occasion. Earlier, the leaders paid floral tributes at a statue of B R Ambedkar in Agra.

"The Agra leg of the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' has definitely proved to be an ice-breaker. The atmosphere is wonderful, workers of both parties are enthusiastic. This will definitely have a positive impact in the Lok Sabha elections for both the parties," Mathur told PTI.

"Under the leadership of Rahulji, Priyankaji and Akhileshji, we will spring a surprise in the Lok Sabha elections," he added. Mathur is a former Congress Legislature Party leader in the Uttar Pradesh assembly. (PTI)

Fadnavis trying to kill me, will march right away to his Mumbai home, says Jarange

MUMBAI, Feb 25: Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Sunday said he would march to Mumbai and protest outside the residence of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis who he accused of trying to kill him.

The announcement, made at the end of a speech of more than one hour in Antarwali Sarati in Jalna in which Jarange made several allegations against Fadnavis, took his supporters by surprise.

Asked about Jarange's statements later, Fadnavis just said "I did not hear what he spoke".

"Some people are being lured and pressured to make false allegations against me. Fadnavis is behind these conspiracies. He wants to kill me. I am ready to march to Sagar bungalow (Fadnavis' official residence in Mumbai's Malabar Hill) right away," Jarange said.

The announcement led to chaos at the site, where the activist's supporters had gathered in large numbers.

Even as some of them tried to take away his microphone, Jarange said he would march to Mumbai alone and all he needed was a stick for support.

He said allegations against him were levelled once the Maratha quota bill was passed in the Maharashtra legislature on February 20.

"How come these people realised my so-called mistakes now and began speaking about them," Jarange asked.

He also spoke about the "Brahminical tricks" of Fadnavis even while asserting that his allegations were not against "all Brahmins".

"Fadnavis does not like anyone to be more popular than him. It is because of Fadnavis that police complaints were filed against Maratha activists despite their peaceful protests. The court has allowed us to protest peacefully. Then why were police complaints filed," he told a regional news channel.

"I am not backing down from my demand to include Marathas in the OBC segment and issuing of Kunbi certificates. There was a plan to finish me by poisoning me through saline. This government is trying to demean major communities through politic tricks," he alleged.

Hitting back, BJP MLA Nitesh Rane warned Jarange that he would have to cross a "huge wall of party workers" to reach Fadnavis, adding that the quota activist was "now reading from a script".

"He should enter politics but he should not stoop low to make such allegations against Fadnavis," Rane said.

Mumbai BJP MLA Atul Bhatkalkar said Jarange's "true face" was now in the open for all to see.

"The Maharashtra government has given 10 per cent reservation to the Maratha community (through a bill passed in the Legislature on February 20). Why is he continuing to protest? Fadnavis was CM for five years and everyone knows him. His image is not going to be affected by Jarange's allegations," Bhatkalkar said.

Mumbai BJP chief Ashish Shelar said anyone speaking in this condemnable manner against Fadnavis must be careful. (PTI)

BSP MPs must introspect whether they followed party guidelines: Mayawati

LUCKNOW, Feb 25: BSP chief Mayawati on Sunday asked her party MPs to introspect whether they followed the guidelines given to them in the interest of the party.

Mayawati's remarks came after BSP Lok Sabha MP from Ambedkar Nagar Ritesh Pandey resigned from the party's primary membership ahead of the Lok Sabha elections and joined the BJP in New Delhi.

"Along with the BSP political party, there is also a movement dedicated to the mission of self-respect and self-respect of the most revered Baba Saheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar due to which the policy and working style of this party is different from the capitalist parties of the country. Keeping this in mind, the party also fields its candidates in the elections," Mayawati said in a series of posts on 'X' in Hindi.

"After meeting this criterion, the BSP MPs must introspect whether they took proper care of the people in their area? Did they devote full time in their area? Also did they properly follow the guidelines given from time to time in the interest of the party and the movement?" she said. The BSP chief further said, "In such a situation, it is possible to give tickets to most of the Lok Sabha MPs, especially when they are seen wandering here and there in their own interests and are in the news for negative reasons. It

is unfair for the media to publicise this as a weakness of the party despite knowing all this. The interest of the BSP is above all, she said. In his resignation letter addressed to the BSP president, Pandey said he has come to the conclusion that the party does not need his service as neither has he been called for meetings for a long time nor has the party leadership spoken to him.

He shared his resignation letter on X. "For a long time, neither am I being called to attend party meetings nor has the party leadership spoken to me. I made numerous efforts to get in touch with and meet you (Mayawati) and the top leadership of the party but it did not yield any result," Pandey said in his resignation letter.

"During this time, I continuously met workers and supporters of other parties in my area and was also involved in various works going on in the constituency. Hence, I have come to the conclusion that the party does not need my service and presence," he said.

"So, I do not have any other option apart from resigning from the primary membership of the party. The decision to break the relationship with the party is a difficult decision from the emotional point of view," he added urging Mayawati to accept his resignation. (PTI)

Kerala: Last outpost of religious harmony, coexistence and brotherhood, says CM Vijayan

THRISSUR (KERALA), Feb 25: Kerala is the last outpost of religious harmony, coexistence and brotherhood, chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Sunday and urged the cultural leaders to combat communalism and fascism in the country.

Vijayan said the cultural history of the country was rich with diversity. Its democracy will slip into fascism when a culture of uniformity is imposed, he added.

The chief minister was speaking at a Face-to-Face Programme with people from the culture sector in the state as part of the Nava Kerala Sadas, government's public outreach programme.

He said democracy slips into fascism when a culture of uniformity such as one language, one culture, one religion, are imposed and added that the spirit of federalism should be protected in the cultural sector as well.

"Kerala is the last outpost of religious harmony, co-existence and brotherhood. It must not be lost. We must be able to strengthen the emotion that is India while preserving the innate culture of Kerala," the Left leader said.

He said during the deliberations on the future of Kerala, the opinions of those from the cultural field should be considered with utmost importance.

"Effective intervention from the cultural sector is essential to combating the destructive communalism that is gaining ground in contemporary India," Vijayan said.

He said it was political and cultural brotherhood that



has made Kerala what it is today.

"If art and the artist want to survive, if the writings and the writers need to survive, we need to combat the forces that destroy the very foundation of unity among the people. There is no point in talking about freedom of expression once fascism reaches our doorstep," he added.

Vijayan said Kerala has a Leftist mindset which has led to the development and high standard of living which is better than most of the states.

The chief minister also listed out the various initiatives taken by the Left government to protect and promote the art and culture in the state. (PTI)

Divine experience, says PM Modi after scuba diving to perform prayers at ancient Dwarka city

DEVBHUMI DWARKA, Feb 25: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday went scuba diving off the Panchkui beach coast here in Gujarat and performed prayers as he witnessed the ancient Dwarka city of Lord Krishna, which is submerged in the waters. To pray there was a "very divine experience," he said.

Wearing a white diving helmet and ochre robes, Modi sat cross-legged on the sea bed, folded his hands in prayers while being helped by the Navy divers and waved peacock feathers before offering them to Lord Krishna.

"More than courage, it was faith," he said after coming out of the waters.

Scuba diving is conducted off the coast of Dwarka near Beyt Dwarka island, where people can see the underwater remains of ancient Dwarka that have been excavated by archaeologists.

Sharing his experience while ad-

ressing a gathering here later in the day, Modi said when he was touching the ancient city, the picture of India's grandeur of the 21st century flashed before his eyes, and he remained inside the waters for a long time.

"The vision of Dwarka in the sea has further strengthened my resolve of a developed India," he said.

The PM also shared his experience with some photographs on X.

"To pray in the city of Dwarka, which is immersed in the waters, was a very divine experience. I felt connected to an ancient era of spiritual grandeur and timeless devotion. May Bhagwan Shri Krishna bless us all," he said in the post on X. Addressing the gathering here, Modi said he was overwhelmed with joy by the experience and fulfilment of his decades old dream of touching the sacred city.

"I went deep into the sea and saw the ancient Dwarkaji. Archaeolo-



gists have written a lot about Dwarka which is immersed in the sea. A lot has been said about Dwarka in our scriptures also. It is said that Lord Vishwakarma himself had built the city of Dwarka," the PM said.

He said the ancient Dwarka city was a good example of planning and development of a great city, and when he was having his darshan in the sea, he experienced "the same ancient grandeur and divinity."

"I bowed to Lord Shri Krishna there. I also took peacock feathers with me which I offered to Lord Krishna," he said. The prime minister

said that for many years, he was very curious about going into the sea and touching whatever remains of the ancient city of Dwarka and paying his respects.

"My wish of many years was fulfilled today. I am thrilled, overwhelmed with emotions. You can imagine how much joy I would have felt when the dream that I had nurtured for decades was fulfilled today by touching that sacred land," he said, sharing his experience.

