

6 WORLD
8 NATION

- Russia attacks Ukrainian electrical power facilities
- Blinken says an Israeli assault on Gaza's Rafah would be a mistake
- Kejriwal 'kingpin' of excise scam, claims ED
- PM Modi embarks on two-day visit to Bhutan

45 politicians including former MPs, MLAs turn saffron Boost for BJP ahead of LS elections

HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 22: In a significant political development, some prominent leaders from the Congress party, including former MLA Klengdoon Engti from Bokajan constituency, have officially switched allegiance to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The defection, which took place at the state BJP Assam Pradesh office in Guwahati, marks a substantial boost for the BJP in the region ahead of the upcoming Parliamentary elections.

According to reports, a total of 45 individuals, comprising former MPs, MLAs, and influential Congress leaders, alongside members from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and other political factions, have joined the BJP.

The event witnessed the presence of key BJP figures including Bhabesh Kalita, the state BJP chief and other notable leaders such as



Tuliram Ronghang, chief executive member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, and minister Jayanta Malla Baruah. One of the notable figures in this political shift is Klengdoon Engti, the former Congress MLA from Bokajan and the son of senior Congress leader and former MP Birenging Engti. While Klengdoon

Engti has chosen to align with the BJP, his father remains within the Congress ranks. This move underscores a significant realignment of political affiliations within the state.

The timing of this defection is crucial as Assam gears up for the upcoming Parliamentary elections. The BJP's acquisition of seasoned leaders from rival parties could potentially reshape the political landscape in the region. It's worth noting that the Congress has fielded Joyram Engleng, former MLA and former chief executive member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, as their candidate for the 6 - Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency.

Among the prominent figures who joined the BJP today were former Rajya Sabha MP and vice president, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), Dwijen Sarma; (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Kejriwal arrest: AAP, Rajior Dal stage protests Arrest of Delhi CM an attack on democracy: Lurinjyoti

GUWAHATI, March 22: The Assam unit of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Rajior Dal staged demonstrations in various parts of the state in protest against the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, with opposition parties condemning the Enforcement Directorate's action against the AAP leader.

Kejriwal was arrested on Thursday night by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an excise policy-linked money laundering case.

In Guwahati, AAP members took out a procession from the party's state headquarters, located about two km from the state secretariat, but were stopped by security forces after marching for about half-a-kilometre.

Unable to proceed further, the protestors blocked traffic for some time, raising slogans against the Narendra Modi-led central government.



Congress' Guwahati Lok Sabha seat candidate Mira Borthakur Goswami also joined the protesters. A similar protest was staged by AAP members in Dibrugarh, which was participated by state party president Bhabesh Choudhury and the party's Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat candidate Manoj Dhanowar. "Narendra Modi is afraid of Kejriwal ji's popularity and wants to keep him confined in jail. But Kejriwal is not an individual, he stands for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

INDIA bloc leaders rap EC's door, allege misuse of central agencies

NEW DELHI, March 22: A day after Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate, a delegation of leaders of the INDIA bloc parties approached the Election Commission of India alleging "unrelenting, blatant and illegal deployment of Central Agencies" by the ruling BJP to stifle the opposition parties.

In a memorandum submitted to the EC, the INDIA party leaders submitted a list of recent instances of central agencies targeting opposition parties and alleged an absence of a level playing field for the opposition.

The leaders also suggested that the poll panel should change the heads of the probe agencies during the election to ensure a fair play.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said, "We pointed out this is not a normal complaint, it is a larger issue of effecting, impairing, undermining, and sabotaging the basic structure of the Indian constitution."

"We pointed out that the level playing field is the heart and soul of free and fair elections. And free and fair elections are the heart and soul of democracy itself. Democracy has been held repeatedly by the Supreme Court to be part of basic structure."

He added, "The moment you skew, render the level playing field in a non level playing field, what do you do? You are actually affecting democracy and therefore the basic structure. How do you do it, you use and misuse agencies blatantly," Singhvi said cases which are 20 years old (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

hishek Manu Singhvi said, "We pointed out this is not a normal complaint, it is a larger issue of effecting, impairing, undermining, and sabotaging the basic structure of the Indian constitution."

"We pointed out that the level playing field is the heart and soul of free and fair elections. And free and fair elections are the heart and soul of democracy itself. Democracy has been held repeatedly by the Supreme Court to be part of basic structure."

He added, "The moment you skew, render the level playing field in a non level playing field, what do you do? You are actually affecting democracy and therefore the basic structure. How do you do it, you use and misuse agencies blatantly," Singhvi said cases which are 20 years old (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India to stand by Bhutan's quest for development: PM Modi assures top leadership

THIMPHU, March 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday assured Bhutan's top leadership that India will stand by the Himalayan kingdom in its quest for development and that their unique bilateral ties would create avenues for greater cooperation in connectivity, infrastructure, trade and energy sectors.

Prime Minister Modi is here on a two-day State visit to further cement India's unique relations with Bhutan as part of India's 'Neighbourhood First' Policy.

The two countries exchanged several MoUs and signed agreements in the fields of energy, trade, digital connectivity, space and agriculture, and finalised the MoU on the establishment of rail links between the two nations.

Modi called on the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and held talks with Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay.

"Glad to have met His Majesty the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. We talked about ways to improve bilateral relations between our nations," Modi posted on X.

"In Bhutan, held productive talks with PM @tsheringtobgay. We reviewed the complete range of India-Bhutan friendship, and agreed to boost our developmental partnership as well as deepen cultural linkages," he wrote on his meeting with his Bhutanese counterpart.

Modi said the MoUs and agreements will add momentum to India-Bhutan relations.

"To fulfil your goals, India stands with you for BB - Brand Bhutan and Bhutan Believe. I assure you that the upcoming 5 years will give a new energy to our relations. We will work to create avenues in the connectivity, infrastructure, trade and energy sectors," Modi said in his address after being bestowed Bhutan's highest civilian (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



mentum to India-Bhutan relations. "To fulfil your goals, India stands with you for BB - Brand Bhutan and Bhutan Believe. I assure you that the upcoming 5 years will give a new energy to our relations. We will work to create avenues in the connectivity, infrastructure, trade and energy sectors," Modi said in his address after being bestowed Bhutan's highest civilian (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Mukul Sangma to join BJP post polls: Pala

SHILLONG, March 22: Meghalaya Congress president Vincent H Pala claimed that his party did not go for an alliance with the TMC in the state as its leader Mukul Sangma will join the BJP after the Lok Sabha polls.

Eleven Congress MLAs led by Sangma joined the TMC in 2022, following which it became the main opposition party in the state overnight. The West Bengal-based party won only five seats in the 2023 assembly elections.

"Our team went and met Dr Mukul, and invited him to come back (to the Congress). I told Mukul, you come back to the Congress or you be in the TMC, we will work together, but rather he himself is trying to persuade Congress workers to join the BJP," Pala, the MP of Shillong, told reporters here on Thursday.

"Many of our (Congress) workers received calls. For example, in Ri Bhoi, they have already started telling our people to join the BJP. In Shillong West and other places also, the TMC leaders are trying to call our leaders and ask them to join the BJP," he said.

Pala claimed that Sangma will "definitely" join the BJP after the Lok Sabha elections.

"This is the reason why the Congress refused to have an alliance with the TMC in Meghalaya," he said, adding that the party did its proper homework before taking the decision.

"...we know the TMC leaders are in talks with the BJP. It is written on the walls that after the elections, many of the TMC leaders will join the BJP. Accordingly, I briefed the high command, and they agreed with me, so we didn't have an alliance here," he said. Pala alleged that the TMC in the state was working as the "B-team" of the BJP.

"Why should we sacrifice? Today, we (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

already started telling our people to join the BJP. In Shillong West and other places also, the TMC leaders are trying to call our leaders and ask them to join the BJP," he said.

Pala claimed that Sangma will "definitely" join the BJP after the Lok Sabha elections.

"This is the reason why the Congress refused to have an alliance with the TMC in Meghalaya," he said, adding that the party did its proper homework before taking the decision.

"...we know the TMC leaders are in talks with the BJP. It is written on the walls that after the elections, many of the TMC leaders will join the BJP. Accordingly, I briefed the high command, and they agreed with me, so we didn't have an alliance here," he said. Pala alleged that the TMC in the state was working as the "B-team" of the BJP.

"Why should we sacrifice? Today, we (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP backs regional parties in Northeast

NEW DELHI, March 22: The BJP on Friday announced its support to the ruling National People's Party (NPP) in Meghalaya in both the Lok Sabha seats in the state and the Naga People's Front (NPF) in one of the two parliamentary constituencies in Manipur in the upcoming general election.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will also support the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), the ruling party in Nagaland, in the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state.

The BJP in-charge for the northeastern region, Sambit Patra, made the announcement on X.

"As per the instructions of BJP president J P Nadda ji, I am pleased to inform that BJP will extend its support to Lok Sabha candidates of NPP in both the seats of Meghalaya (Shillong and Tura), to NPF in the Outer Manipur constituency and to NDPP in Nagaland in the ensuing parliamentary elections 2024," Patra said in a post on the microblogging platform.

The saffron party had unsuccessfully contested the two seats in Meghalaya and one seat in Manipur in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The NPF and the NDPP had won the seats on which the BJP had extended support to them in 2019. The NPP had won one of the two seats in Meghalaya.

Sources said the political upshot of ethnic clashes in Manipur might have prompted the BJP to support these regional parties in these constituencies with a considerable Christian population.

These state parties have often supported the BJP government at the Centre. (PTI)

History of 2004 will repeat itself 20 years later: Jairam Ramesh on LS polls

NEW DELHI, March 22: Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Friday rejected the BJP's claims that the 2024 poll results are a foregone conclusion, saying "tiger mein abhi bahut jaan hai" and the opposition bloc will repeat the history of 2004 when the saffron party was unseated from power despite its 'India Shining' campaign.

The Congress general secretary in-charge communications also said his party is going into the Lok Sabha polls with its "five nyays" and "25 guarantees", and has full confidence that the opposition INDIA bloc will get a clear mandate.

In an interaction at the PTI office here, Ramesh also said the Congress' guarantee is not of one person but of the party and its



"ghoshna patra (manifesto)" will be called the "nyay patra" which will focus on Yuva Nyay, Nari Nyay, Shramik Nyay, Kisaan Nyay and Hissedari Nyay and the 25 guarantees under these. Asked if the polls will be about "Modi ki Guarantee" versus the Congress' "nyay" guarantees, he said, "Our guarantee is not of one person. We are giving the Congress guarantee and are giving these guarantees on the basis of our experience."

person. We are giving the Congress guarantee and are giving these guarantees on the basis of our experience."

"Under the five 'nyays' -- Yuva Nyay, Nari Nyay, Shramik Nyay, Kisaan Nyay and Hissedari Nyay - - that were the pillars of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, there are five guarantees each that have been announced by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, that would be our strategy and the issues (in the polls)," he said.

Asked about his earlier 'Tiger Zinda Hai' statement on whether the 2024 polls are a done deal, Ramesh quipped, "Tiger zinda hai, tiger zinda hi nahi hai balki tiger utsak hai, tiger mein aur bhi bahut jaan hai." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Maldives seeks debt relief from India after insisting on withdrawal of military personnel

MALE, March 22: After his anti-India rhetoric, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has struck a conciliatory tone, saying India will continue to remain his country's "closest ally" and urged New Delhi to provide debt relief to the archipelago nation.

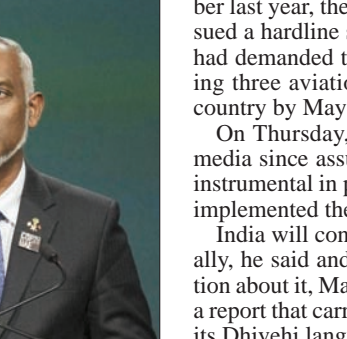
The Maldives owed approximately USD 400.9 million to India by the end of last year.

Ever since he took oath as the president in November last year, the pro-China Maldivian leader has pursued a hardline stand towards India and within hours had demanded that Indian military personnel operating three aviation platforms be repatriated from his country by May 10.

On Thursday, in his first interview with the local media since assuming office, Muizzu said India was instrumental in providing aid to the Maldives and has implemented the "greatest number" of projects.

India will continue to remain the Maldives' closest ally, he said and emphasised that there was no question about it. Maldives news portal Edition.mv said in a report that carried excerpts of Muizzu's interview to its Dhivehi language sister-publication 'Miharu.'

Muizzu's comments praising India came after the first batch of Indian military personnel left the island nation this month as planned. By May 10, Muizzu had demanded that all 88 military personnel, manning the three Indian aviation platforms, should leave the country. India has been providing humanitarian and medical evacuation services to the people of the Maldives for the last few years using (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



MALE, March 22: After his anti-India rhetoric, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has struck a conciliatory tone, saying India will continue to remain his country's "closest ally" and urged New Delhi to provide debt relief to the archipelago nation. The Maldives owed approximately USD 400.9 million to India by the end of last year. Ever since he took oath as the president in November last year, the pro-China Maldivian leader has pursued a hardline stand towards India and within hours had demanded that Indian military personnel operating three aviation platforms be repatriated from his country by May 10.