Modi also offered prayers at the Lord Sri Krishna temple at Dwarka. In the morning, he inaugurated 'Sudarshan Setu', the country's longest cable-stayed bridge of 2.32 km, on the Arabian Sea connecting Beyt Dwarka island to mainland Okha in Devbhumi Dwarka district.

He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of Rs 4,100 crore projects covering the districts of Devbhumi Dwarka, Jamnagar and Porbandar. (PTI)

Absconding for 22 years, SIMI operative Hanif Sheikh arrested by Delhi Police

'Hanif became highly radicalised after coming in contact with SIMI activists'

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: A 47-year-old member of Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) who also allegedly edited a magazine of the banned organisation besides indoctrinating many gullible youths has been arrested by the Delhi Police, officials said on Sunday.

According to the police, Hanif Sheikh was declared a proclaimed offender in 2002 and has been absconding for the last 22 years. He was nabbed on February 22 from Bhusawal in Jalgaon district in Maharashtra where he was a teacher in an Urdu school under a different identity, they said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Alok Kumar claimed that Hanif was the most notorious and wanted SIMI terrorist who had played pivotal roles in various activities of the proscribed organisation across the country.

Police said the SIMI magazine that Hanif Sheikh edited had his name printed as Haneef Hudai. This was the only lead available with the police, making it difficult to trace him, they said.

A case of sedition and under the



Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) was registered against him in 2001 at New Friends Colony police station in the national capital. "A local court declared him proclaimed offender in 2002," Kumar said.

"A team from the Special Cell was tasked with collecting data, information and other digital footprints about the absconding SIMI cadre, sympathisers and sleeper

cells across states. The team extensively visited and collected information from various parts of the country," he said.

The information collected by the team helped the Delhi police's special cell to zero in on Hanif. Following this, a raiding party was formed which laid a trap, the officer said.

"Around 2.50 pm on February 22, a person travelling from

Mohmadin Nagar to Khadka Road was identified as Hanif. As members of the team began to corner him, Hanif attempted to escape but was arrested after a scuffle," the DCP said.

He said Hanif became highly radicalised after coming in contact with SIMI activists and after joining the organisation, he started attending its weekly programmes and radicalising youths. Hanif was later appointed as the editor of the Urdu edition of the SIMI's magazine in 2001, the police officer said.

The DCP added that Hanif was one of the think tank members of Wahadat-e-Islam and played an important role in Maharashtra and other adjoining states.

"He was also involved in collecting money under the guise of donations to support and finance the agenda of SIMI as well as Wahadat-e-Islam."

After fleeing Delhi in 2001, Hanif moved to Jalgaon and subsequently to Bhusawal in Maharashtra from where he was arrested, police said. (PTI)

PM Modi to inaugurate 2000 railway infrastructure today

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone, inaugurate and dedicate to the nation around 2000 railway infrastructure projects worth more than ₹ 41,000 crores on Monday via video conferencing.

Prime Minister has often emphasised the importance of providing world class amenities at railway stations. In a major step in this endeavour, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone for redevelopment of 553 railway stations under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. These stations, spread across 27 States and Union Territories, will be redeveloped at a cost of over ₹ 19,000 crore. These stations will act as 'City Centres' integrating both sides of the city.

They will have modern passenger amenities like roof plaza, beautiful landscaping, inter-modal connectivity, improved modern façade, kids play area, kiosks, food courts, etc. These stations will be redeveloped as environment friendly as well as Divyang friendly. The design of these station buildings will be inspired by local culture, heritage and architecture.

Further, the Prime Minister will inaugurate Gomti Nagar station in Uttar Pradesh which has been redeveloped at a total cost of around ₹ 385 crores. To cater to the increased future passenger footfall, this station has segregated arrival and departure facilities. It integrates both sides of the city. This centrally air-conditioned station has modern passenger amenities like Air Concourse, congestion free circulation, food courts and ample parking space in upper and lower basement.

Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone, inaugurate and dedicate to the nation 1500 road over bridges and underpasses. These road over bridges and underpasses spread across 24 States and Union Territories, the total cost of these projects is around ₹ 21,520 crores. These projects will reduce congestion, enhance safety and connectivity, improve capacity, and efficiency of rail travel.

Under the jurisdiction of N. F. Railway, foundation stone for 23 railway stations under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, 06 road under bridges and 02 road over bridges will be laid by the PM.

ACB/EOW launch raids on premises of 13 people in alleged liquor scam

RAIPUR, Feb 25: The Chhattisgarh's Economic Offence Wing/Anti Corruption Bureau on Sunday launched raids on the premises of 13 people, including two former IAS officers and some businessmen, in connection with alleged liquor scam unearthed during the previous Congress government in the state, officials said.

The action also covered premises of a businessman in Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh, they said.

According to ACB/EOW officials, 70 persons, including several leaders of the Congress, and companies have been named in the FIR registered by the state agency last month in the alleged liquor scam based on a complaint by Enforcement Directorate which has also been probing the case.

The FIR was lodged under sections of Prevention of Corruption Act 1988/Amended Act 2018 and Indian Penal Code, they said.

After receiving search warrants from a special court in Raipur for conducting searches at the premises linked to these suspects, the ACB-EOW launched raids this morning, an official statement said.

The raids covered the premises of former Chief Secretary Vivek Dhand (retired IAS officer), former

Secretary of Commerce and Industry department Anil Tuteja (retired IAS officer), then commissioner of excise department Niranjan Das, Excise Officer Ashok Kumar Singh, businessman Anwar Dhebar(brother of Congress leader and Raipur Mayor Aijaz Dhebar), Arvind Singh and Siddharth Singhania in Raipur, they said.

The raids also covered premises of then special secretary of Excise department and Managing Director of Chhattisgarh State Marketing Corporation Limited Arunpati Tripathi (Indian Telecom Service officer) in Durg district, then assistant commissioner of excise department Korba Saurabh Bakshi in Korba district.

It also covered premises linked to businessman Rajendra Jaiswal of M/s Welcome Distilleries and Bhupendra Pal Singh Bhatia of M/s Bhatia Wine Merchant in Bilaspur district and Naveen Kedia of M/s Chhattisgarh Distillery Limited in Kumhari area (Durg district), the release said.

Besides, the raid was also launched at M/s Prism Hologram and Security Private Limited of Vidhu Gupta in Greater Noida Uttar Pradesh, it said. The searches are underway, the release informed. (PTI)

Khurja Junction near Noida airport among 10 UP stations set for makeover under 'Amrit Bharat'

NOIDA, Feb 25: The Khurja Junction station, which is less than 30 kilometres from the upcoming Noida International Airport, is among 10 railway stations in Uttar Pradesh set for redevelopment under the 'Amrit Bharat' scheme this year, according to officials.

Besides Khurja, the railway stations at Mirzapur, Sonbhadra, Chunar, Manikpur, Govindpur, Kanpur's Anwarganj, Mainpuri, Shikohabad and Firozabad -- all under the Prayagraj Division of the North Central Railway -- will be redeveloped, they said. These stations will be equipped with airport-like facilities such as lounges, space for small business meetings and free WiFi for passengers among others, the officials added.

Known for its pottery and ceramic works, Khurja, in Bulandshahr district of western Uttar Pradesh, is less than an hour's drive from Gautam Buddha Nagar's Jewar area where the Noida International Airport is being developed. The airport is expected to see commercial operations by the end of this year.

Separately, work is underway to link the Noida airport with another railway station in Buland-

shahr --? Chola --? to provide improved transport connectivity in the region, while plans for RRTS and metro rail connectivity are also in the offing.

Under the 'Amrit Bharat' scheme, the central government has decided to develop 10 stations of the Prayagraj Division of the North Central Railway. On Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone and inaugurate various railway schemes under the Prayagraj division. These include the laying of foundation stone of 11 bridges and the inauguration of 54 bridges, a senior official said.

"Under 'Amrit Bharat', Mirzapur, Sonbhadra, Chunar, Manikpur, Govindpur, Khurja, Kanpur's Anwarganj, Mainpuri, Shikohabad and Firozabad stations of the division will be developed. Along with modernising these stations, passenger facilities will also be increased here and passenger management will be further improved," Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (Prayagraj Division) Himanshu Shukla said.

The officer said that a target has been set to complete the work at all the stations by the end of this year. (PTI)

Forest officials plan to conduct mapping of Kanger Ghati National Park caves

RAIPUR, Feb 25: Forest authorities are planning to conduct mapping and microfaunal study of caves in the Kanger Ghati National Park in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, a senior official said on Sunday.

A two-day workshop on the caves and further course of action for mapping and study in the park concluded on Saturday, he said.

Spread over 200 square kilometres, the pristine Kanger valley forest, flanked by hills and covered with sal trees, is famous for its natural beauty, biodiversity, waterfalls and caves, the park's Director Dhammsil Ganvir told PTI.

Kanger Valley got the status of a

national park in 1982.

The park is home to more than 15 underground limestone caves, including Kutumsar, Kailash and Dandak, famous for their amazing geological structures, the official said.

"We have been planning to conduct mapping and microfaunal study of caves in the park. At the same time, exploration of new caves will also be carried out," he said.

Once budgetary allocation for the purpose is approved, the exercise will be undertaken in collaboration with research scholars from various colleges and universities, he said.

The two-day workshop on caves held at Kotamsar village in the park in association with the National Cave Research and Protection Organisation (a non-profit organisation) concluded on Saturday, Ganvir said.

In the workshop, Jayant Vishwas, an expert in cave science, informed about how caves are explored and dos and don'ts while conducting surveys inside caves to avoid untoward incidents, he said.

The workshop was attended by more than 50 participants.

Such events will help in the scientific management of caves, the official said. (PTI)

20 times increase in dog bite incidents in Bihar: Economic Survey

PATNA, Feb 25: Bihar has witnessed an over 20 times increase in dog bite cases compared to the previous year, according to data released by the state's latest economic survey.

The Bihar Economic Survey (2023-24) released by the state government has identified dog bite as the "most prevalent disease" in the state. According to the report, a total of 2,07,181 people suffered dog bites in the year 2022-23 whereas the total number was just 9,809 in the year 2021-22.

Analysis of the data revealed that on average, 600 people become victims of dog bites in Bihar every day. The second most prevalent disease in the state, as per the report, was malaria. The state witnessed 45,532 cases of malaria in 2022-23, the report said.

The report, however, did not mention the number of rabies cases usually transmitted by a bite from an infected animal, including dogs.

According to a World Health Organisation report, "Dogs are the main source of human rabies deaths, contributing up to 99 per cent of all rabies transmissions to humans. The incubation period for rabies is typically 2-3 months but may vary from

one week to one year, depending on factors such as the location of virus entry and the viral load."

As per the report, state capital Patna reported a total of 22,599 incidents of dog bites, highest in Bihar in the year 2022-23, followed by Nalanda (17,074), Gopalganj (15,253), Vaishali (13,110), West Champaran (11,291), East Champaran (9,975), Madhubani (8,401), Araria (6,710).

Nawada district reported 6,234 cases of dog bites followed by Sitamarhi (6,198), Jamui (5,851), Jehanabad (5,683), Bhojpur (5,323), Madhepura (5,169) and Darbhanga (5,023).

The districts that witnessed less than 2,000 reported dog bite incidents in 2022-23 include Kaimur (33), Aurangabad (435), Buxar (686), Muzaffarpur (1,258) and Khagaria (1,916).

In January 2023, a stray dog allegedly went on a biting spree and attacked more than 80 people in Bihar's Arrah in Bhojpur district.

Commenting on Patna reporting the highest number of dog bite incidents, Animesh Kumar Parashar, Patna Municipal Commissioner (PMC), told PTI, "We are aware of the fact and will soon intensify our drive to check this menace as per the

existing norms. The PMC is also going to engage non-government organisations for the purpose. At the same time, we are also expecting co-operation from the public."

Echoing a similar view, Shekhar Anand, Municipal Commissioner, Nalanda, the district which reported the second highest number of dog bite incidents in Bihar, said, "We have our dedicated and trained team of municipal employees to curb his menace. We have already intensified the drive against the stray dogs in the city."

Expressing his concern over the stray dog menace in the state, Patna-based medical practitioner, Dr Manoj Kumar, said, "The survey report should have mentioned the number of rabies cases usually transmitted by a bite from an infected animal, including dog. How can dog bite incidents be termed as a disease? Rabies is a disease, it's a dangerous virus that causes brain inflammation. Animals can spread rabies to humans through bites and scratches."

The incubation period for rabies may vary from one week to one year, he said, adding authorities concerned must take adequate measures to check incidents of dog bites in the state. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

No Mann ki Baat broadcast

only be a part of political activities but also remain aware of debates and discussions during the period, Modi said. "You should keep in mind that your first vote should be for the country," he said, urging influencers and other prominent personalities to motivate first-time voters.

The Election Commission, he said, has launched a campaign "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye", urging first-time voters to use their franchise in maximum numbers. The bigger the participation of the young voters in the electoral process, the more beneficial its consequences will be for the country, the prime minister said. (PTI)

Four held with arms

AK series rifle, magazines, three live ammunitions of .32 pistols, and three live hand grenades hidden within a bamboo grove. Additionally, two mobile phones and country-made guns were seized during the operation.

An FIR has been filed against the detained individuals at the Diphu police station, with ongoing interrogations aimed at gathering further intelligence and insights into the matter.

Himanta thanks Manipuri

language in the four districts of Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi and Hojai. The Bill seeks to amend the Assam Official Languages Act, 1960 by inserting a new section 5B, which will provide for the recognition of Manipur language as an associate official language in the four districts.

Singh thanked his Assam counterpart and asserted that the "recognition and trust on the Manipuri is highly appreciated". The decision was in the interest of protecting, preserving and promoting the cultural, social and linguistic identity and heritage of the Manipuri people living in Assam. (With inputs from PTI)

Interviews for CMAAA

It further said that the information that the online system will generate messages on the date of interview, time and venue at the district level for each sector, like agriculture, veterinary, fishery etc and the applicants shall be informed through messages or email. The applicants may also check the portal, cmaaa.assam.gov.in, for interview related information.

The statement claimed that the applicants who have submitted their projects under CMAAA are therefore advised to check the CMAAA portal frequently and for message for the date, time and venue for their interview at district level. "About 559 candidates are professional degree holders and have applied under Rs 5 lakh scheme. Their interviews will be held at the state level and this will also start from 28th February," it added.

It is mentionable that Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Assam Abhijan was launched on 23rd September 2023 by chief minister Assam and as of now 1,04,091 applications are under consideration for the phase 1 of the scheme.

The scheme, which envisages to create 2 lakh entrepreneurs over next two financial years and to provide Rs 2 lakh/ Rs 5 Lakh benefits along with handholding and incubation services, has been enthusiastically received by the educated un-employed youth of the state.

The recent cabinet meeting on 23rd February had approved the constitution of CMAAA Society for dedicated mission mode action to implement CMAAA with a larger scope of activities to make Assam "Atmanirbhar - self-sufficient" in various sectors.

Focus on front liners

The people living in the fringe areas of the park have voluntarily accepted that the wild animals are their neighbours and their tolerance has ensured conservation success, Ghosh said. Asked about the threat of poaching in the park, she said the frontline forest guards have brought the situation under control.

Still, there was an incident of rhino poaching in January this year which is a matter of concern, the official said. "As long as there is international trade in body parts of wild animals, particularly the rhino horn, the threat of poaching will remain but a lot of emphasis has been laid on rhino conservation," she said.

Another matter of concern is the human-animal conflict, particularly with the wild buffaloes which have a considerable population of over 2500, and "there is a need for an effective strategy to establish and maintain the co-existence between humans and animals", she said.

The capacity of the reserve forest also needs to be addressed continuously with a growing number of tourists. The Kaziranga park is a "very intensely managed reserve forest and we need to develop and innovate strategies to tackle the increasing pressure," the director said.

There is always a challenge to balance conservation and tourism by implementing the strategies, she added.

The maximum concentration of tourists is in the central and western ranges and it is difficult to convey to people that there are equally beautiful areas with diverse wildlife in the eastern, northern and westernmost ranges, the official said. "If we can stagger the tourist footfalls across all the ranges, we can reduce the pressure on just two and bring down the adverse impact. Besides, we are also keen to expand the buffer areas both from the wildlife and tourism point of view," she said.

With the expansion of the park and animals colonising these areas, the need for their protection arises and "we need more watch towers and camps in the extended area", she added. (PTI)

Tipra Motha leaders to

from the Centre regarding their demand. He said despite a year of discussions with both the Centre and the state government, no positive outcomes have been achieved. BJP state president Rajib Bhattacharjee downplayed the significance of the agitation, stating that it poses no challenge to either the party or the government.

He highlighted the development initiatives under the "double-engine government" and expressed confidence in securing further success in the upcoming parliamentary elections. (PTI)

IIT-Madras researchers patent use of Indian spices to treat cancer; clinical trials to begin soon

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Researchers at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, have patented the use of Indian spices to treat cancer and the medicines are likely to be available in the market by 2028, according to officials.

The Indian spice-derived nanomedicines have shown anti-cancer activity against lung, breast, colon, cervical, oral and thyroid cell lines but were safe in normal cells, they said.

The nanomedicines were also found to be safe in normal cells. The researchers are currently working on addressing the safety and cost issues which are major challenges in the existing cancer medicines. Animal studies have been successfully concluded recently and clinical trials are being planned with a target of making the medicines available in the market by 2027-28.

"While the medical benefits of Indian spice oils have been known through the ages, their bioavailability has limited their application and use. Formulation as a nano-emulsion effectively overcomes this limitation. Stability of the nano-emulsion was a key consideration and it was optimised in our



laboratory," R Nagarajan, a professor at the Department of Chemical Engineering in IIT-Madras, told PTI.