Sonitpur Congress candidate files nomination for LS polls in Assam

GUWAHATI, March 22: Congress nominee Prem Lal Ganju, contesting from Sonitpur parliamentary constituency, became the first candidate to file the nomination papers for the first phase polls in Assam scheduled on April 19, an election official said.

No nomination was filed by any of the candidates of the remaining four constituencies - Kaziranga, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh and Jorhat - till Friday. The notification for the first phase was issued on March 20.

Ganju, a state Congress general secretary, was accompanied by Pradesh Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah, the party's Dhubri contestant and sitting MLA Rakibul Husain, while he filed the nomination papers.

In Sonitpur, Ganju will contest against BJP's Behali MLA Ranjit Dutta.

Both Dutta, a minister in the erstwhile Sarbananda Sonowal government in the state, and Ganju will contest for the first time in the Lok Sabha polls.

Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal, contesting from the prestigious Dibrugarh constituency, and deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi, contesting from Nagaon, are likely to file their nomination papers on March 26, party sources said.

Elections to the 14 Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam will be held in the first three phases - on April 19, 26 and May 7 - of the seven-phase general elections in the country. The last date of filing nominations (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Dr Navin Basumatary highlighted growth analysis and sustainability benchmarks for entrepreneurship Entrepreneurs' meet in Diphu boosts local innovation and business development

HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 22: The Krishi Vignyan Kendra (KVK) in Karbi Anglong hosted a dynamic Entrepreneurs' Meet at its premises, drawing attention to the burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit within the district here on Friday.

The event gathered 25 entrepreneurs from various sectors, showcasing their enterprises and fostering discussions on agricultural, industrial, and commercial ventures.

Dr Lohit Kataki, SMS (Plant Protection) at KVK, Karbi Anglong, welcomed participants and underscored the importance of such gatherings in promoting economic growth.

The event also witnessed the presence of esteemed guests including Raju Deka, district agricultural officer (DAO), Dilip Mahanta, district veterinary officer, Melina Terangpi, additional director of the District Industries & Commerce Centre, Navin Basumatary from the State Bank of India (SBI), Diphu, and Dr Manha Bathari, scientist in Entomology from Assam Agriculture University -Zonal Research Station (AAU-ZRS), Diphu.

Speaking on the occasion, DAO Raju Deka emphasised the crucial role of entrepreneurs in driving district development and elucidated on various agricultural schemes available for their



benefit. Dr Mahanta provided insights into scientific piggy and poultry management practices essential for commercial farms. On the other hand, Mrs Terangpi discussed industrial schemes conducive to entrepreneurs, while Dr Basumatary highlighted growth analysis and sustainability benchmarks for entrepreneurship. Dr Bathari delved into the essential entrepreneurial mindset and business strategies necessary for success in various ventures. The event also featured felicitation of entrepreneurs with traditional Karbi turbans, acknowledging their contributions to local business endeavors. Additionally, diverse arrays of agro-based products from entrepreneurs were showcased, highlighting the district's economic diversity. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

benefit. Dr Mahanta provided insights into scientific piggy and poultry management practices essential for commercial farms.

On the other hand, Mrs Terangpi discussed industrial schemes conducive to entrepreneurs, while Dr Basumatary highlighted growth analysis and sustainability benchmarks for entrepreneurship.

Dr Bathari delved into the essential entrepreneurial mindset and business strategies necessary for success in various ventures. The event also featured felicitation of entrepreneurs with traditional Karbi turbans, acknowledging their contributions to local business endeavors. Additionally, diverse arrays of agro-based products from entrepreneurs were showcased, highlighting the district's economic diversity. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India's outlook for next fiscal positive: FinMin

National Statistical Office (NSO) has revised upwards the GDP growth estimate for current fiscal to 7.6 per cent from 7.3 per cent

NEW DELHI, March 22: The finance ministry on Friday said with an uptick in private investment and inflation trending down, India's outlook for the next fiscal looks positive.

The Monthly Economic Review also said that inclusion of Indian bonds in Bloomberg bond index from January 2025 should bolster inflows.

It said robust investment activity is driving growth amid a steady rise in consumption.

"The continued focus on public investment seems to have crowded in private investment," said the February edition of the review by Department of Economic Affairs.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) has revised upwards the GDP growth estimate for current fiscal to 7.6 per cent from 7.3 per cent.

India grew above 8 per cent for three consecutive quarters, reaffirming its position as a standout performer amid sluggish global growth trends. Various agencies echo a similar sentiment revising



the FY24 growth estimates of India closer to 8 per cent, the ministry said.

"On the whole, India looks positively towards the dawn of FY25," the review said.

absorb the labour leaving agriculture.

"The ascent of manufacturing sector employment is expected to be marked by upscaling of enterprises and sunrise sectors emerging as catalysts for generating quality employment," it added.

It said strong growth accompanied by stable inflation and external account and progressive employment outlook will help the Indian economy close the current financial year on a positive note.

"There are headwinds like indications of hardening crude oil prices and global supply chain bottlenecks to trade. Nonetheless, India, on the whole, looks forward to a bright outlook for FY25," the monthly review said.

It said India's inflation outlook for the upcoming months is positive.

Core inflation is trending downwards, indicating a broad-based moderation in price pressures. The pick-up in summer sowing is likely to help reduce food prices, it added. (PTI)

Stock markets rise for 3rd session; Sensex gains 190 pts



MUMBAI, March 22: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher for the third straight session on Friday, following gains in index majors L&T, ITC and Maruti and a record rally in the US markets after the Federal Reserve indicated three rate cuts this year.

However, a massive sell-off in IT and tech stocks kept indices under pressure and restricted the rise after Accenture lowered its revenue forecast for the sector for fiscal 2023-24, traders said.

After falling in early trade, markets staged a smart recovery. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 190.75 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 72,831.94. However, a sharp correction in IT and tech stocks limited the rise. During the day, it jumped 474.43 points or 0.65 per cent to 73,115.62. The NSE Nifty advanced 84.80 points or 0.39 per cent to 22,096.75.

On a weekly basis, the BSE benchmark climbed 188.51 points or 0.25 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 73.4 points or 0.33 per cent.

"The domestic market swiftly rebounded from an initial downturn and maintained a positive trajectory throughout the day, buoyed by favourable global cues driven by dovish comments from the BoE and buying activity at lower levels in the wake of a recent sell-off.

"Additionally, the retreat of crude oil prices from recent highs contributed to the positive sentiment. While most sectors experienced gains, the IT remained in the red due to subdued guidance from Accenture, a major global IT player," said Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services.

From the Sensex basket, Sun Pharma, Maruti, and IndusInd Bank, Titan, ITC, Tata Motors, Larsen &

Toubro and JSW Steel were the major gainers.

On the other hand, Infosys, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra and Bajaj Finserv were among the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.06 per cent, and the midcap index climbed 0.38 per cent.

Among the indices, telecommunication jumped 2.28 per cent, consumer discretionary rallied 1.20 per cent, commodities (1.11 per cent), healthcare (1.17 per cent) and industrials (1.17 per cent). IT declined by 2 per cent, and tech fell by 1.47 per cent.

Accenture on Tuesday lowered its revenue forecast for fiscal year 2024 due to global uncertainty and weak client spending on consulting services. It now sees full-year revenue growth to be between 1-3 per cent, down from the earlier projection of 2-5 per cent.

"Asian stocks were mixed on Friday and European stocks reacted from record highs but were still on path for a ninth straight week of gains, the longest winning streak since 2012, as investors turned more confident in the economy and looked forward to upcoming interest-rate cuts. A series of central bank meetings during the week indicated that a turn towards looser policy is on track," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

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

European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street tapped fresh record peaks on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,826.97 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.22 per cent to USD 85.59 a barrel.

"Markets traded volatile but managed to end higher, tracking favourable global cues. Participants are taking comfort from the favourable global cues," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. Equity markets will remain closed on Monday for Holi.

The BSE benchmark jumped 539.50 points or 0.75 per cent to close at 72,641.19 on Thursday. The NSE Nifty climbed 172.85 points or 0.79 per cent to 22,011.95. (PTI)

Ather Energy set to unveil Ather Rizta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 22: Ather Energy, a pioneering force in India's electric vehicle (EV) landscape, is poised to introduce its latest offering, the Ather Rizta, during the upcoming Ather Community Day on April 6, 2024. This eagerly awaited unveiling marks Ather's foray into the family scooter segment, aiming to redefine the category with a focus on space, safety, and comfort tailored to Indian family dynamics.

The Ather Rizta has been meticulously crafted to address the diverse needs of Indian families, with a significant emphasis on enhancing the riding experience for all members. Notably, Ather has emphasized the scooter's spaciousness and safety features, boasting the largest seat and storage space in its segment. Furthermore, the Rizta promises a comfortable city ride with its upright riding stance and plush suspension tuning.

Ravneet S. Phokela, chief business officer at Ather Energy, emphasized the company's commitment to meeting evolving customer demands, stating, "With this in mind, we endeavored to create a scooter that could address the needs of a family audience." He highlighted the Ather Rizta's focus on delivering space, safety, and comfort, alongside modern features designed to set new benchmarks in the family scooter segment.

Designed to navigate the challenges of Indian roads with ease, the Ather Rizta embodies reliability, durability, and comfort across various terrains. Ather envisions tapping into the burgeoning family scooter market, estimated at 5 million units, with the Rizta poised to capture significant volumes and market share within this segment.

Airtel introduces exclusive IPL bonanza offers

HT Bureau

Guwahati, March 22: As cricket enthusiasts eagerly anticipate the commencement of the premier T20 league, Airtel, a leading telecommunications provider, has unveiled a series of special IPL Bonanza offers for its customers, starting at an enticing ₹ 39.

In a strategic move tailored for the fervent followers of cricket, Airtel has introduced two new prepaid data pack plans priced at ₹ 39 and ₹ 79, replacing the existing ₹ 49 and ₹ 99 plans, respectively. These revamped packages are meticulously designed to cater to the demands of IPL 2024 aficionados, ensuring uninterrupted connectivity and a seamless streaming experience throughout the tournament.

Moreover, Airtel Digital TV, in collaboration with StarSports, has embarked on enhancing the viewer experience during the ongoing IPL 2024 season. Through this partnership, Airtel Digital TV subscribers can now access Star Sports' cutting-edge 4K service, elevating the immersive experience for cricket enthusiasts just in time for the highly anticipated tournament.

With these innovative offerings, Airtel aims to captivate cricket enthusiasts and provide them with unparalleled access to the exhilarating action of the TATA IPL 2024 on their preferred streaming devices, reaffirming its commitment to delivering superior connectivity and entertainment solutions to its discerning clientele.

RBI offices dealing with govt business to remain open on March 30, 31

Electronic transactions can be done till the stipulated time on both days



MUMBAI, March 22: RBI offices dealing with government business and all designated branches of agency banks will keep their counters open as per normal working hours on Saturday and Sunday for the convenience of taxpayers.

Electronic transactions can be done till the stipulated time on both

days (March 30 and March 31), the Reserve Bank said in a statement on special measures for the current financial year (2023-24), in wake of annual closing of government accounts.

"Transactions through National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) and Real Time Gross Settlement

(RTGS) System will continue up to 2400 hours as hitherto on March 31, 2024," it said with a view to provide greater convenience to taxpayers.

In order to facilitate government receipts and payments, necessary arrangements have also been made to conduct special clearing operations across the country, it added.

"Special clearing will be conducted for government cheques both on March 30 and 31, 2024. Agency banks are hereby advised that all cheques related to government accounts may be presented on such clearing," the RBI said.

Regarding reporting of central and state government transactions to RBI, the reporting window of March 31 will be kept open till 1200 hours on April 1, 2024. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Boost for BJP ahead of LS

general secretary, APCC Sainen Borah; ex-CEM, NC Hills Autonomous Council and ex-MLA and president, NC Hills District Congress Committee, Somorjit Halflongbar; former MLA Ananta Malo and leaders Sehraj Yasmin Haque and Prajapati Nandan Barah including vice president, AAP, Dasarath Das including other AAP leaders and Congress Seval Dal from Guwahati.

Kejriwal arrest: AAP, Rajior Dal

an ideology," Choudhury said. Opposition Rajior Dal members also staged a separate protest in front of their city office. "This move is clearly aimed at diverting attention from the pressing issues confronting the BJP-led NDA government, especially the truth about the electoral bonds. We will not be silenced and people will give a befitting reply," party leader Bhasco De Saikia said.