"While mechanistic studies to identify the active ingredients and their modes of interaction with cancer cells are important and will continue in our labs, parallelly, we will attempt to translate the positive results in our animal studies to clinical trials in an expedited manner. We are looking at a two to three-year window for bringing the formulations to market," he added.

Animal studies have been carried out on the patented anti-cancer nano-formulations.

Animal validation to adjust the dosage (GLP phase) and efficacy studies (non-GLP phase) have been carried out through funding support from IIT Madras Distinguished Alumnus Awardee and Infosys Co-Founder Gopalakrishnan through Pratiksha Trust.

Nagarajan said there are several advantages of nano-oncology over conventional cancer treatment therapy. "The benefits include no toxic side-effects, reduced cost of treatment, abundance of Indian spice oils and leveraging of nano-scale for optimising effectiveness and bio-availability," he said.

M Joyce Nirmala, Chief Scien-

tific Officer (Cancer Nanomedicine and Drug Design Laboratory), IIT Madras, said the patented Indian spice-based nano-formulations have proven effective in many common types of cancers through in-vitro studies.

"The drug dosage adjustment and efficacy are now under investigation through animal models. This will be followed by clinical trials. This cancer nanomedicine is being developed to reduce the cost and pain of cancer treatment and also to overcome the toxic side effects seen in the existing cancer treatments."

India is the world's largest spice producer. Hence, large-scale production could be achieved at a low cost with our Indian spice-based cancer nanomedicine.

"Moreover, the formulations are developed for an oral route of administration to ease the treatment process. The spices chosen are edible, hence, biocompatibility is good, reducing toxic side effects."

"Also, plant and spice oils, in general, could influence multiple oncogenic signalling pathways, which have an added advantage in improving the quality of life of cancer patients," Nirmala said. (PTI)

BARUAR SONGSAAR: FILM ON 100-YEAR OLD HOUSE IN GUWAHATI PREMIERED

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: From music to films to sports to politics -- it is a tale of a rare family and its over 100-year-old residence that the national award-winning filmmaker Utpal Borpujari has tried to capture in his latest documentary 'Baruar Songsaar' or 'The House of Baruas'.

Produced by Nayan Prasad, Jemini Phukan and Dibyajyoti Saharia, and Directed by Borpujari, this 71-minute film was premiered for select audience at Rudra Baruah auditorium of Jyoti Chitraban Film Studio in Guwahati on Saturday evening, followed by a ticketed show at the same venue.

The film is on an iconic Assam-type house, which completed a century in 2023, in the heart of Guwahati at Latasil that no residence of the city or any visitor to that area can miss.

It is also located in a strategically very important area adjacent to Gauhati High Court, planetarium and Latasil playground on the bank of Brahmaputra in Uzan Bazar.

The structure has been the home to legends like Ramen Barua (musician), Dwipen Barua (cricketer, singer), late Brajen Barua (filmmaker, actor, musician, singer), Nip Barua (filmmaker, footballer, artist),



Dibon Barua (filmmaker), Girin Barua (entrepreneur, sports organizer, politician), Niren Barua (actor, radio personality) and several others.

"We all grew up seeing this house and wondering about its residents during our childhood. In fact, we became adults listening to the romantic songs of Dwipen Barua and others composed by their brothers. This is a rare family, perhaps in entire India, giving birth to so many talents under one single roof," Borpujari told PTI.

Constructed by engineer Chandranath Barua of Bihdiya village near Baihata Chariali in Kamrup district in 1923, the house of Baruas was built with a mix of materials imported from the UK as well as sourced locally.

Out of the 13 siblings, only Ramen Barua and Dwipen Barua are alive now. The producers plan to donate a part of the proceedings coming from the screenings across the state to the legendary brothers.

"That will be the least we can do to show our love, respect and gratitude to them for their contribution to Assamese society. I hope the government will also consider the two living legends for the state and central civilian awards. There are very few deserving people other than Ramen Da and Dwipen Da for these honours," Borpujari said.

'Baruar Songsaar' was screened at the Indian Panorama of the 54th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in November last year. The makers are now planning screenings of the documentary all over Assam.

"The film will be screened in ticketed shows in collaboration with like-minded organisations so that people at large, specially the present generation, get to know about the immense contribution made by the Barua family towards Assamese cinema, music, culture, sports and society over the years," he said. (PTI)

'Oppenheimer' wins Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture at SAG Awards 2024



LOS ANGELES, Feb 25: The 'Oppenheimer' cast wins big at the 30th Screen Actors Guild Awards. It was a moment of pride for the entire team as they won the award for outstanding performance by a cast in a motion picture, reported People.

The other nominees were 'American Fiction', 'Barbie', 'The Color Purple', and 'Killers of the Flower Moon'.

Accepting the award on the cast's behalf was Kenneth Branagh, who played Danish physicist Niels Bohr in the film.

"Thank you. It's my it's my honor to say a few words briefly on behalf of this incredible cast on stage and to the extended family of Oppenheimer, who can't be here," he began. "So, thank you so much, Chris Nolan and Emma Thomas. Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you for the respect. Thank you for the invitation to play a genuine part in making this scarily important film. Thank you to Donna Langley and Universal Pictures for believing in us, believing in us and in the film. Thank you Chuck Roven, Andy Thompson, and John Papsidera, thank you very much."

"And, of course... thank you SAG-AFTRA. Thank you for this. Thank you for fighting for us. Thank you for every SAG-AFTRA member whose support and whose sacrifice allows us to be standing here better than we were before," he continued. (AGENCIES)

Actors are not supposed to be crusaders, says Anupam Kher

MUMBAI, Feb 25: Actor Anupam Kher says that while he has participated in protests in an individual capacity, he believes artists shouldn't act as activists.

The negative impact of demonstrations and rallies is the subject of his next film "kaagaz 2". Directed by VK Prakash, the film highlights hardships of an ordinary individuals due to protests and rallies. "Actors and entertainers are not supposed to be crusaders. In an individual capacity, I've raised my voice about whatever has bothered me and faced the consequences. I became unpopular with so many people but it doesn't matter. At the end of the day, I've to sleep peacefully with my thoughts," Kher told PTI in an interview.

The actor, who took part in the India Against Corruption movement in 2011, said the ideal way to resolve issues is through "negotiations" "We are an independent country, thanks to the 'aandolan'

that (Mahatma) Gandhi ji did. We are an outcome of Quit India movement, non-cooperation movement, but the people of India were together, it was not something that is just helping you (few people) and not others."

Kher, speaking about the ongoing farmers protests, said that while everyone has the right to protest, it should not affect the life of ordinary people. "Everybody has a right to freedom to move around, freedom of expression, but not at the inconvenience of other people. This is the current scenario in our country, the protest, just because it is called farmers protest, I don't think farmers all over the country feel like that, farmers are givers."

"We are made to feel defensive by being told that we are talking about 'annadaata'... I feel those who pay taxes are also contributing towards the growth of the country. I feel it is not okay to make com-

mon people's lives miserable," the actor added. Referring to the 2021 farmers protest, Kher expressed his discontentment over the chain of events that unfolded after protesting farmers stormed Delhi's historic Red Fort. "That visuals will always haunt me when protestors reach Red Fort and they took out my country's flag and put some other flag. I'll not sympathise with such people, even if it is at the cost of being unpopular with some people," the actor said.

"It is a very topical film, it is a very complex film, it has that Rashomon impact, that everyone has their own point of view," he said. (PTI)



Lionsgate developing 'Naruto' film, ropes in filmmaker Destin Daniel Cretton



LOS ANGELES, Feb 25: A live-action film based on classic Japanese manga series "Naruto" is being developed by Hollywood studio Lionsgate.

According to entertainment news outlet Deadline, the studio has hired "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" maker Destin Daniel Cretton to direct the project.

The film adaptation will be produced by Avi Arad, Ari Arad, and Emmy Yu for Arad Productions, as well as Jeremy Latcham, Cretton, and Jeyun Munford for Hisako.

Created by Masashi Kishimoto in 1999, "Naruto" is one of the world's most popular manga series and has sold over 250 million copies in more than 60 countries

and territories.

The story of the manga follows Naruto Uzumaki, a young ninja with dreams of becoming leader of his village. He faces an uphill battle in this mission, given the fact that the Nine-Tailed Fox spirit sealed within him at birth once brought destruction upon the place.

The manga has spawned an anime adaptation, as well as video games, numerous anime films and a sequel series "Boruto: Naruto Next Generations". Cretton is currently working on "Wonder Man", based on the Marvel Comics character of the same name. He will also direct the sequel to "Shang-Chi", which featured Simu Liu as the titular superhero. (PTI)

'Shogun' a great chance to show our culture correctly: lead star-producer Hiroyuki Sanada

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Dreams do come true, says veteran actor Hiroyuki Sanada as he looks forward to introduce audiences to the lavishly-crafted world of "Shogun", a new and ambitious adaptation of James Clavell's 1975 novel, that, he hopes, authentically tells the story of a crucial period in Japan's history.