The party also staged protests in Sivasagar and Lakhimpur.

Congress' deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi, said the government was trying to crush the opposition. "Crushing the opposition is the second nature of this government. Two lows on the same day - freezing the accounts of @INCIndia and arresting a sitting CM. Independent agencies are clearly working at the behest of political bosses," Gogoi posted on X.

He asserted that the government was resorting to extreme measures to silence dissenting voices, stating, "The world's largest democracy is headed to become a full-fledged autocracy. People watch, history remembers, truth prevails." State Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah also criticised Kejriwal's arrest and said "INDIA will give a befitting reply".

"A frightened dictator wants to create a dead democracy," he wrote on the micro-blogging site.

"While capturing all the institutions including the media, breaking up parties, extorting money from companies, freezing the account of the main opposition party were not enough for the 'devilish power', now the arrest of the elected chief minister has also become a common thing," Borah wrote.

Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president Lurinjyoti Gogoi termed the ED raid and arrest of the Delhi CM as an attack on democracy. "The ED raid and arrest of Arvind Kejriwal is an attack on democracy and abuse of power. Targeting political opponents undermines the principles of justice and fairness. This is not how a healthy democracy operates," Gogoi wrote on X. (PTI)

INDIA bloc leaders rap EC's door,

have been resurrected to target the opposition. "...if you had to take action, I am assuming for a minute action is justified... why can't the action be deferred to June-July, what is the need to arrest him today? What is the need to raid him tomorrow? Right in the middle of the election. It is because you want to win by unfair means before the first vote is cast," he alleged, referring to the arrest of Kejriwal.

He said in 75 years of India history, no party of whatever colour, including BJP, ever thought of arresting a sitting chief minister.

"Every party of this political structure standing here has been harassed, raided and arrested, why? All virtues are in this pocket, all the vices on this side? Or are you blind?" he said.

"Not a single person of the ruling party is affected, how is this level playing field? We asked this question to the mega custodian of our democracy, the Election Commission. We told them that you have constitutional power, if you can appoint heads of police, change home secretaries, why can't you control appointments to ED, CBI, and the IT during at least the period of the MCC," Singhvi added. (PTI)

India to stand by Bhutan's quest

award. Modi was conferred the 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo,' making him the first foreign Head of the Government to receive the honour.

The award recognises Prime Minister Modi's contribution to strengthening the India-Bhutan friendship and his people-centric leadership.

"The citation added that the award also honours India's rise as a global power under his leadership, and celebrates Bhutan's special bond with India. Prime Minister Modi's leadership has set India on the path of transformation, and that India's moral authority and global influence have grown," a statement from the Ministry of External Affairs said.

"Honoured to be conferred with 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo' Award by Bhutan. I dedicate it to 140 crore Indians," Modi posted on X soon after.

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the Fifth King of Bhutan, who presented him with the honour, and members of the royal family were also present on the occasion.

Starting his address after receiving the honour with the same sentiment, dedicating the award to 140 crore Indians, Modi said the affinity between the people of India and Bhutan makes their bilateral relationship unique while emphasising that "Bharat" resides in people's hearts in this Himalayan nation.

Modi addressed the gathering as "My dear friends of Bhutan" and greeted them with a 'namaskar', receiving applause from the audience.

"We collaborate and celebrate each other's successes. When India's mission Chandrayaan was successful, the people of Bhutan were as happy as the people of India were," he said.

"Your Majesty, you're taking forward the rich culture of Bhutan with a modern vision. Your efforts are promoting 'innovation' along with 'inner joy' in Bhutan. Bhutan has given the world the concept of 'Gross National Happiness'. I am confident that Bhutan's 'Mindfulness City' will also become an inspiration for the world," Modi, speaking in Hindi, asserted that "Our ties are inseparable. Our friendship is inseparable. Our mutual cooperation is inseparable. And, the main thing is our faith is unwavering. And, that is why this day is very special for me."

People from Bhutan dressed in their native wear and holding flags of both countries clapped intermittently as Modi addressed them. Enscenced between the mighty Himalayas and India, sharing its border on west, south and east, Bhutan and India share "a unique and enduring partnership which is rooted in mutual trust, understanding and goodwill. (PTI)

Mukul Sangma to join

will tell our people to vote for the TMC, tomorrow if they go to the BJP, we will fall prey to that ideas of the BJP," he said. The Congress leader said that the TMC in West Bengal and its unit in Meghalaya are completely different. He exuded confidence that the Congress would do better than the TMC in the Garo Hills in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

"Winning or losing, that is a next-level thing, but we will give a good fight and our party will revive in Meghalaya," he said.

"According to me, TMC will come last in Garo Hills this time. The way the TMC workers, cadres and leaders have joined the Congress in Garo Hills, it seems that TMC will not be able to get even at the level which BJP got in Garo Hills," he said. Pala has been renominated by the Congress from Shillong, while Saleng A Sangma is the party nominee in the Tura seat. The TMC has fielded Mukul Sangma's brother Zenith Sangma in Tura.

Mukul Sangma could not be reached for comments on Pala's claims and allegations. Other state TMC leaders also refused to comment on it. (PTI)

History of 2004 will repeat

"So, those saying 2024 is a done deal, they are completely wrong. I will tell you what happened in 2003, the Congress lost in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, it was 'India Shining' but the Congress formed the government at the Centre in 2004, so after 20 years, that will be repeated," he said.

The seven-phase Lok Sabha polls will be held between April 19 and June 1. The results will be announced June 4. (PTI)

Maldives seeks debt relief

two helicopters and a Dornier aircraft. The Maldives' proximity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the mainland's western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gives it significant strategic importance.

During the interview, Muizzu urged India to accommodate debt relief measures for the Maldives in the repayment of "the hefty loans taken over consecutive governments."

"The conditions we have inherited are such that there are very large loans taken from India. Hence, we are holding discussions to explore leniencies in the repayment structure of these loans.

"Instead of halting any ongoing projects... to proceed with them at speed, so I see no reason for any adverse effects (on Maldives-India relations)," Muizzu added.

Muizzu's conciliatory comments towards India came ahead of Parliament elections in Maldives slated in mid-April.

He said Maldives has taken significant loans from India, which are heavier than can be borne by the Maldivian economy. "Due to this, he is currently discussing with the Indian government to explore options to repay the loans to the best of the Maldives' economic capabilities," the news portal said quoting him.

Muizzu, who expressed hope that India would "facilitate debt relief measures in the repayment of these loans," also said that he has conveyed his appreciation to the Indian government for their contributions.

During the previous regime, headed by pro-India leader Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's administration, the total amount of loans taken from the Export and Import Bank of India (Exim Bank) stood at USD 1.4 million (MVR 22 million). (PTI)

Sonitpur Congress candidate files

for the first phase of polls is on March 27, scrutiny of nominations will be on March 28, and the last date of withdrawal of candidature is March 30.

In Dibrugarh, Sonowal will contest against the United Opposition Front of Assam (UOFA)'s candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi, while in Jorhat Gaurav Gogoi will fight against sitting BJP MP Topon Gogoi, and in Kaziranga, BJP Rajya Sabha MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa has been pitted against former Congress MLA Roselina Tirkey.

The counting of votes of all seats will be held on June 4.

In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one each from the state. (PTI)

Entrepreneurs' meet in Diphu

Subject Matter Specialists and KVK staff actively participated in the program, further enriching the discussions.

Three local entrepreneurs, namely Jiten Sarangfanga from Diphu, Udayan Borah from Howraghat, and Anjali Singnarpi from Diphu, shared their entrepreneurial journeys, inspiring fellow attendees.

The Entrepreneurs' Meet concluded with a vote of thanks from Prakshipta Boruah, SMS (Agronomy) at KVK, Karbi Anglong, signaling the event's success in fostering innovation and collaboration among local entrepreneurs.

Ministers lead campaign, emphasising grassroots support & strategic planning in Dibrugarh meeting

Atul Bora confident of NDA sweeping all 14 LS seats in state

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, March 22: Atul Bora, the president of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), expressed confidence on Friday that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would secure victory in all 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam.

Speaking to media persons at the Dibrugarh AGP office, state Agriculture minister Atul Bora stated, "The NDA is poised to win all 14 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Assam. The first phase of parliamentary elections will be held on April 19, covering five Lok Sabha constituencies. We have commenced our campaign from the Kalibari constituency. Today, we conducted meetings in Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh. Our primary goal is to support our NDA candidates to secure maximum votes."

"This time, we are contesting from Dhubri and Barpeta seats. Our candidates are prepared, and



they are expected to emerge victorious from their respective constituencies. We have received positive responses, particularly in the Barpeta seat, and we are optimistic about winning with a significant margin," Bora emphasised.

He added, "Today, we convened a party meeting at the Dibrugarh AGP office to strategise for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in Dibrugarh. For the Dibrugarh seat, BJP candidate Sarbananda Sonowal will be contesting. We will extend

our full support to him to ensure his victory by securing maximum votes."

State Health minister Keshab Mahanta and Chabua MLA Punakon Baruah were also present during the party meeting.

Nowgong College organises international conference on traditional knowledge

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 22: In a gesture to fuse traditional wisdom with contemporary scientific advancement, Nowgong College (Autonomous) organised a two-day long ICSSR-sponsored international conference on 'Exploring Traditional Knowledge: Bridging Past and Future', here at the college premises. The conference aims to establish a bridge between traditional knowledge systems and modern scientific practices. Dr Ranjit Kumar Mazindar, principal of the college, delivered the welcome address at the very beginning and spoke on the significance of traditional knowledge. The IQAC coordinator and organising secretary of the conference, Dr Bhuvan Chandra Chutia, gave a brief introduction to the prestigious institution and spoke on the intention behind organising the conference. The vice chancellor of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva University, Professor

Mridul Hazarika, ceremonially inaugurated the conference.

In his inaugural speech, Dr Hazarika mentioned the rich diversity of Indian knowledge systems and pointed out how modern science can be based on these knowledge systems to achieve further progress. Prof Achintya Nayan Bezbaruah from North Dakota State University, America, delivered his speech as the guest of honour and focused on the need to document, record, and preserve our traditional knowledge so that future generations can inherit that rich legacy. Dr Bhujang Babode, the coordinator of the Research for Resonance Foundation, Nagpur, Maharashtra, graced the inaugural program and spoke on the necessity to turn from worshipping western knowledge toward restoring our indigenous knowledge systems.

Following his speech, the abstracts of the conference were released on the online platform

Zenedo. It is pertinent to mention that this is the first conference in Assam and in the entire North East to use this platform for publishing the conference abstracts. Dr Jagannath Biswakarma, an alumnus of Nowgong College (Autonomous) and currently a scientist at the University of Bristol, UK, initiated the entire process and mentioned the North East as a rich reservoir of traditional knowledge.

Dr AK Thakur, professor of History at North East Hills University, spoke on the amazing reservoir of tribal or indigenous knowledge, particularly in the context of the hill states of the North East. He mentioned how some tribal communities in these areas use traditional herbs to cure diseases and wounds instead of using modern medicines. Dr Farishta Yasmin, the academic member secretary of the college, offered her vote of thanks in the inaugural program, as asserted in a press note here.

Dibrugarh boy clinches bronze medal

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, March 22: Dibrugarh native Pallab Jyoti Mohan brought laurels to the entire district by clinching a bronze medal in the Para National Ranking Table Tennis Tournament held recently in Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

He became the first player in Assam to achieve this feat, marking a significant milestone in the sporting history of the region. Pallab Jyoti Mohan, currently pursuing his master's in Mathematics from Dibrugarh University, has etched his name in the sporting annals with this accomplishment.

Speaking to this correspondent, Pallab Jyoti Mohan's coach, Hrishikesh Gogoi, expressed pride in his student's achievement. He said, "We are proud of him for becoming the first player in Assam to clinch the bronze medal in the Para National Ranking Table Tennis Tournament recently held in Madhya Pradesh. I have been coaching him for the last four years."

"He possesses excellent techniques and movement. Recently, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) has selected him for coaching in Gujarat, where he will prepare for future big tournaments," added Gogoi.

Expressing gratitude, Gogoi said, "We thank all the people who were directly or indirectly involved in this journey, especially the Assam Table Tennis Association for their continuous support."

The Assam Table Tennis Association extended heartfelt congratulations to Pallab Jyoti Mohan for his remarkable achievement.

Farewell for outgoing circle officer

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, March 22: Nabajyoti Saharia, who served as the circle officer of Demow, has been transferred to Doodhoo. In honour of his service, the employees of Demow Circle Office organised a farewell meeting at the Demow Circle Office recently.

During the farewell, the outgoing circle officer Nabajyoti Saharia was presented with a phular gamosa, a xorai, and a citation by the employees of Demow Circle Office.

AAP members detained in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, March 22: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Dibrugarh candidate, Manoj Dhanowar, state president Bhaben Choudhary, and AAP supporters were detained by Dibrugarh Police after they staged a protest in front of the Dibrugarh District BJP office against the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Talking to reporters, Rajesh Sharma, in-charge of AAP northeast, said, "Arvind Kejriwal was arrested

in a fake case, and it was a political conspiracy. He should be released immediately."

The AAP supporters, holding placards and their party flags, protested in front of the BJP party office. After a few hours, Dibrugarh Police released them.

"It's a conspiracy to arrest our leader Arvind Kejriwal in a fake case. We are against such unconstitutional behavior of the BJP government," said Manoj Dhanowar, AAP candidate from Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat, to reporters.

Congress candidate Premlal Ganju files nomination papers



TEZPUR, March 22: The nomination filing process for the upcoming general election, scheduled for April 19 in the first phase, commenced on Friday for the No-11 Sonitpur Lok Sabha seat, with Indian National Congress (INC) candidate Premlal Ganju submitting his nomination papers. Accompanied by Dadul Barkataki, president of the District Congress Committee, the Congress candidate filed his nomination papers with the returning officer, Deba Kumar Mishra.

He received a warm welcome from Congress workers before the process at the Congress office. A procession, led by APCC president Bhupen Borah, senior Congress leader Roqibul Hussain, MLA Titibar Bhaskar Barua, and a host of INDIA alliance workers, escorted Premlal Ganju to the DC office.

After filing his nomination, Premlal Ganju and APCC president Bhupen Borah, while addressing the media, criticised the BJP government's rule over the past years. They stated that the nation has lost faith in the government, and they aim to win the support of the people in the election. They expressed confidence in winning the election.

Helpline numbers released

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 22: In view of the upcoming general election to Lok Sabha in 2024, the Dima Hasao Election Office has provided the following contact numbers for the convenience of the public. Any queries or complaints regarding the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) may be addressed by contacting these numbers: 03673236024, 03673236324, and 1077.

Jorhat mourns demise of noted lyricist

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 22: Parashmani Mahanta, a noted singer, lyricist, and music composer, passed away at JMCH on Friday due to a sudden illness.

Mahanta, a resident of Naliali here, was 59 years old and also served as a subject teacher (Physics) at Jorhat Government HS and MP School. He is survived by his wife, a daughter, and a large number of relatives.

Mahanta was actively involved with various social, cultural, and literary organisations and was a familiar face in the literary and cultural circles of Jorhat. His demise has been deeply mourned by numerous organised groups and a large number of people.

Tezpur MLA launches 'The Unsung Hero-1942' book



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 22: MLA Tezpur, Prithviraj Rabha, launched a book titled 'The Unsung Hero-1942' on Wednesday, authored by renowned playwright Niranjan Saikia, at a special function held for the occasion at Dekargaon Higher Secondary School near here.

While launching the book, MLA Rabha, in his commendable speech, praised noted playwright Niranjan Saikia's effort to docu-

ment the history and contributions made by the unsung heroes of the district of Sonitpur from Dhekiajuli, Sootea, to Gohpur towards India's struggle for Independence. He emphasised that this endeavor would keep alive the life and works of the dedicated souls of the area for generations to come. During his speech, MLA Rabha further added that Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and his contemporaries had tremendous contributions throughout the jour-

ney for India's independence.

Bidyut Sarma, retired headmaster of Satsang High School, hosted the meeting chaired by Geeta Rani Mali, principal of Dekargaon Higher Secondary School. Among others, the program was graced by the presence of former student leader Jasaskar Barua, publisher of the book Pradyut Hazarika, artist and teacher Mayur Kanchan Bora, and teaching staff of Dekargaon HS School.

Local holiday declared in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 22: Through a notification, Narendra Kr Shah, district commissioner of Nagaon, on Friday declared a local holiday on March 26, 2024, in the district on account of Doul Yatra.

It is stated in the notification that during the day, all government offices, courts, and educational institutions will remain closed, except for emergency services, pre-scheduled tests or examinations, and other election-related works.

Police seize drugs

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, March 22: Three drug peddlers were arrested with 125.6 grams of heroin in Jagiroad town in an operation led by static surveillance group Tapan Kumar Nath, Jagiroad Police Station officer-in-charge (OC) Bhadeshwar Pegu, and sub-inspector (SI) Utpal Das at around 5:30 am on Friday. The smugglers, Muddasir Ali, Alilluh, and Atabur Rahman, were planning to smuggle the drugs to Kerala by train from Juria in Nagaon district via Jagiroad in a Maruti Alto (AS02 N 3157). The international market value of the seized items is estimated at ₹ 1 crore.

AJP condemns arrest of Arvind Kejriwal

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, March 22: Sanjay Kumar Deb, secretary of the Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP) Central Committee and coordinator of the 13th Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency, has slammed the arrest of Aam Aadmi Party supreme and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday.

Sanjay Kumar Deb stated that the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal ahead of the Lok Sabha elections was dangerous and unfortunate for the largest democratic country, India.

He further mentioned that the Prime Minister is misusing his post and has coerced Opposition leaders into joining the BJP by threatening them with ED, CBI, income tax, and all government machinery.

Sanjay Kumar Deb added that many Opposition political parties' bank accounts have been frozen by the BJP so that they cannot contest in this Lok Sabha election.

Assam Agricultural University holds awareness meeting

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, March 22: Assam Agricultural University-Regional Research Centre, Chilangani, Nagaon, organised an awareness meeting on 'Weather, Climate, and Agriculture' in collaboration with Green Farmer Producer Company at Bhurbandha Development block on Friday.

The program was chaired by Hiren Sharma, managing director, Green Farmers Producers Company, in the presence of about fifty farmers and members. Agricultural meteorologist Navajyoti Deka explained the objectives of the meeting and how farmers can benefit from weather advisories. The meeting was attended by Dr Jyoti Rekha Hazarika, a scientist who urged farmers to select high-quality varieties suitable for the weather and climate and to promote cultivation in a scientific manner. Dr Binod Kalita, scientist, Regional Research Centre, Chilangani, also spoke about the cultivation of maize and paddy in

response to changing climate conditions, along with various field crops according to weather conditions. Dr Saptadevika Bhat-tacharya, acting head, Center of Agricultural Sciences, Morigaon, urged the women of Bhurbandha agricultural sector to become self-reliant by engaging themselves in agriculture and undertaking agricultural plans depending on the weather and climate.

Dr Sukanya Gogoi, subject matter specialist, Horticulture Department, Center of Agricultural Sciences, Morigaon, spoke about the relationship between weather, climate, and horticulture. Navajyoti Deka, agricultural meteorologist, explained in detail how farmers can benefit from the mobile service 'Damini' to get weather advisories developed by the Department of Meteorology, Government of India.

A rain gauge was installed at the Agricultural Science Centre, Morigaon, to measure rainfall in the Morigaon district.

World Water Day celebrated with speech competitions & awareness prog



TEZPUR, March 22: The Department of Public Health Engineering, Sonitpur, in association with Darrang College, celebrated World Water Day at the college premises, focusing on the theme 'Water for Peace' and highlighting the critical role of water in the stability and prosperity of the world. Nearly one hundred students from seven schools and colleges participated in a district-level speech competition organised in connection with the event, with sub-themes including 'Significance of World Water Day', 'Water for Peace', and 'Water Conservation'.

Alongside the competition, a talk on 'The Importance of Water for the Survival of Mankind' commenced with a welcome address by Dr Lakshmi Roy, academic vice principal (Science) at Darrang College. The event was graced by dignitaries including Nayanjyoti Hazarika, executive engineer (PHE) Tezpur, and Manash

Bhuyan, district coordinator (PHE), along with faculty members Dr Arundhati Deka Nath, Abhijit Das, Dr Nabanita Medhi, Dr Gukul Kr Das, Dr Chittaranjan Baruah, Dr Kihar Deka, Gulap Sonowal, and Ritu Sharma.

As distinguished speakers, Nayanjyoti Hazarika and Manash Bhuyan from the PHE Department emphasised the importance of celebrating World Water Day. Dr Lakshmi Roy and Dr Arundhati Deka Nath judged the speech competition, which was held in two categories.

In category I of the speech competition, Barbi Borah and Bhaswati Kashyap of Tezpur Government Girls' H.S. and MP School secured the first and second prizes, respectively, while Abhisekh Kr Rai of Rashtabhasa Vidyalaya won the third prize.

Our Nagaon correspondent adds: The Public Health Engineering Department, Dhing division, and Institution's Innovation

Council (IIC), Dhing College jointly observed 'World Water Day' on Friday at Dhing College here. The event included a speech competition for both college and school-level students in two categories and also conducted an awareness program.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from students and faculty members representing various educational institutions of greater Dhing and Moirabari.

M Dewan, executive engineer, PHED, Pomi Bora, SDO, PHED, as well as other dignitaries from Dhing College Prof GC Bharali, Dr SK Nath, Dr MM Saikia, Dr LN Bordoloi delivered speeches highlighting the theme of this year's celebration of the day - 'Water for Peace'. Dr Biman Hazarika, principal of the college, narrated the history of the observance of 'World Water Day' since 1993 and the importance of water in day-to-day life, a press note said here.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.
—Theodore Roosevelt

Debate over Kejriwal's arrest

The recent turn of events surrounding Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest has stirred significant debate and speculation, particularly regarding its potential ramifications on the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Kejriwal's decision to withdraw his appeal against the Enforcement Directorate's actions has sparked a flurry of reactions, with both the BJP and AAP presenting contrasting narratives. At the heart of the matter lies a fundamental disagreement over the nature of Kejriwal's arrest. While the BJP maintains that it is a "purely legal matter," the AAP asserts that it is a "purely political ploy" aimed at undermining their challenge to the BJP's dominance in Delhi's parliamentary seats. With the BJP's uncertain prospects of retaining all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, the timing of Kejriwal's arrest adds a new layer of complexity to the political landscape. Amidst these developments, speculation abounds regarding the potential impact on the electorate's sentiments and voting behavior. The AAP is banking on garnering sympathy and support from Delhi voters in response to Kejriwal's arrest, viewing it as an opportunity to rally against the BJP's perceived tactics. However, concerns linger regarding the AAP's ability to withstand the pressure and uncertainty in the absence of Kejriwal's leadership.

While the BJP may initially seem to hold the upper hand, recent alliances and shifting voter dynamics suggest a more nuanced electoral landscape. The Congress-AAP alliance, bolstered by a substantial Muslim vote and resonant messages on education and healthcare, poses a formidable challenge to the BJP's dominance. However, the BJP remains proactive in its efforts to capitalize on the evolving situation and maintain its political advantage. Kejriwal's arrest has also reignited debates over governance and accountability in Delhi. The BJP's strategy to portray Kejriwal as "the face of corruption" has gained traction, with the party leveraging recent controversies to bolster its narrative. Despite AAP's assertions of political victimization, the legal and political dimensions of Kejriwal's arrest continue to intersect, shaping public perceptions and electoral strategies. As the political landscape evolves, the role of the judiciary emerges as a crucial factor in safeguarding democratic principles and constitutional norms. AAP's appeal to the Supreme Court underscores the broader implications of Kejriwal's arrest for the integrity of India's democracy. However, the ultimate outcome remains uncertain, leaving both parties and the electorate on tenterhooks.

In navigating these turbulent waters, AAP faces a pivotal moment in its trajectory. The need for a cohesive leadership strategy and a clear succession plan becomes paramount in the face of Kejriwal's absence. The party must seize this opportunity to cultivate a broader leadership base and reaffirm its commitment to transparency and accountability in governance. Looking ahead to the Lok Sabha elections, the stakes have never been higher for Delhi's political landscape. The outcome will not only shape the balance of power in the national capital but also reverberate across the country. As the countdown to polling day begins, all eyes are on Delhi, where the battle for electoral supremacy rages on amidst a backdrop of legal wrangling and political maneuvering. While Kejriwal's arrest may have immediate repercussions for AAP and the broader political landscape in Delhi, its ultimate impact on the Lok Sabha elections remains uncertain. As the drama unfolds, one thing is clear: the future of Delhi's governance hangs in the balance, awaiting the verdict of both the courts and the electorate.

Samajwadi party and Congress setting up coordination committees

By: Pradeep Kapoor

Ever since Akhilesh Yadav joined Bharat Jodo Yatra of Rahul Gandhi in Agra, there is a perfect understanding between Samajwadi Party and Congress for Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh. Both the leaders sent positive message to the party leaders and workers through their action during their joint rally at Agra. So much so both the leaders took selfie of each other to show mutual respect which was very well appreciated by those present on the occasion.

Recently senior Congress leaders Avinash Pande who is AICC general secretary in charge of UP, state Congress President Ajai Rai, CLP leader Aradhna Mishra and senior leader PL Punia visited Samajwadi Party headquarters to meet Akhilesh Yadav and other senior leaders.