Sanada, who worked extensively in Japan from a young age before finding fame in Hollywood, serves as a producer besides playing the lead role of Yoshii Toranaga, a character modelled on real-life Japanese military hero, Tokugawa Ieyasu.

"For a long time, I wanted to introduce our culture to the world correctly. I thought it's a great chance to do that... That was my dream (and) they gave me the title of a producer.

Dreams do come true in Hollywood," Sanada told PTI in a virtual interview.

The 63-year-old actor, known for starring alongside Tom Cruise in "The Last Samurai" and playing prominent roles in "The Wolverine", "47 Ronin", "Avengers: Endgame", "Bullet Train", "John Wick: Chapter 4" and TV show "Westworld", said he was waiting for a show like "Shogun".

Admitting that he had played many samurai (warrior) and yakuza (mafia) roles in Hollywood, Sanada said, "Every time, I took on the roles, I tried to (portray) our culture correctly but it all depends on the show and movie. But this kind of story ('Shogun') has to be shown to the audience in an authentic way as much as possible."

The 10-part series, slated to premiere on Disney+Hotstar in India on

February 28, is set in Japan in the year 1600 at the dawn of a century-defining civil war.

Sanada's Toranaga is fighting for his life as his enemies unite against him. When a mysterious European ship is found marooned in a nearby fishing village, its English pilot, John Blackthorne (Cosmo Jarvis), comes bearing secrets that could help Toranaga tip the scales of power. Toranaga's and Blackthorne's fates become inextricably tied to their translator, Toda Mariko (Anna Sawai), a mysterious Christian noblewoman and the last of a disgraced line.

The FX show has earned praise by reviewers for the way it reframes the novel, which was adapted as a TV show in 1980, more through the culture it is rooted in rather than focusing

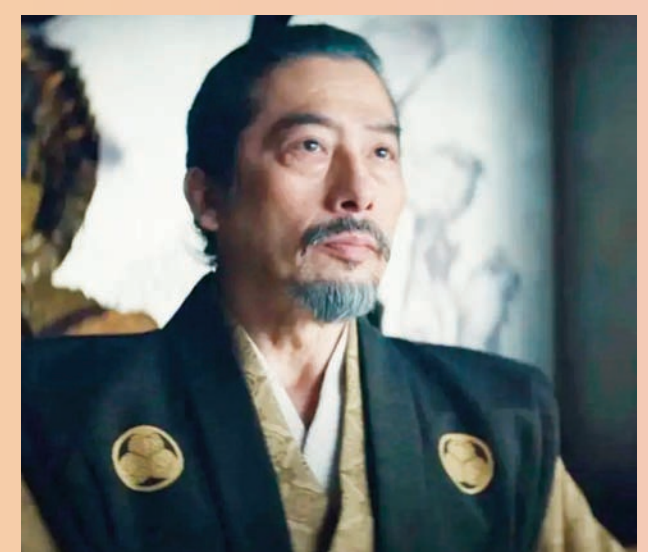
on a story driven by the white man's perspective.

Sanada still remembers the conversation he had with a producer about a decade ago offering him a chance to play Toranaga.

"I said yes and at that time, I was involved with the project just as an actor," he recalled, adding that when Justin Marks and Rachel Kondo joined the show as creators, they decided to involve him as a producer as well.

In interviews, Marks and Kondo have spoken about the important role Sanada played in bringing authenticity to the show by fine-tuning cultural nuances, language and diction.

It is also a wish fulfilment of another kind for Sanada to play Toranaga, he said. (PTI)



Mumbai take slender first-innings lead against Baroda in Ranji Trophy quarterfinal

MUMBAI, Feb 25: Mumbai were ahead by 57 runs at stumps after Baroda conceded a slender lead in the first innings, despite centuries from Shashwat Rawat and Vishnu Solanki on the third day of their ongoing Ranji Trophy quarterfinal, here on Sunday.

Mumbai, who posted 384 in the first innings, fought hard on the third day with the ball to eke out a lead of a mere 36 runs, with the visitors being bowled out for 348 on day

three. Shams Mulani took four for 121 to lead the fight for the hosts at the BKC Ground after the pair of Rawat and Solanki kept Mumbai wicketless for the first session, with both the Baroda batters eventually bringing up their respective centuries.

Rawat, who has been Baroda's leading run-scorer in the Ranji Trophy this season, scored 124 from 194 balls with 15 boundaries.

Rawat put on 174 runs for the third wicket with Solanki to



consolidate for Baroda, as at one stage it appeared that the visiting side would be able to take the lead in the first innings — a vital aspect if the game ends in a draw.

On the other hand, Solanki led by example as the Baroda captain faced 291 balls with 14 fours to make 136 for his side in the first innings, but the others just could not produce much to stop Mumbai from taking the lead.

But Mumbai fought back

through Tushar Deshpande (2/52) who accounted for both the centuries, while spinners Mulani and Tanush Kotian (2/49) teamed up to put the 41-time champions back in a commanding position.

None of the remaining Baroda batters could trouble the scorers as Ninad Rathva's 18 was the highest individual contribution after the pair of Rawat and Solanki was separated.

Baroda were eventually bowled out for 348 and in reply,

Mumbai reached 21 for one with Bhupen Lalwani dismissed for just six runs.

At the crease were wicket-keeper-batter Hardik Tamore on 12, who scored a crucial fifty in the first innings, with night-watchman Mohit Avasthi on three. Bhargav Bhatt, who took a seven-wicket haul in the first innings, got Baroda the much-needed breakthrough when he had Lalwani caught by Rathva in the second innings. (PTI)

Mehuli, Anish, Ganga win in national selection trials

BHOPAL, Feb 25: India's Paris Olympic quota holders enjoyed a favourable outing in the first finals of the national rifle-pistol selection trials 3 and 4, with West Bengal's Mehuli Ghosh and Haryana's Anish Bhanwala ending up winners here on Sunday.

Army marksman Ganga Singh bucked the trend in the day's final competition, winning the men's 50m rifle 3 positions event with plenty to spare.

Mehuli qualified for the top eights with a characteristically solid 631.5 in the first 60-shot round. Tamil Nadu's R. Narmada Nithin topped with 632.5.

In the final, Mehuli was joint third behind Punjab's Jasmeen Kaur and local favourite Ashi Chouksey after the first five-shot series, and slipped to fourth in the middle before getting back to that position after the 16th single shot with Jasmeen and Ashi still 1-2.

Thereafter she shot 10.7 or above in five of her last eight shots, the 17th being a perfect 10.9, to pip Ashi by 0.1 and finish with 251.6. Jasmeen settled for third position with 229.9.

The men's 25m rapid fire pistol event reinforced Bhanwala's stature as India's number one RFP shooter as he cantered home with a 32-hits in the six-man 40-shot final. Army marksman Gurmeet was some distance behind with 29-hits while Rajasthan's Bhavesh Shekhawat was third with 22.

Anish had earlier topped the qualification over two days with a total of 589 with Gurmeet again way behind on second with 583. Ankur Goel who was the final qualifier was a dozen points behind Anish. (PTI)

'It makes more sense for IOC to give 2036 Olympics to India'



NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Sports Minister Anurag Thakur said on Sunday "it makes more sense for the IOC" to give India the hosting rights for the 2036 Olympic Games as the country is growing by leaps and bounds in every sphere including sports. Thakur, while speaking at the News9 Global Summit, said India's recent performance at mega international events, such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games, gives him hope that the country could become a top-10 sporting nation by 2036 and be in the top-5 by 2047. "We had the largest population to see the Olympic sports last time (in 2020 Tokyo) and this time, it makes more sense for the IOC to give 2036 Olympics to none other than Bharat, our India," said Thakur.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already expressed the country's desire to host the Olympics in 2036 during the IOC session in Mumbai last year, and when asked if India was ready to hold the mega event and which city could play host, Thakur said, "PM Modi made it very clear during the IOC session that India is very serious to host the 2036 Summer Olympics, and before that we want to host the 2030 Youth Olympics. And, I have a reason to say so. "If you look at India in the last 10 years, we have become the fifth-largest economy in the world. If you look at sector to sector, India is doing extremely well...economy-wise fifth largest, next five years, we are going to be the third largest.

"By 2036, the Indian economy

would be much larger, sports infrastructure is also getting better and better with each passing day. We have 1.4 billion population, out of which 65 per cent is below 35. That is 1/6th of the total population of the world lives in India, so what could be a bigger market (for Olympics).

"Then, the target I have set for 2036, India will be among the top-10 medal winning countries, and (by) 2047, among the top-5 to win medals," he said.

Thakur foresees Olympic disciplines too enjoying a huge following and compared it with where cricket was before the country won the World Cup for the first time and how massively things have changed now.