Akhilesh Yadav introduced the senior Congress leaders to party office-bearers and district level leaders from 17 Lok Sabha seats given to Congress as part of seat sharing in INDIA block in UP. Akhilesh Yadav directed the Samajwadi Party leaders at state level as well as in districts to ensure victory of Congress candidates in all the 17 Lok Sabha seats.

Instructions have been sent by both the parties to district level office-bearers to set up coordination committees for better understanding and joint campaign for candidates.

As a part of the strategy and better understanding Samajwadi Party and Congress candidates have started visiting the offices

and residences of each other party leaders.

Leaders from both the parties emphasised on the need of coordination between leaders and workers to set up coordination committees at booth level. Both the parties have learnt lessons from 2017 assembly polls when they contested the polls in alliance which miserably failed to transfer votes to candidates of other party.

Although Congress is contesting 17 Lok Sabha seats but this time it is going to be tough challenge to retain Rae Bareilly and get back Amethi from BJP.

There was a time when Congress won 82 seats out of total 85 Lok Sabha seats in 1984 Lok Sabha polls.

The tally came down to only one in 2019 when Mrs Sonia Gandhi won from Rae Bareilly. The vote percentage too took the dip and reached all-time low at 2.33 in 2022 assembly polls.

Similarly for Samajwadi Party also these polls are very important as party was able to retain five seats in 2019 Lok Sabha polls while the alliance partner BSP increased the tally from nil to 10.

Samajwadi Party got setback when its candidates were defeated in Rampur and Azamgarh by-elections reducing the tally to only three.

So it is in the larger interest of both the parties the leaderships of Samajwadi Party and Congress should set up the coordination committees from state to both level for mobilisation of voters and ensure transfer of votes for candidates of both the parties. (IPA Service)

The evolution and trustworthiness of electronic voting machines

The electronic voting machine (EVM) has once again taken center stage in public discourse. Since its full implementation in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, the EVM has been a subject of intense debate among political circles and civil society alike. The arguments surrounding its efficacy remain consistent, though the proponents and opponents frequently switch positions. In the current context, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar has eloquently come to the defense of the voting machine. He metaphorically rebukes its detractors, stating, "Blaming EVMs for unfulfilled desires is an unjust accusation." This poetic stance by the CEC underscores the ongoing dialogue surrounding the role and reliability of EVMs in democratic processes.

The issue at hand revolves around the fundamental concept of trust in technology. Take, for instance, the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), a cornerstone in the democratic process of electing representatives. For this system to function effectively, it's imperative that all stakeholders—be it political entities, voters, or civil society—place their trust in it. Trust, however, is not solely contingent upon the technology meeting legislative, legal, regulatory, and technological standards, but it extends beyond these parameters. This principle is applicable across various technological advancements.

Consider the evolution of financial transactions: from the traditional paper-based cheque system replacing informal methods like Hundi transfers, to the emergence of electronic money transfers via banks, and presently, the widespread adoption of internet-based digital transactions facilitated by mobile phones. Despite the involvement of numerous unidentified inter-



mediaries in the latter, the fact remains that billions of digital transactions occur daily. While acknowledging the presence of potential vulnerabilities within these systems, it's evident that users exhibit a significant level of trust in their reliability and functionality.

Before the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) took center stage, the paper ballot system was the primary mode of voting, a practice that evolved over several decades. Initially, in the inaugural General Election of 1951-52, the process involved multiple ballot boxes, each designated for a specific candidate and marked with their party's symbol.

Voters then had to deposit their ballot in the box corresponding to their chosen candidate. Subsequently, a common ballot box was introduced, accompanied by ballot papers featuring symbols and names of contesting candidates. Voters were required to stamp their chosen symbol and deposit the paper into the shared box.

However, despite its widespread adoption, the paper ballot system wasn't immune to controversies regarding its reliability and security. Instances of ballot box theft and booth capturing were reported from various parts of the country, highlighting its susceptibility to fraud. Nonetheless, despite these challenges, the paper ballot system maintained a

reasonable level of trust among all stakeholders for many decades.

From its humble beginnings as a prototype developed by the Hyderabad-based Electronics Corporation of India Limited in 1979 to its nationwide implementation in 2004, the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) underwent a series of refinements amidst intense legal and political scrutiny.

Much like its predecessor, the paper ballot, the EVM is expected to instill confidence in voters across three crucial aspects: firstly, ensuring that their vote is accurately recorded in a transparent manner; secondly, guaranteeing that their vote is allocated to the intended candidate; and finally, ensuring that the entire process, from assembly and programming to transport, storage, and counting, maintains integrity and accountability.

Consequently, trust in EVMs transcends mere confidence in the technology itself, encompassing the integrity of the entire operational chain.

Regarding its technological aspect, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has consistently asserted that the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) is immune to tampering and corruption. At first glance, this assertion appears reasonable. The EVM op-

erates on a simplistic design, devoid of any networking capabilities, wireless interfaces, or operating systems found in more sophisticated voting machines. This inherent simplicity, proponents argue, shields the EVM from external hacking attempts.

During the peak of public skepticism surrounding the integrity of the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in 2009, the Election Commission of India (ECI) organized a public challenge, offering around 100 EVMs for examination by political parties and activists. However, the challenge faced objections from ECI officials and EVM manufacturers when some participants resorted to dismantling the machines.

Consequently, the initiative lost momentum. Subsequently, Hari Prasad, one of the activists involved, claimed in a televised interview that he had successfully accessed and could potentially hack an EVM in private. In response, the ECI filed a complaint leading to Prasad's arrest. Notably, Prasad was affiliated with a group known as Citizens for Verifiability, Transparency, and Accountability in Elections, led by GVL Narasimha Rao, who later assumed the role of a spokesperson for the BJP.

The incident highlighted a lack of transparency on the part of both the Election Commission of India (ECI) and EVM manufacturers regarding the inner workings of the machines. However, in response to mounting criticism over this opacity, the ECI took a significant step in 2013 by introducing the Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system. This innovative measure aimed to provide voters with tangible assurance that their votes had been accurately recorded, thus addressing concerns about trans-

parency in the voting process.

While an individual Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) may appear secure against external hacking attempts, its vulnerability lies in the human element involved during the manufacturing process. EVMs are programmed using a source code that operates on the hardware. In theory, this code could be manipulated to function in a desired manner.

PV Indresan, a former IIT professor who chaired the Election Commission of India's (ECI) technical committee in 2005, disclosed that only a handful of individuals, typically three to four, possess knowledge of the source code. This source code, kept confidential by the EVM manufacturers (often public sector units), is entrusted to individuals whose integrity is paramount. Ultimately, the trustworthiness of the EVM technology hinges not solely on its technical aspects but also on the integrity of those involved in its manufacturing process.

Advocating against reverting to the paper ballot, some suggest that the Election Commission of India (ECI) should proactively work towards reinstating trust among political parties and voters. This endeavor necessitates a comprehensive approach, encompassing every facet of the electoral process, from the manufacturing and programming of machines to the secure storage and accurate counting of votes. Furthermore, additional trust-building measures, such as the Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), should be implemented where deemed necessary. Central to fostering greater trust is a corresponding level of transparency. It's crucial to recognize that technology, including the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), is dynamic and adaptable, never set in stone. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

India's NHRC is acting as an agency of the ruling Narendra Modi government

By: Arvind Narrain

India, the world's largest democracy, has unfortunately been witnessing a backsliding on human rights. It is in this context that the National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC) will be undergoing its review for accreditation by a jury of its peers which is the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in March 2024.

Accreditation by GANHRI and the status of A or B, which is awarded, is based on the extent to which an NHRI complies with the Paris Principles—which are the agreed minimum standards that NHRIs must meet to be considered credible.

One of the standards that the NHRC will have to meet is to show that it is exercising its powers to "draw the attention of the government to situations in any part of the country where human rights are violated and making proposals to it for initiatives to put an end to such situations and, where necessary, expressing an opinion on the positions and reactions of the government".

In India, the constituency which has mounted the strongest defence of human rights is civil society. There have been strong protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) as well as by farmers against the farm laws. There has also been a consistent campaign for the release of political prisoners including the BK-16, the Delhi anti-CAA protesters as well as the thousands of Adivasis who languish in Indian prisons. The exercise of these fundamental rights to speech, expression and assembly has come at a great cost. Those doing human rights work have faced the brunt of persecution by the State.

Be it Khurram Parvez of the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), Harsh Mander, Henri Tiphagne or Aakar Patel - they have all faced the brunt of State intimidation. Khurram Parvez, who is an internationally known human rights defender is still in jail, imprisoned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967 for the 'crime' of human rights reporting on Kashmir.

It is outrageous that the NHRC has not released a single statement on the arrest of Khurram Parvez and Irfan Mehraj and the targeting of the JKCCS, which is the premier human rights organisation based in Kashmir. When the very raising of a voice is sought to be stifled by the State, democracy is under threat. It is in times such as this, that it is vital that an institution with a mandate of independence stands up for the principle that the work of human rights defenders, however unpopular it is to the government, is a vital element of our democratic fabric.

The institution which Indian civil society looks to, to stand up for these core democratic principles of speech, expression, association and assembly, is the NHRC. The mandate of the NHRC under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 is the 'better protection of human rights'. By human rights, the statute under Section 2(d) means, "the rights related to life, lib-

erty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the international covenants."

The question of defending the right to speech, expression, assembly and association is vital to an institution that claims human rights as its very mandate. If the NHRC has remained silent when its core mandate is being threatened, then it needs to be accountable for its inaction. Leaving aside the question of being a voice in support of those raising human rights concerns, the NHRC also has a mandate to proactively intervene in human rights concerns of the day.

In the past, the NHRC has exercised its power under Section 12(d) of the Act by doing a 'review' of the "safeguards provided by or under the Constitution or any law for the time being in force for the protection of human rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation". The NHRC in the past has been responsive to civil society concerns and come out with recommendations on legislation in which there were legitimate concerns expressed about human rights.

With respect to the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (later Act), the NHRC came out with a finding that, "there was no need to enact the new law" and that the concerns around terrorism could be dealt with under existing legislation. However, the current NHRC has shown no concern about the constitutional implications of anti-terror laws. Ever since the coming into power of the Modi government, both the UAPA and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act, 2008 have become the go-to laws with respect to targeting dissenters.

An online People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCIL) conference held in January 2021 had victims and activists testifying from twelve states across the country on how the UAPA continues to be invoked to criminalise dissent, be it of speech, association or assembly. However, the misuse of the UAPA and the NIA Act while being raised by civil society groups has not troubled the human rights conscience of the NHRC.

Neither has the current NHRC seen fit to issue any statement or analysis regarding the human rights implications of the three

criminal laws that have been passed to replace the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC), the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC), and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872. These laws seriously dilute human rights standards which the NHRC should hold dear, be it the prohibition against handcuffing or solitary confinement. However, the analysis and critique of the same have been left to civil society.

The other important function that the NHRC has under Section 12(b) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, relates to "intervening in any proceeding involving any allegation of violation of human rights pending before any court". In the past, the NHRC has intervened forcefully in the Supreme Court on key human rights violations. During the Gujarat riots in 2002, the NHRC was a petitioner before the Supreme Court representing the interests of the human rights violated, in a luminous example of the use of its powers under Section 12(b) of the Protection of Human Rights Act.

However, the NHRC has not said a word in relation to the passing of the CAA by the Union government and its recent notification. The passing of the law triggered one of the most widespread protest movements in contemporary times, with over 140 petitions being filed challenging the CAA. The NHRC could have exercised its powers under Section 12(b) and added the weight of its office to the challenge by filing its own petition before the Supreme Court.

It took a statement by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), in which it contemplated intervening in the Supreme Court to expose the failure of the NHRC to a global audience.

The Ministry of External Affairs has opposed this proposed intervention, stating that the Act is "an internal matter of India". It further went on to characterise the United Nations body as a "foreign party" and the intervention itself as bereft of "locus standi" as it related to "issues pertaining to India's sovereignty".

This debate between the ministry and the OHCHR provided the NHRC an opportunity to issue a statement welcoming the OHCHR intervention as adding a welcome

POST BAG

Ensure water security

Sir/Ma'am

It is imperative for the Karnataka government to adopt and execute long-term strategies to ensure water security for the populace. It is crucial to curb the expansion of Bengaluru as there will be insufficient water resources to sustain the city in the future. Prioritizing schemes for rainwater harvesting, lake rejuvenation, and water recycling is essential, as these initiatives are often overlooked until crises arise. It is crucial to acknowledge that the Supreme Court has imposed a restriction on usage of Cauvery water. With the looming threat of climate change, the situation is expected to deteriorate further. The water crisis is palpable in numerous districts, including Chamarajanagar, Ramanagar, Mysuru Mandya and also in North Karnataka districts including Bellary, Raichur, Yadgir, Bidar and Koppal. Many taluks in Karnataka are grappling with a drinking water shortage, while water levels in most reservoirs, including the Krishnaraja Sagar and the Tungbhadra, have plummeted to unprecedented lows. The distress signals and warnings from towns and villages must not be ignored.

Vijaykumar H K
Raichur, Karnataka
hkvkmech1@gmail.com

Worthful career options- After 12th Commerce

By: Kaustov Kashyap

Commerce is a stream that caters to almost all types of aptitudes and skills. If you are a business-oriented person, you can pick career options after commerce, irrespective of your aptitude in maths. A lot of students worry about the career options after 12th commerce, but the truth is if you have the right skill and aptitude, you can earn well in any line of business-oriented work you pick up. Commerce is taking the world by storm, and that's because we are in the era of start-ups and entrepreneurship. Thanks to social media, small businesses are also coming to fruition, which increases the need for commerce graduates and commerce career options even more.

As a commerce student, you develop a great eye for detail, creativity, problem-solving skills, and communication skills. If you see your skill set matching the skills mentioned above or wish to develop them, you must consider the following career options after commerce.

Chartered Accountant

Chartered Accountancy is one of the most popular commerce career options after 12. A CA is an accountant who has received certification from a statutory body, deeming them qualified to take charge of the accounting and tax-related matters of a company, such as tax returns, audits of financial statements and business practices, and record keeping.

There are 3 phases you must successfully go through to become a CA. First, this involves a foundation course; you can appear for this after the 12th. If you complete your graduation, you don't have to appear for the foundation course. Then comes the intermediate level. Once you clear the intermediate level, you become eligible for CA internships. After interning for 2 to 2.5 years, you become eligible to give the final exam and become a CA. Becoming a CA is a five-year journey that you must commit to.

Eligibility: 10+2, CA foundation, CA intermediate, CA final.

Salary (Per month): ₹ 10,000 - ₹ 1,50,000 Approx.

Risk Management Analyst

To be an avid Risk Management Analyst, you must have good supervision, observation, research, and coordination skills. In such career options after commerce, risk managers ensure that their client or company is not compromising in terms of regulation and operation of human and monetary resources. And if a company is at risk, they hire a risk management analyst to find a way to counter the situation.

If you are prevention-oriented and always ready with a contingency plan, then this is one of the best career opportunities after 12th commerce for students. After graduation in such career options after 12 commerce, you can start with entry-level jobs like Insurance Risk Surveyors, Data Analyst, Financial Risk Analyst, and many other

and make your way up to Risk Management Analyst.

Eligibility: UG in Maths and Commerce related courses

Salary (Per month): ₹ 30,000 - ₹ 1,00,000 Approx.

Personal Financial Advisor

Commerce career options such as a financial advisor, make you responsible for suggesting the best possible solutions for your employer regarding investments, taxes, insurance, stocks, money management, and achieving their financial goals. If you have an analytical mind, excellent problem-solving skills, and feel good about guiding others, this can be one of the best career options after commerce.

Some organizations do not ask for a specific certification in the field, but you should consider undergoing a certified course in such commerce career options to have the edge over others. Again, you can look up FINRA, SEBI, and the like to know about these certifications.

Eligibility: UG Course in Maths, Economics, or Finance.

Salary (Per Month): ₹ 30,000 -

₹ 1,50,000 Approx.

Investment Banker

Investment bankers are financial advisors to businesses and, in some cases, governments. In such career options for commerce students, you help clients to raise funds. This means issuing shares, issuing bonds, negotiating the acquisition of a rival business, or arranging the sale of the business itself.

To pursue such career options after commerce, you must be highly detail-oriented, well-versed with MS office, a good team player, and open to taking directions efficiently, above all, you must be able to give in an extensive amount of time (approximately more than 80 hours a week).

You can consider doing an MBA, or CA since these are preferred qualifications in Investment banking but not necessary for career in commerce after 12th. As a graduate looking for career options for commerce students, you can join an entry-level job like a data analyst and make your way up.

Eligibility: UG course in any field (minimum percentage required-50 per

cent), Entrance Exams

Salary (Per month): ₹ 40,000 - ₹ 6,50,000 Approx.

Actuary

Actuaries are business professionals responsible for managing financial risks to help protect the organization's plans and defend against losses. In such commerce career options, you will use statistical techniques and mathematical skills to help companies and clients formulate policies to minimize risk costs.

For such career options after commerce, you need specialized mathematical knowledge, project management, and problem-solving skills, Interpersonal communication, and computer skills, such as developing spreadsheets, database operations data, and programming language, are necessary for these types of career options for commerce students.

Becoming an actuary will require you to obtain a bachelor's degree to get started. Many institutions offer courses in actuarial science, but you can also study courses in business, mathematics, or economics.

Eligibility: UG Course with a mathematical subject.

Pay Bracket (Per month): ₹ 28,000 - ₹ 4,00,000 Approx

Digital Marketer

As a Digital Marketing professional, you will have to create and upload images from your organization's website, write and deliver a marketing campaign by email, and accurately analyze the customer reports. Beyond this, such ca-

reer options after commerce require you to use quantitative analysis to identify weaknesses in the advertising or branding of the organization and find ways to improve performance in social and marketing channels.

As a Digital Marketer you can try out various job profiles while staying within your arena, you can look for jobs that involve SEO Management, Content Marketing Specialisation, Social Media Management, etc. For such commerce career options, you must also be well-versed with the current societal trends and norms of the target population so that you can effectively reach them.

Eligibility: UG Course with any subject.

Salary (Per month): ₹ 18,000 - ₹ 60,000 Approx.

Career options after 12th commerce are promising but it is really important to have a clear vision and set of goals. For all career options after commerce, there are graduate and postgraduate courses available that bigger companies will be more attracted to. Therefore, all your efforts should be guided in a direction where you can see yourself becoming successful not just in terms of post or salary but in terms of well-being as well. The average salary of a personal financial advisor is Rs 18,000 to Rs 60,000 Approximately per month. (The author is an HR & Career Consultant based in Jorhat, Assam. He can be reached at 9957663224)

Central Bank Of India Recruitment – 3000 Apprentice Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 27/03/2024.

Central Bank of India has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 3000 Apprentice Posts under Apprentices Act, 1961 and as per Apprenticeship policy of the Bank. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Apprentice

No of posts: 3000 posts

No of posts @ Assam: 70 posts

Place of Posting: Anywhere in India

No of posts @ Assam: 75 posts

Stipend: ₹ 15000

Eligibility Criteria of Central Bank of India Recruitment

Age Limit: Candidate should be born between 01.04.1996 to 31.03.2004 as on cut off date.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe: 5 years
Other Backward Classes (Non-Creamy Layer): 3 years
PWBD: 10 Years

Educational Qualification: Graduate degree in any discipline from a recognized University or any equivalent qualifications recognized as such by the Central Government. Candidates should have completed & have passing certificate for their graduation after 31.03.2020.

Application Fee:

Category	Fee
PWBD	₹ 400+GST
SC/ ST/ Women	₹ 600+GST
Others	₹ 800+GST

Important Dates of Central Bank of India Vacancy 2024

Starting date for submission of application: 21st February 2024

Last date for submission of application: 27th March 2024

Date of online exam: 31st March 2024 (Tentative)

Primary Healthtech Guwahati Recruitment – 15 Posts

Last Date: 30/03/2024.

Primary Healthtech, Guwahati has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 15 Posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancies.

1. Business Development Executive

No of posts: 5 posts

Age Limit: 21-35 years

Educational Qualification:

Bachelor's/ Master's in business administration
Proficient in Microsoft Office and Google Suite
Experience with CRM software is a plus
Passionate about startups and entrepreneurship

Experience: 1 to 2 years of experience in medical device/ product sales .

Skills required:

Sales and Marketing
Strong Communication
Analytical and Critical Thinking

2. Research Assistant

No of posts: 5

Pay: 10k to 12k during probation

Age Limit: 21-35

Educational Qualification: Master's degree in Chemistry/Biotechnology/Chemical Engineering

Experience: 0-2 years Freshers can apply but with an impeccable academics record.

3. Medical Lab Technician

No of posts: 5

Pay: 7k to 10k during probation

Age Limit: 21-25

Educational Qualification: Diploma/Degree in Medical Lab Technology

Experience: 0-2 years. Freshers can apply but with an impeccable academic's record.

Application fee if any: NA

How to Apply for Primary Healthtech Guwahati Recruitment?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online by sending their CV's to career@mobilabs.in.

Subject line: Applied for the post of _____

Last date of submission of application: March 30th, 2024 .

Prag News Recruitment 2024 – 5 News Anchor & Other Posts

Last Date: 31/03/2024.

M/s AM Television Private Limited (Prag News) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 5 News Anchor and other Posts in Guwahati. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

1. AD Sales Executive

No of posts: 03

Age Limit: 27 years onwards

Educational Qualification & Experience: Must be Graduate; Experience of minimum 4-5 years in field sales; Must be Smart, Presentable & Good Communication Skills.

2. English News Anchor

No of posts: 2

Age Limit: 23 years onwards

Educational Qualification & Experience: Must be graduate in Journalism; Experience of minimum of 1-3 years in similar field; excellent communication skills.

Languages Skill: English, Hindi, and Assamese.

Application Fee: Nil.

How to Apply for Prag News Recruitment?

Candidates can mail there CV @ pragnewscvs@gmail.com or drop CV at reception of Prag Tower, below Ulubari fly over, Guwahati-781007.

Last Date: 31st March 2024.

About Prag News

M/s AM Television Private Limited is a Private Company incorporated on 21st day of June 2005 in Guwahati Assam with an object to own Television Channel for Tele-casting of News, Info-Entertainment & other Programmes, Also to act as producer & Distributor of Misc. Television program. This media Company is one of the most prestigious and respected media house not only in Assam but in the entire North East. It has produced 23 films under its production house. The major films are Dwaar (2013), Shiyor (2014), Sarvagunakar Srimanta Sankardeva (2015), Doordarshan ,Eti Jantra (2016), Duronir Nirala Poojai (2017), Gangs Of North East (2017),Marksheet (2018), Xandhikayan (2018), Leelar Pora Lailaloi (2018).

This media company is an owner of premium Assamese language and Entertainment Channel which includes Prag News, Prag Channel, Prag Cinema, and Rengoni.

Cotton University Faculty Recruitment 2024 – 167 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 02/04/2024.

Cotton University has released an advertisement for the recruitment of 167 Faculty Vacancy on regular basis. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online/offline.

1. Professor

No of posts: 21 posts

Scale of Pay: ₹ 1,44,200 to ₹ 2,18,200

2. Associate Professor

No of posts: 46 posts

Scale of Pay: ₹ 1,31,400 to ₹ 2,17,100

3. Assistant Professor

No of posts: 100 posts

Scale of Pay: ₹ 57,700 to ₹ 1,82,400

Eligibility Criteria: Applicants should have an excellent academic record and fulfil requisite qualifications and criteria laid down in the UGC Regulations 2018 and the rules of Govt. of Assam.

Application Fee:

UR/ OBC/ MOBC: ₹ 2000
SC/ ST: ₹ 1000
Overseas candidates: US \$ 100
Payment Mode: Online

How to Apply for Cotton University Recruitment?

The candidate must

(i) Email a soft copy/copies of all relevant documents along with the application form in a single PDF file to recruit2024@cottonuniversity.ac.in.

(ii) Send hard copy of the filled in application form along with the photocopies of the relevant documents to "The Registrar, Cotton University, Panbazar, Guwahati-781001, India". The candidates must produce the original certificates/documents/testimonials at the time of interview.

Candidates desirous of applying to more than one post should submit separate applications for each post along with requisite application fee.

Important Dates of Cotton University Recruitment 2024

Last date of submission of Soft copies of Application Form (for all candidates): 2nd April, 2024

Last date of submission of Hard copies of Application Form: 8th April, 2024

Dairy Development Recruitment 2024 – 16 Plant Manager Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 05/04/2024.

Assam Public Service Commission has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 16 Plant Manager and its equivalent Posts under Dairy Development Department, Assam (Class-I, Class-B Junior Grade). Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Plant Manager and its equivalent Post viz. Chilling Plant Supervisor/ Milk Tester/ Asstt. Rural Dairy Extension Office (ARDEO)/ Asstt. Distribution Officer (ADO)

No of posts: 16 posts

Category-wise vacancy:

UR: 9
OBC/ MOBC: 4
SC: 1
STP: 1
STH: 1

Name of department: Dairy Development Department, Assam (Class-I, Class-B Junior Grade)

Scale of Pay: ₹ 30,000 to ₹ 1,10,000 GP: ₹ 12,700

Age Limit: The candidates should not be less than 21 years of age and not more than 38 years of age as on 01/01/2024.

Educational Qualification: Candidates must have at least a Degree in Dairy Technology from a recognized University/ Institution.