"If you look at 1983 (World Cup win), before that even in cricket we didn't have enough

money. When the team won the World Cup, even the BCCI didn't have enough money to pay them (winning team players), or to celebrate in a big way.

"But when they (BCCI) fought the case against Prasar Bharati and won the case, that is where they won the telecast rights and the game changed. Then money came into cricket. That is how the BCCI have done well with their professional working in the last so many years. "In the last 2-3 decades, we have seen so many cricketers doing well on the international stage. So, in cricket we had a lot of stars to look up to. And, today, in other sports too we have a lot of stars to look up to. I think the time has started when the country's mindset has changed," he added. He said the government's focus on creating sports infrastructure in the last 10 years and pumping in money gave him confidence.

"The sports budget has been increased three times in the last 10 years. We have spent 3,000 crores in creating 300 sports infrastructure. We have a lot of schemes for the benefit of players, so that they can perform better rather than worry about the facilities... how they can train, where to train, who will fund them. That is not their worry today, they all need to train hard and perform.

"That is why India has won 100-plus (107) medals in the Hangzhou Asian Games. At one time, a rickshaw-puller's or a tea seller's son used to worry how he will reach the top level in sports. After Khelo India and Target Olympics Podium Scheme (TOPS), boarding, lodging and training etc is taken care of and elite athletes get Rs six lakh pocket money as well. (PTI)

MP, Andhra set for thrilling finish to Ranji Trophy quarterfinal



INDORE, Feb 25: The Ranji Trophy quarterfinal match between Madhya Pradesh and Andhra was evenly poised at stumps on the third day here on Sunday, with both the teams having an equal opportunity to win the game and make it to the final four.

A contest in which the bowlers have dominated from the word go, Andhra were placed precariously at 95/4 and requiring another 75 runs to win with two days left, while the task for the hosts Madhya Pradesh at the Holkar Stadium would be to take the remaining six wickets.

But Andhra would feel confident going into the fourth day knowing that India batter Hanuma Vihari had dropped anchor to reach 43 not out from 109 balls with four boundaries.

Vihari's experience would be required for Andhra to get over the line especially when skipper and the leading run-scorer this season, Ricky Bhui (9), was dismissed cheaply for the second time in the game.

It all expedited with Madhya Pradesh being shot out for just 107 in their second innings in a little over 40 overs, with Nithish Kumar Reddy returning 10-2-28-4 and the others in KV Sasikanth and Lalith Mohan claiming three wickets apiece.

For Madhya Pradesh, wicket-keeper-batter Himanshu Mantri once again provided a crucial contribution scoring 43 from 107 balls with six hits to the fence as none of the other batters could make a dent.

Madhya Pradesh, who had taken a lead of 62 runs in the first innings and had resumed the third day's play at 21 for no loss, rolled over without any fight in the second innings which handed the advantage to the visiting side.

But Andhra were themselves guilty of being tentative with the bat in a chase of 170, losing their openers cheaply before the pair of Nithish and Vihari got together to settle the nerves.

Having taken a fine three-wicket haul in the first innings, Anubhav Agarwal was once again back to haunt the Andhra batters as he accounted for Revanth Reddy (9) and Nithish (20), while Kumar Kartikeya removed Prashant Kumar from the equation for six.

Saransh Jain produced a measly spell of 7-2-7-1 while accounting for the dangerous Bhui to keep the hopes high for his side heading into what should be the final day of this quarterfinal clash.

The tension in the Andhra camp was palpable with the fact that they took as many as 44 hours to get to 95/4.

At stumps, Vihari was holding on to one end with Karan Shinde unbeaten on five at the other end.

Brief scores: Madhya Pradesh 234 and 107 in 40.5 overs (Himanshu Mantri 43; Nithish Kumar Reddy 4/28, Lalith Mohan 3/20, KV Sasikanth 3/20) lead Andhra 172 and 95/4 in 44 overs (Hanuma Vihari 43*; Anubhav Agarwal 2/22) by 75 runs. (PTI)

Yathiraj, Pramod, Krishna win Gold at Para Badminton World Championships

PATTAYA (THAILAND), Feb 25: India's Suhass Yathiraj, Pramod Bhagat and Krishna Nagar capped their impressive run by securing gold medals in men's singles SL4, SL3 and SH6 class respectively at the Para Badminton World Championship here on Sunday.

The world No 3 Yathiraj, a Paralympic silver medalist, outwitted Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan 21-18 in SL4 final (standing/lower limb impairment/minor) for her maiden world title. "Gold it is, happy and proud to be world champion," tweeted the 40-year-old

Yathiraj, who hails from Karnataka and is an IAS officer of the 2007 batch of Uttar Pradesh cadre. Yathiraj, who has an impairment in one of his ankles, is currently the secretary and director general of Youth Welfare and Prantiya Rakshak Dal in the UP government. Tokyo Paralympic gold medalist Bhagat, who won a gold and two bronze at the Para Asian Games in China, edged out England's Daniel Bethell 14-21 21-15 21-14 in SL3 (standing/lower limb impairment/severe) final.

Bhagat thus completed a hat-trick of crowns after Stoke Mandeville in

2015 and Basel in 2019. He also won a gold medal at 2022 Tokyo and 2009 Seoul edition.

"This win holds a very special place in my heart for various reasons," said the Bihar-born shuttler, one of the six siblings, who was diagnosed with polio when he was five years old. "First being that I have managed to equal my idol Lin Dan's record of five world championships and second being having been able to retain three consecutive world championships."

Apart from the gold, the 35-year-old also won two bronze medals in

men's doubles and mixed doubles along with Sukant Kadam and Manisha Ramadass respectively. The three medals took his tally to 14, which includes 6 gold, 3 silver, 5 bronze across categories.

In SH6 category (standing/short stature), Krishna Nagar, a Paralympic gold medal winner, also emerged champion after prevailing 22-20 22-20 over China's Lin Naili in another men's singles final.

In women's singles SU5 (standing/upper limb impairment), Manisha Ramadass signed off with a silver medal after losing 16-21 16-

21 to China's Yang Qiu Xia in the final. The men's doubles pair of Chirag Baretha and Raj Kumar and women's doubles combination of Rachana Shaileshkumar and Nithya Sree Sumathy Sivan settled for a silver each, after losing their respective final matches in SU5 and SH6 categories. In women's doubles (SL3-SU5) category, Manasi Joshi and Thulasimathi Murugesan also signed off with a silver medal after losing 20-22 17-21 to Indonesian combination of Leani Ratri Oktia and Khalimatuz Sadiyah in the final. (PTI)

Karachi's last-ball win in PSL extends defending champion Lahore's losing streak to four games

LAHORE, Feb 25: Karachi Kings clinched a last-ball thriller to hand two-time defending champion Lahore Qalandars its fourth straight loss in the Pakistan Super League.

Karachi won by two wickets after defying a much improved Lahore pace attack, led by Shaheen Shah Afridi (1-34), to reach 176-8 in exactly 20 overs in reply to Lahore's 175-6.

Lahore was asked to bat first by Karachi and opener Sahibzada Farhan anchored the innings with an unbeaten 72 off 45 balls. South African George Linde provided the late flourish with a breezy 26 not out off 13 balls.

Karachi's Kieron Pollard (58) and Shoaib Malik (39) led the chase with their 95-run fifth wicket stand after their team had stuttered at 44-4 inside the batting power play. But their departures in successive overs brought Lahore back into the game with Afridi featuring in both dismissals. Pollard skied an easy catch to cover against the left-arm fast bowler in the 16th over and Afridi took a brilliant catch running backward from mid-off to

dismiss Malik in Haris Rauf's next over.

Rauf (1-22), who had taken just one wicket in the previous three games and conceded 110 runs, got his rhythm back before suffering a shoulder injury late in Karachi's chase.

Zaman Khan (2-25) bowled Daniel Sams and that gave inexperienced spinner Ahsan Hafeez 11 runs to defend in the last over.

Hasan Ali hoisted Hafeez for a six over wide mid-on off the first ball. After the scores were level, Rauf damaged his shoulder while holding onto a spectacular diving catch to dismiss Hasan. Mir Hamza cut Hafeez to third man off the final ball to raise Karachi's second win in four games. Karachi is third with four points behind Multan Sultans and Quetta Gladiators.

Earlier, Farhan counterattacked in the second half of the innings as Karachi's pace and spin pinned down Lahore to 59-3 in 10 overs.

Shai Hope (21) smashed Tabraiz Shamsi (2-42) for 16 runs in the spinner's final over. Farhan and Linde combined in a 54-run stand off the final 26 balls. (AP)

ICC suspends Hasaranga for two matches, Gurbaz fined 15 per cent of match fees

DUBAI, Feb 25: The ICC has suspended Sri Lanka captain Wanindu Hasaranga for two matches and docked a fine of 15 per cent on the match fee of Afghanistan wicket-keeper-batter Rahmanullah Gurbaz for breaching its Code of Conduct during the third T20I in Dambulla.