Other Criteria of Dairy Development Recruitment

Citizenship: Candidates must be Indian Citizens as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

SC: 5 years
ST: 5 years
OBC/ MOBC: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years

Residency:

(i) The candidate must be a permanent resident of Assam.
(ii) The candidate must produce PRC issued in Assam for educational purpose/ Employment Exchange Registration certificate as proof of residency along with the application form.

Application Fee:

Category	Fee (in Rs.)
General/EWS	₹ 297.20
SC/ST/OBC/MOBC	₹ 197.20
BPL/ PwBD	₹ 47.20

Important Dates of Dairy Development Vacancy 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 6th March 2024

Last date of submission of online application: 5th April 2024

The goal is not just to damage, but to cause a large-scale disruption of the country's energy system

Russia attacks Ukrainian electrical power facilities, including major hydroelectric plant

KYIV, March 22: Russia attacked electrical power facilities in much of Ukraine, including the country's largest hydroelectric plant, causing widespread outages and killing at least three people, officials said on Friday.

Energy Minister German Galushchenko said the nighttime drone and rocket attacks were "the largest attack on the Ukrainian energy sector in recent times. The goal is not just to damage, but to try again, like last year, to cause a large-scale disruption of the country's energy system."

The attacks caused a fire at the Dnipro Hydroelectric Station, which supplies electricity to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest nuclear power installation.

The main 750-kilovolt power line to the plant was cut off, International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Grossi said early on Friday. A lower-power backup line was working, he said.

The plant is occupied by Russian troops, and fighting around the plant has been a constant concern because of the potential for a nuclear accident. The dam at the hydroelectric station was not in danger of breaching, the country's hydroelectric authority said.

A dam breach could not only disrupt supplies to the nuclear plant but would potentially cause severe flooding similar to what occurred last year when a major dam at Kakhovka further down the Dnieper collapsed.



One person was killed and at least eight injured in the Russian attack, said Zaporizhzhia regional governor Ivan Fedorov. Attacks on energy facilities in the Kharkiv region caused blackouts, and other attacks were reported in areas of western Ukraine far from the front lines. Two people died in the Khmelnytskyi region, according to the Internal Affairs Ministry.

"The world sees the targets of Russian terrorists as clearly as possible: power plants and energy supply lines, a hydroelectric dam, ordinary residential buildings, even a trolleybus. Russia is fighting against the ordinary life of people,"

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Friday on the Telegram messaging app.

Russian officials said on Friday that one person died and at least three were injured in Ukrainian shelling of areas near the border.

The governor of the Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said a woman was killed when a shell hit nearby while she was walking her dogs and that two others were injured. The town of Tetkino in the Kursk region was shelled, injuring one person, said Gov. Roman Starovoi.

Both regions have been subject to shelling and drone attacks in recent weeks and officials have said that attempts by Ukrainian fighters to cross into Russian territory have been repelled. (AP)

EU leaders mull ways to get more arms to outgunned Ukraine amid a new sense of urgency



BRUSSELS, March 22: European Union leaders on Thursday debated fresh ways to help boost arms and ammunition production for Ukraine amid a new sense of urgency about the future of the war-torn country.

Ukraine's munition stocks are desperately low, while Russia has more and better-armed troops. There is also a growing awareness that the EU must provide for its own security, with election campaigning in the U.S. raising questions about Washington's commitment to its allies.

At the same time, political rhetoric is at fever pitch as the campaign for Europe-wide elections on June 6-9 gathers pace, with security a major issue. As they talk up the need to fund the defense industry, both at home and in Ukraine, many leaders are also trying to convince citizens that budgets could be tightened elsewhere.

Ahead of the summit in Brussels, EU Council President Charles Michel said the Europeans "face a pivotal moment." He said that with Europe "facing the biggest security threat since the Second World War, it is high time we take radical and concrete steps to be defense-ready and put the EU's economy on a 'war footing.'"

Across town at NATO, the alliance's secretary-general, Jens Stoltenberg, warned Thursday that "the situation on the battlefield remains very difficult. Ukraine is running out of ammunition. So, Ukraine needs even more support, and they need it now."

New plans are on the EU's table, notably to use the profits from frozen Russian assets to buy arms and ammunition for Ukraine.

The 27-nation EU is holding

around 210 billion euros (\$228 billion) in Russian central bank assets, most of it frozen in Belgium, in retaliation for Moscow's war against Ukraine. The bloc estimates that the money could generate profits of up to 3 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) each year.

"I am glad that leaders endorsed our proposal to use the extraordinary revenues from immobilized Russian assets," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said after the meeting. "This will provide funding for military equipment to Ukraine."

A small group of member countries, notably Hungary, refuse to supply weapons to Ukraine, so these windfall profits would be split up. Around 90% of the money would be put into a special fund that many EU countries already use to get reimbursed for arms and ammunition they send.

The other 10% would be put into the EU budget to help bolster Ukraine's defense industry. Members that object to sending weapons could then claim that they are not arming the country.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that these profits should be used "first and foremost" to buy weapons and ammunition for Ukraine. "What is important to me is that we give this use a clear direction now, the direction of acquiring ammunition, for example," he said.

Asked what signal would be sent to Russian President Vladimir Putin if there is no agreement on using windfall profits, Scholz said: "I am very sure that we are sending a very clear signal to Putin here. He has miscalculated if he thinks we are not in a position to support Ukraine for as long as is necessary, and the use

of the windfall profits is a small but important element."

Speaking to the leaders via video-link, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged them to provide his armed forces with more artillery shells and air defense systems following an overnight missile attack on the capital Kyiv.

"Unfortunately, the use of artillery at the front line by our soldiers is humiliating for Europe in the sense that Europe can provide more. And it is crucial to prove it now," he said, adding that Ukraine's current "air defense systems are not enough to protect our entire territory from Russian terror."

Some countries want to use the windfall profits to help Ukraine rebuild, but Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, said that "the first necessity is ammunition. Of course I would love to invest in reconstruction but it's a bit pointless to invest in reconstruction if you risk losing the country."

The leaders of Estonia and Lithuania, two of Ukraine's staunchest supporters within the EU, said it would be best to use the frozen assets themselves and not just the interest earned on those billions.

"The damage that Russia is causing to Ukraine is much bigger than the value of those assets that we have in Europe. We have to think how we can really achieve this (so) that our taxpayers don't have to pay the damage that Russia is causing in Ukraine," Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said.

De Croo also urged his EU partners to be receptive to new ideas. "We'll need different types of financing, or at least be open to the discussion. It will need to be national contributions, it might be defense bonds, it might be financing by the EIB (European Investment Bank)," he said.

The idea of issuing defense bonds to finance military spending through common debt issuance is gaining some traction, but is far from having the unanimous agreement that such a move would require. It would mirror way the EU raised money to kickstart economies with its pandemic recovery fund. (AP)

of the windfall profits is a small but important element."

Speaking to the leaders via video-link, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged them to provide his armed forces with more artillery shells and air defense systems following an overnight missile attack on the capital Kyiv.

"Unfortunately, the use of artillery at the front line by our soldiers is humiliating for Europe in the sense that Europe can provide more. And it is crucial to prove it now," he said, adding that Ukraine's current "air defense systems are not enough to protect our entire territory from Russian terror."

Some countries want to use the windfall profits to help Ukraine rebuild, but Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, said that "the first necessity is ammunition. Of course I would love to invest in reconstruction but it's a bit pointless to invest in reconstruction if you risk losing the country."

The leaders of Estonia and Lithuania, two of Ukraine's staunchest supporters within the EU, said it would be best to use the frozen assets themselves and not just the interest earned on those billions.

"The damage that Russia is causing to Ukraine is much bigger than the value of those assets that we have in Europe. We have to think how we can really achieve this (so) that our taxpayers don't have to pay the damage that Russia is causing in Ukraine," Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said.

De Croo also urged his EU partners to be receptive to new ideas. "We'll need different types of financing, or at least be open to the discussion. It will need to be national contributions, it might be defense bonds, it might be financing by the EIB (European Investment Bank)," he said.

The idea of issuing defense bonds to finance military spending through common debt issuance is gaining some traction, but is far from having the unanimous agreement that such a move would require. It would mirror way the EU raised money to kickstart economies with its pandemic recovery fund. (AP)

of the most advanced manufacturing production lines in the world," Marles told reporters at the Osborne shipyard in Adelaide on Friday.

Australia is acquiring at least three US nuclear submarines from the early 2030s under the AUKUS agreement. "Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States remain fully committed to this shared endeavour," a joint trilateral statement from Marles, Shapps and US Defence Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III said on Friday.

"These steps to grow Australia's submarine construction and maintenance capability are critical to the AUKUS partnership, expanding trilateral industrial capacity and building the collective resilience of AUKUS partners to produce and sustain conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarines for decades to come." (AP)



USD 3 billion deal with UK gets Australia closer to having a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines

SYDNEY, March 22: Australia is set to provide 4.6 billion Australian dollars (USD 3 billion) to British industry to support the construction of nuclear-powered submarines and ensure its new fleet arrives on time, the two countries said on Friday.

The announcement came a day after the two countries signed a defence and security pact to better meet challenges such as China's increased activity in the South China Sea and South Pacific.

UK Defence Minister Grant Shapps said the submarine programme was expensive but necessary. "Nuclear-powered submarines are not cheap, but we live in a much more dangerous world where we are seeing a much more assertive region with China, a much more dangerous world all around with what's happening in the Middle East and Europe," Shapps told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

"Countries need to invest in making sure that adversaries see we are serious about our security, defending freedom of navigation, for example."

The 10-year deal announced at an annual ministers' gathering will boost capacity at the Rolls-Royce factory

in Derby, UK, to build the nuclear reactors that will propel the submarines to be built by BAE Systems in Adelaide, Australia.

The Virginia-class submarines will be primarily from a UK design and will have a US weapons system onboard.

Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles said the agreement showed that the nuclear submarine programme would be fulfilled and would create new production capability for the AUKUS partners, referring to the grouping of Australia, the UK and US.

"These are big foundational decisions which demonstrate that the pathway to Australia acquiring a nuclear-powered submarine capability under the banner of AUKUS is happening, and the result of that right here is going to be the most advanced manufacturing in the nation and one

of the most advanced manufacturing production lines in the world," Marles told reporters at the Osborne shipyard in Adelaide on Friday.

Australia is acquiring at least three US nuclear submarines from the early 2030s under the AUKUS agreement. "Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States remain fully committed to this shared endeavour," a joint trilateral statement from Marles, Shapps and US Defence Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III said on Friday.

"These steps to grow Australia's submarine construction and maintenance capability are critical to the AUKUS partnership, expanding trilateral industrial capacity and building the collective resilience of AUKUS partners to produce and sustain conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarines for decades to come." (AP)

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe releases 234 acres of land in Jaffna for farmers' use



COLOMBO, March 22: Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Friday released 234 acres of land, previously held by the Jaffna Security Forces Headquarters, to farmers in the area, a statement said.

Jaffna is a Tamil-dominated capital city of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.

President's Media Division of Sri Lanka (PMD) said in a post on X: "President Ranil Wickremesinghe released 234 acres of land which were previously held by the Jaffna Security Forces Headquarters, to farmers for cultivation purposes in 5 Grama Niladhari Divisions in Jaffna."

These plots of land were released to farmers across five Grama Niladhari Divisions in Jaffna for cultivation purposes, The Morning News website reported.

Under the Urumaya national programme, aimed at distributing two million freehold deeds to the deserving public, Wickremesinghe symbolically presented the deeds, benefiting 408 individuals at a ceremony held in Jaffna's Oddakapulam.

Jaffna holds great significance as it was the region where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had run a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland for nearly 30 years before its collapse in 2009 after the Sri Lankan Army killed its supreme leader V Prabhakaran.

The region has lacked economic development and the Sri Lankan leaders have said they are committed to the development of the Tamil-dominated Northern and Eastern provinces of the island nation. (PTI)

Chinese coast guard ships attempt to block Philippine vessels carrying scientists in South China Sea

MANILA, March 22: Chinese coast guard ships backed by a military helicopter attempted unsuccessfully to block two Philippine government vessels carrying scientists from reaching two sandbars in the disputed South China Sea, Philippine officials said on Friday.

Chinese coast guard personnel blew the horn on one of their ships for half an hour and repeatedly transmitted radio warnings during the confrontation Thursday, but the Filipino scientists managed to complete their four-hour marine and biodiversity research at the barren sandbars called Sandy Cay, the officials said.

The Chinese coast guard gave a different account of the faceoff. A spokesperson, Gan Yu, said in a statement that his law enforcement officers "boarded" the sandbars, which Beijing calls Tiexian Reef, and dealt with what it called "illegal activities" by 34 Philippine personnel who "ignored China's warnings and dissuasion."

"That's another lie coming from the Chinese coast guard," Philippine coast guard Commander Jay Tarrila said at a news conference on Friday. "For four hours, our marine scientists were able to continue their research."