The global governing body said in a release that Hasaranga has been banned after the spin bowling all-rounder accumulated a total of five demerit points within a 24-month period, which includes his latest breach of the ICC Code of Conduct. "Sri Lanka's T20I skipper and second-ranked T20I bowler on the ICC Men's Player Rankings, Wanindu Hasaranga, has been presented with a two-match suspension after his total demerit points reached five within a 24-month period following his latest breach of the ICC Code of

Conduct, for which he received a 50 per cent fine and three demerit points," the ICC said in a statement.

The incident involving Hasaranga took place towards the end of the third and final T20I on Wednesday when he approached the on-field umpire Lyndon Hanibal to criticise a decision regarding a full toss delivery not being adjudged a no-ball.

Hasaranga was thus found guilty of breaching the article 2.13 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel. The article relates to "personal abuse of a Player, Player Support Personnel, Umpire or Match Referee during an International Match".

With Hasaranga accumulating five demerit points, it converts to two suspension points, the ICC said. "This means he will either get



a ban for one Test match or two ODIs or T20Is, whichever comes first, for the player or player support personnel.

Consequently, Hasaranga will be suspended from participating in Sri Lanka's first two T20Is against Bangladesh next

month," the ICC said.

Afghanistan batter Gurbaz too was penalised for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct in the same match for having violated the article 2.4 of the code, which concerns "disobeying an Umpire's in-

struction during an International Match". This has resulted in one demerit point being added to Gurbaz's disciplinary record, which marks his second such offence in a 24-month period and the player accumulating two demerit points.

"The sanction was imposed on Rahmanullah for altering the grip of his bat on the field despite repeated warnings against doing so," the ICC said.

The ICC added that both the players have admitted to the offences and have accepted the sanction proposed by Chris Broad from the elite panel of match referees. "The charges were brought forth by on-field umpires Lyndon Hanibal and Ravendra Wimalasiri, third umpire Ruchira Palliyaguruge, and fourth umpire Rammore Martinez," the ICC said. (PTI)

Ashwin, Jurel, Kuldeep shine as India rise above England in remarkable Day 3 turnaround

RANCHI, Feb 25: Dhruv Jurel's defensive chef-d'oeuvre found a perfect match in the destructive symphony of spin by five-man Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav as India seized decisive control of the fourth Test against England at the end of a dramatic third day here on Sunday.

India walked off at the stumps, having chiselled off 40 runs from the 192-run target without losing a wicket.

Rohit Sharma (24 batting) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (16 batting) would be confident of the team mustering the remaining 152 runs without much theatre.

However, it was Jurel who started India's resistive movement with a defiant 90 that came in 149 balls and 211 minutes. It carried the hosts to 307 in their first innings from the overnight 219 for seven.

In their second essay, England just did not have any answers to the questions posed by Ashwin (5/51), his 35th five-wicket haul in Tests, and Kuldeep Yadav (4/22), getting bowled out for a meagre 145.

Opener Zak Crawley (60) was the lone post of fight. It would have been worse for England without that Crawley fifty before his innings was halted by Kuldeep.

Ravindra Jadeja bagged a solitary wicket but it was the key wicket of Jonny Bairstow. In fact, Crawley was the only English bat-



ter to go past 30 as they lost their last seven wickets for just 35 runs with Ashwin and Jadeja weaving their magic.

Introduced late, the left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep struck in his third over when he cleaned up Crawley with a gem of a delivery that skidded through, unsettling the middle-stump.

Crawley was looking in an ominous mood and tore into the Indian attack against the run of play to stretch their overall lead past 150 as Rohit persisted with Ashwin and Jadeja in the second session.

But Kuldeep breathed fire into the attack as he got drift and was at his deceptive best.

Having survived through an umpire's call, England skipper Ben Stokes was castled by Kuldeep with the ball staying low.

Bairstow looked in firm control in his 42-ball 30 (3x4) but fell in the first ball after tea when Jadeja exploited the cracks on the pitch to turn it away and the batter drove it straight to short cover.

Kuldeep then dismissed Tom Hartley and Ollie Robinson in four balls, before Ashwin raced to his fifth wicket as stumper Dhruv Jurel took a brilliant reflex catch to oust James Anderson.

In the process, Ashwin also became the highest wicket-taker at home for India. He

now has 354 wickets from 59 Tests at home, overtaking Anil Kumble's tally of 350 from 63 matches.

But Jurel's innings might just have ended India's search for a wicketkeeper batter in Tests in the absence of recuperating Rishabh Pant.

The 23-year-old from Agra was not only terrific with his glovesmanship but exhibited oodles of maturity during that determined fifty as India mounted an incredible fight-back, trimming England's first-innings lead to a mere 46 runs.

After reaching his maiden fifty in 96 balls, the Rajasthan Royals' wicketkeeper-batsman shifted gears, taking on English spinners Shoaib Bashir and Tom Hartley.

Jurel hurried for a single off Hartley to bring up his fifty in an entertaining 40-run stand off just 75 balls for the ninth wicket with Akash Deep (9).

But Hartley denied him a hundred with a quicker delivery that stayed low.

Young England off-spinner Bashir completed his maiden Test five-wicket haul, trapping Akash to finish with figures of 5 for 119 in only his second Test.

Jurel and Kuldeep's 76-run partnership for the eighth wicket also rescued India from a precarious position when they were reduced to 177 for seven on the second day. (PTI)

Australia beats New Zealand by 27 runs in rain-shortened 3rd T20



AUCKLAND, Feb 25: Australia beat New Zealand by 27 runs under the Duckworth-Lewis system in the heavily rain-affected third T20 international Sunday to complete a 3-0 sweep the series and to harden its favoritism for the World Cup later this year.

New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner won the toss in his 100th T20 international and sent Australia in, mindful the rain might dictate terms later in the match. It did. Australia's was interrupted three times by rain breaks and finally terminated after 10.4 overs when it was 118-4. New Zealand was set 126 to win in 10 overs under the Duckworth-Lewis system, which seemed a relatively charitable target.

But New Zealand botched the run chase for the second time in three days at Eden Park, unable to conquer Australia's world class attack.

Under the revised rules for the 10-over innings, Australia was allowed five bowlers who could bowl two overs each with a three-over power play.

The young left-armer Spencer Johnson took 1-10 from his two overs, showing why he made \$1.4 million in the IPL auction earlier this year. Nathan Ellis conceded only 11 from his two overs, Mitchell Starc only 15 and Adam Zampa took 1-20.

Ellis bowled four dot balls to New Zealand's biggest hitter,

Glenn Phillips, in the fifth over and at the midpoint of its innings New Zealand was 51-2, needing 75 from the last 30 balls.

Australia's bowlers continued to bowl a tight line and length to frustrate the Black Caps batters and after Ellis bowled the ninth over for the cost of only 8 runs, New Zealand needed 43 off the last over to win. The honor, or duty, of bowling the last over went to Matt Short who already had contributed for Australia, making 27 off 11 ball, batting at No. 3.

The first ball of the over went for six but the next three balls were singles, the fifth ball went for two and the last ball for a boundary as New Zealand fell hopelessly short. "I think I feel most comfortable when I'm playing shots," Short said. "It was a bit of a strange game because of the rain and being off and on."

"The aggressive way is the way we want to play our T20."

Credit also goes to wicket-keeper Matthew Wade who took over the captaincy from Mitch Marsh and led Australia with great tactical insight in tricky conditions.

"Our bowlers were unbelievable today the way they came out and executed," Wade said. "It's as clinical a bowling performance as I've seen from an Australian unit and for Matt Short to come out and bat the way he did is exciting for the future." (AP)

Assam athletes shine in 44th National Masters Athletics Championships

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 25: A total of 138 athletes from Assam, aged 35 to 85 years, showcased their prowess at the 44th National Masters Athletics Championships held at Sri Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex, Balewari Stadium, Pune, from February 13 to 17, 2024. With over 3,500 participants from various states, the Assam team distinguished themselves by clinching a remarkable total of 116 medals, comprising 51 gold, 31 silver, and 34 bronze.



Moreover, in recognition of their outstanding performance, numerous men and women have earned the privilege to represent India at the prestigious 2024 World Masters Athletics Championships in Gothenburg, Sweden, scheduled from August 13 to 25, 2024. The event witnessed the presence of Juan Ordóñez, the newly elected Secretary of the World Masters Athletics Council, along with several officials from WMA.

Looking ahead, the 45th National Masters Athletics Championships are slated to take place in Delhi next year.

England spinner Jack Leach to undergo knee surgery

LONDON, Feb 25: Left-arm spinner Jack Leach is set to undergo a knee surgery on Tuesday after being ruled out of the England's ongoing five-Test tour of India.

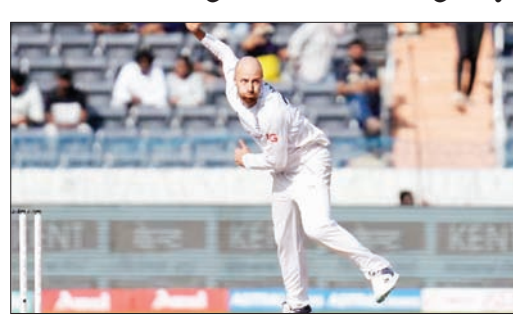
Leach, who came into the India series as England's most experienced spinner, took part in only the opening Test at Hyderabad which his side won by 28 runs.

The 32-year-old spinner suffered an injury on the field which caused severe swelling, forcing him to leave the tour after missing the second Test and subsequently returning home.

"I'm going to have an operation to get the rest of the swelling out because it's not budging," Leach was quoted as saying by the BBC.

The report added that the knee injury trouble is the latest for Leach who suffers from Crohn's disease, having also missed last year's Ashes in England due to a stress fracture in his back. On the tour of New Zealand five years ago in 2019, Leach had also contracted sepsis.

"It was quite an unfortunate one. It was the second ball of the first innings in the field so that whole game I was playing with this knee problem. I obvi-



ously knocked it a few times throughout that game and it has just created a long period of recovery," he said.

"I need to get the operation done and then hopefully I can get back to playing cricket. I'd love to have a run of playing cricket and getting into a bit of a rhythm again and hopefully that can happen again once I've got this sorted."

After the conclusion of the India tour, England's next assignment will be the first home Test at Lord's from July 10. (PTI)

Gavaskar wants Ashwin to lead team out on field in Dharamsala in his 100th Test



RANCHI, Feb 24: Legendary batter Sunil Gavaskar on Sunday suggested that India captain Rohit Sharma should allow Ravichandran Ashwin to lead the team out on the field in the final Test in Dharamsala, to honour the senior off-spinner in his milestone 100th match.

The 37-year-old Ashwin is playing in his 99th Test in the fourth match here against England and returned with figures of 5/51 in the visitors' second innings, his 35th five-wicket haul in the longest format.

"India win tomorrow, and you go to Dharamsala (for fifth and final Test), I just hope that Rohit allows you to lead the team out to the field. That'll be a wonderful gesture, honour for all that you have done for Indian cricket," Gavaskar said while speaking to Ashwin on Jio Cinema after the end of the third day's play.

To that, Ashwin replied he would be happy if his presence in the team lasts longer.

"Sunny bhai, you are being too generous, thanks so much. However, expectations about all these things, I think I am well past all that. But genuinely saying, I am enjoying every single moment I am being with this team," Ashwin said.

"The longer it lasts, I will be happy."

Gavaskar's co-commentator and former India all-rounder Ravi Shastri also said it would be a perfect way for Ashwin to go to the Dharamsala Test after helping the team win with a five-for in his 99th Test.

"Yes. But you can pick all the wickets you want, you performed the way you want but it's nothing

without the team winning. It (team win) is the best thing which can happen to a cricketer.

"Win a Test after four-five days, the feeling is surreal. I would like to have that feeling tomorrow. Rohit (Sharma) and (Yashasvi) Jaiswal started very well and hopefully they can carry on that tomorrow," said Ashwin who reached the milestone of taking 500 wickets in the Rajkot Test.

Asked about his famous carrom ball, Ashwin said, "My knee has been acting out, but I had a bit of warm-up, I didn't want to give runs as we're batting last, any runs saved is a bonus."

"When we were asked as to who wanted to start, I put my hand up. I do enjoy bowling with the new ball. I had to go back, rewire the way I think about the game."

"The way I drop the ball on the pitch, I came to know that it doesn't have the bite, it was hitting the shin off the pitch. So, I had to go back and mentally readjust, had to fire the ball quicker."

Ashwin was also all praise for wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav, who returned with fine figures of 4/22 with crucial wickets of Zak Crawley and Ben Stokes.

"I loved the way Kuldeep bowled today, he was brilliant, the way he changed the trajectory, change of pace, the dip he got -- I think he's double the bowler now. I took away a 5-wicket haul from him."

"It was hard on him yesterday, we sent him to bat early, but he showed a lot of technique and guile, we batted almost the entire first session. We would have taken a deficit of 70-80 runs when we went back to the hotel yesterday, we would have taken it." (PTI)

Abhijit Buragohain to represent India at Wushu Star Int'l Championship 2024 in Moscow

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Feb 25: The Wushu Star International Championship 2024 is scheduled to take place in Moscow from February 28 to March 5. Abhijit Buragohain, a talented athlete from the Nitaipukhuri area near Demow and a member of the Sivasagar District Wushu Association, has successfully secured a spot in the India Wushu Team. He will be representing India in the upcoming Wushu Star International Championship 2024. Abhijit Buragohain, along with the rest of the India Wushu Team, is set to depart for Russia on February 27 to participate in the championship.

Bring a law to free sports from politicians, bureaucrats: Gopichand

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Legendary shuttler Pullela Gopichand was on Sunday extremely critical of politicians and bureaucrats running sports administration in the country, saying that the government should bring a law to ensure only professionals and people who understand sports are at the helm of affairs.

Speaking during the 'News9 Global Summit' here, the former All England champion, who runs a badminton academy in Hyderabad producing top players said, "One legislation, I would really love to see is the government telling that we (sportspeople) are not under bureaucrats, sports administration is not under politicians. But sports is managed by professionals and people who know stuff and who are sportspeople."

"That, from a legislation point I would really

want to see," said Gopichand, who is also currently the chief national badminton coach. He also called upon the government and other stakeholders to streamline the processes where an athlete could just concentrate on his training and performance without having to bother about other issues.

"From policy makers, there are two things that are important. For performance, there are too many people involved, there are the (sports) associations, government, private parties, managers; there's a whole of ecosystem."

"So, I think that needs to be streamlined. Because on one side is the corporate and marketing side, the entire ecosystem of very different things. But performance is a purely different ball game."

"It needs a set of people who are really com-

mitted, whether it's players, coaches and support staff and an ecosystem which builds performance. We need to keep that isolated from the rest of it. So, I would really say 'boss get this done for us (athletes)'," he added. While Gopichand was happy with the phenomenal success and growth of sports in the country, he also pointed out the flip side of it, saying, kids could be leaving education for better prospects in sports.

"We have grown too fast as a country in sport, we are still pushing forward in big force and that is amazing. But, I think, we need to look at the entire ecosystem, because all it takes is one generation of failed sportspeople to show to the society, or the society will see it and say, 'there is no use playing sports'. So, don't want that to happen," he said. (PTI)

How Jurel cracked Test code: 4 hrs of facing spin at Talegaon, 140 overs of batting per day



a monumental practice session, one of the few that matched Jaiswal's long sessions," Bharucha revealed.

A day in a Test match has 90 overs, which is 540 balls plus extras, but 140 overs is effectively 840 deliveries in a single day. How was that even possible?

Bharucha explained the process.

"All (bowlers and throwdown men) are standing there at the same time. And the sequence is one throws for the flick. Next one for the cut. Next one for the pull. Next one for the straight drive. We do this on multiple surfaces (spinning, grass, bounce, wet cement), with multiple types of balls (rubber, tennis, cricket) and multiple types of bats

(heavy/light/thin etc). "Within this also we have one bunch who do it with the hand and the next bunch who do it with the wanger (throwdown apparatus Roboarm). Behind them are the spinners, and behind them the fast bowlers."

"So, one round in the nets would comprise around 14 people throwing, wanging and bowling, as opposed to the traditional way, where you may have like three spinners and three fast bowlers (for example) bowling one round."

"That's how we got through 140 overs in a day's practice for Dhruv," he said.

Bharucha explained the need for young batters to practice "sequencing" where they

know that no two deliveries will be same, and that's how the batter prepares for all eventualities.

"The discussion before this innings with Dhruv was 'go down to the level of your practice and everything will be fine'. The talk is always about staying hungry."

"Like Jaiswal did to Anderson. First flick into the on-side, then you know you are forcing the bowler to bowl outside off, so let's be prepared to attack him in that region (six over cover). Then he can't bowl outside off or outside leg."

"So you can attack him straight down the ground (six down the ground). All our practice is set up in this manner. No two balls will land in the same spot during our drills. We even have our set throwers who are named Flick, Cut, Pull, Drive. It's funny but our boys loved it."

Destiny does play a role for people who are destined to achieve great things. It was Jurel's U19 and UP teammate Kartik Tyagi who recommended him for Rajasthan Royals trials.

Funnily, there was another batter-keeper, an U19 World Cup winner (2018) named Aryan Juyal, who also did well in trials and scouts were a bit confused.

But Bharucha always knew whom they were signing.

"I remembered him (Jurel) hitting this one ball over extra cover for an enormous six and thought this looked different and special. Even our own RR selection team was confused which player we were going after."

"But I requested them to check the video of the guy who hit that six over extra cover and they came back saying it was Dhruv Jurel. I was very clear that's the one RR should be chasing come the auction day." (PTI)