Journalists who were invited to join the research mission witnessed the incident, Tarrila said.

It was the latest flareup in increasingly tense territorial disputes that are seen as a potential Asian flashpoint that might bring China and the United States into a conflict if they degenerate into a major armed confrontation.

China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei have overlapping territorial claims that have erupted from time to time into brief confrontations in the South China Sea.

Hostilities between China and the Philippines, however, have worsened since last year,

Blinken says an Israeli assault on Gaza's Rafah would be a mistake and isn't needed to defeat Hamas

CAIRO, March 22: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday a major Israeli ground assault on the southern Gaza town of Rafah would be "a mistake" and "unnecessary" to defeating Hamas, underscoring the further souring of relations between the United States and Israel.

Blinken, on his sixth urgent Mideast mission since the war began in October, spoke after huddling with top Arab diplomats in Cairo for discussions on efforts for a cease-fire and Gaza's post-conflict future. He said an "immediate, sustained cease-fire" with the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas was urgently needed and that gaps were narrowing in indirect negotiations that U.S., Egypt and Qatar have spent weeks mediating. Those negotiations are to continue at a senior level in Qatar on Friday.

Blinken heads to Israel on Friday to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his War Cabinet. The growing disagreements between Netanyahu and President Joe Biden over the prosecution of the war will likely overshadow those talks — particularly over Netanyahu's determination to launch a ground assault on Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians have sought refuge from devastating Israeli ground and air strikes further north.

Netanyahu has said that without an invasion of Rafah, Israel can't achieve its goal of destroying Hamas after its deadly Oct. 7 attack and taking of hostages that triggered Israel's bombardment and offensive in Gaza.

"A major military operation in Rafah would be a mistake, something we don't support. And, it's also not necessary to deal with Hamas, which is necessary," Blinken told a news conference in Cairo with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. A major offensive would mean more civilian deaths and worsen Gaza's humanitarian crisis, Blinken

said, adding that his talks on Rafah in Israel on Friday and discussions between senior U.S. and Israeli officials next week in Washington will be to share ideas for alternative action.

The U.S. position on a Rafah operation has shifted significantly in recent days. Initially, U.S. officials said they could not support a major incursion into the city unless there was a clear and credible plan for getting civilians out of harm's way. Now, U.S. officials said they have concluded there is no credible way to do that, given the density of the population of more than a million people. They say now that other options, including specifically targeted operations against known Hamas fighters and commanders, are the only way to avoid a civilian catastrophe.

But Netanyahu, on a roughly 45-minute call with GOP senators on Wednesday, pledged to ignore warnings about a Rafah operation. He also took aim at Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's condemnation last week of the civilian death toll in Gaza and his call for new elections in Israel in a speech that Biden later said was "good." Netanyahu stressed that Israel would move ahead in Rafah, according to senators who participated in the meeting. Sen. John Kennedy, a Louisiana Republican, said Netanyahu "made it very clear that he and the people of Israel intend to prosecute the war to the full extent of their power and that he would not be dictated to by Senator Schumer or President Biden."

Netanyahu has been accused by Israeli critics of undermining bipartisan American support by cultivating close ties with Republican leaders.

As Blinken and the Arab ministers met, Gaza's Health Ministry raised the territory's death toll to nearly 32,000 Palestinians since the war began on its soil. Also, U.N. officials stepped up warnings that famine is "imminent" in northern Gaza. (AP)

The UN will vote on a US resolution declaring that an immediate cease-fire in Gaza is imperative

UNITED NATIONS, March 22: The United Nations Security Council is set to vote on a United States-sponsored resolution declaring that "an immediate and sustained cease-fire" in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is "imperative" to protect civilians and enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to more than 2 million hungry Palestinians.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said she was optimistic that the new, tougher draft resolution would be approved on Friday by the 15-member council.

The draft being put to a vote "determines" — which is a council order — "the imperative of an immediate and sustained cease-fire," with no direct link to the release of hostages taken during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, which was in the previous draft. But it would unequivocally support diplomatic efforts "to secure such a cease-fire in connection with the release of all remaining hostages."

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Dmitry Polyansky said Moscow will not be satisfied "with anything that doesn't call for an immediate cease-fire," saying it's what U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is pressing for and what "everybody" wants. He questioned the wording of the draft, asking, "What's an imperative? I have an imperative to give you \$100, but ... it's only an imperative, not \$100."

"So, somebody's fooling around, I think, (with the) international community," the Russian envoy said. The Security Council had already adopted two resolutions on the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, but none calling for a cease-fire.

Russia and China vetoed a U.S.-sponsored resolution in late October calling for pauses in the fighting to deliver aid, protection of civilians, and a halt to arming Hamas. They said it didn't reflect global calls for a cease-fire.

The U.S., Israel's closest ally, has vetoed three resolutions demanding a cease-fire, the most recent an Arab-backed measure supported by 13 council members with one abstention on Feb. 20.

A day earlier, the U.S. circulated a rival resolution, which has gone through major changes during negotiations before Friday's vote. It initially would have supported a temporary cease-fire linked to the release of all hostages, and the previous draft would have supported international efforts for a cease-fire as part of a hostage deal.

The vote will take place as Blinken, America's top diplomat, is on his sixth urgent mission to the Middle East since the Israel-Hamas war, discussing a deal for a cease-fire and hostage release, as well as post-war scenarios.

Nate Evans, the spokesperson for the U.S. Mission to the United Nations who announced the Friday morning vote, said: "This resolution is an opportunity for the Council to speak with one voice to support the diplomacy happening on the ground and pressure Hamas to accept the deal on the table."

Meanwhile, the 10 elected members of the Security Council have been drafting their own resolution, which would demand an immediate humanitarian cease-fire for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan that began March 10 to be "respected by all parties leading to a permanent sustainable cease-fire." (AP)

IS group claims responsibility for bombing at Afghan bank and says it targeted Taliban

ISLAMABAD, March 22: The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a deadly bombing that targeted Taliban trying to collect their salaries at a bank in southern Afghanistan.

The bombing on Thursday at a branch of New Kabul Bank in Kandahar city killed three people and wounded 12 others.

All of the victims were people who had gathered there to collect their monthly salaries, said Inamullah Samangani, head of the government's Kandahar Information and Culture Department.

The Islamic State group's affiliate, a major Taliban rival, has conducted attacks on schools, hospitals, mosques and Shiite areas throughout Afghanistan.

The militant group said in a statement posted on its news agency, Aamaq, late on Thursday that the suicide bomber detonated his explosive belt among the Taliban gathered near the bank to receive their salaries.

Kandahar city is a spiritual and political centre for Afghanistan's rulers because the Taliban's supreme leader,

Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, is based there and his decisions on major issues are implemented by authorities in Kabul, the capital.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021 during the chaotic departure of US and NATO troops after 20 years. Despite initial promises of a more moderate stance, the Taliban gradually reimposed a harsh interpretation of Islamic law, or Shariah, as they did during their previous rule of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. (AP)

Tuki to lock horns with Rijiju in Arunachal West Lok Sabha seat

Anti-incumbency wave blowing against Rijiju: Tuki



ITANAGAR, March 22: State Congress chief Nabam Tuki is set to lock horns with Union minister Kiren Rijiju in the Arunachal West Lok Sabha seat.

The state will go for simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in the first phase on April 19.

Former chief minister Tuki currently

represents Sagalee constituency in Papumpare district as MLA, having been elected for six consecutive terms.

The Congress on Thursday announced Tuki's candidacy along with Bosiram Siram, the Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee vice-president, who will be contesting from Arunachal East Parlia-

mentary seat against BJP nominee Tapir Gao.

Tuki, who lost the Arunachal West seat to Rijiju in 2019, is confident of victory this time, citing a growing desire for change among the electorate.

"People want a change and public mood is changing against Rijiju. He is facing a strong anti-incumbency wave," Tuki said.

"My focus will be on employment generation," he added.

BJP had won both Lok Sabha seats in the last elections. While Rijiju won the seat by a margin of 1,74,843 votes, Gao won by a margin of 68,189 votes defeating his nearest rival Wangman Lowangcha of Congress.

In the 2019 assembly elections, the BJP bagged 41 seats, JD(U) won seven, NPP (5), Congress (4), PPA (1) and two seats were bagged by Independents.

Counting of votes for assembly polls will be held on June 2 and for Lok Sabha elections on June 4.

The BJP has declared candidates for all the 60 assembly seats, Congress has announced nominees for 34 seats and the NCP so far has declared 17 candidates. (PTI)

Arunachal CM Khandu files nomination for Mukto assembly seat



ITANAGAR, March 22: Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu on Friday filed his nomination for the April 19 assembly polls.

He will contest from Mukto constituency in Tawang district as a BJP nominee.

The chief minister filed his papers at the additional deputy commissioner (ADC) office at Jang in the district in

the presence of his supporters and cabinet colleagues.

"A special day as I filed my nomination paper as a candidate for 3-Mukto (ST) Assembly constituency. I am humbled by the overwhelming support and encouragement from all corners," Khandu posted on X.

While interacting with people, Khandu assured his commitment for

all-round development of his constituency as well as the state as a whole.

"I am committed to working tirelessly for the welfare and progress of every citizen, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are met. Gratitude for your trust and support," he said in another post.

Arunachal Pradesh will go for simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in the first phase on April 19 next.

The northeastern state has two Lok Sabha seats and a 60-member assembly. The term of the present assembly ends on June 2.

The counting of votes for assembly polls will be held on June 2 and for Lok Sabha polls on June 4.

The BJP has declared candidates for all the assembly seats, while Congress declared names of 34 candidates and NCP so far declared 17 candidates.

In the 2019 assembly election, the BJP bagged 41 seats, JD(U) won seven, the NPP (five), Congress (four), PPA (one) besides two Independents.

The ruling party had also won both the Lok Sabha seats in the last election. (PTI)

Tribal bodies asked to avoid taking part in electioneering process

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 22: Even as the Eastern Nagaland Legislators' Union appealed to the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) to suspend the ongoing 'public emergency' for the greater interest of the Frontier Nagaland Territory, the control room of the 'eastern Nagaland public emergency' on Friday directed all tribal bodies in eastern Nagaland not to take part in any electioneering activities such as appointment of polling agents of different political parties, any election-related training etc. A notification issued by the eastern Nagaland public emergency also asked the tribal bodies not to participate in any government inauguration function till the proposed eastern Nagaland public meeting slated for March 28 is held.

The notification said the directive has been issued in view of the public emergency all over eastern Nagaland and its subsequent public resolution not to participate in any central and state election. People are to refrain

from casting their votes as a mark of protest against non-fulfillment of the demand for creation of Frontier Nagaland Territory before the declaration of the model code of conduct for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

On March 5, the ENPO, along with the tribal bodies of eastern Nagaland, declared public emergency in eastern Nagaland against the delay by the Centre to settle the offer for the creation of Frontier Nagaland Territory, comprising of the districts of Mon, Tuensang, Kiphire, Longleng, Shamator and Noklak. Meanwhile, the volunteers of tribal bodies, as per the directive of the ENPO, put up black flags atop houses and offices in all six districts of eastern Nagaland on Thursday as a sign of resentment against the delay.

Though offices, business establishments and schools are open, the ENPO said the public emergency would continue and that the black flags would continue to be hoisted across eastern Nagaland.

Manipur Congress accuses BJP of freezing bank accounts ahead of Lok Sabha Polls, alleges attack on democracy

IMPHAL, March 22: The Congress party in Manipur on Friday accused the BJP of recently freezing the party's bank accounts by the Income Tax ahead of the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls.

Speaking at a press conference held in Congress Bhavan here, senior Manipur Congress leader and former chief minister O Ibobi Singh alleged that the freezing of all bank accounts of the Congress party is a part of BJP's attempt to transform the nation's democracy into dictatorship.

He said that it is unfortunate that the Income Tax has frozen all the bank accounts of the party where money donated by the well-wishers and supporters of the party were deposited.

"The act is nothing but to abolish the opposition parties, particularly the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls and eliminate democracy from the country by holding the elections to elect BJP candi-



dates only," he said.

"From this very act of freezing the accounts of the Congress party, it is very clear that the saffron party wanted to win the elections without any hurdle from other parties and among the opposition parties, BJP fears the Congress most as shown

high time to bring a change in the government at the Centre which will be formed after the elections", he said.

Attending the press conference, Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) president K Meghachandra said that the act of freezing of AICC's accounts by the Income Tax was done at the instigation of the BJP, the party in power at the Centre.

He alleged that the BJP has a motive to eliminate all other parties, particularly the opposition so that there is no hurdle in converting the BJP's secret agenda into actions. The topmost agenda of the BJP is to eliminate the Congress first so that the party can rule the country like a dictator, he added.

He said that even though donations to the parties were exempted from levying income tax, it was not done for the Congress since the BJP came to power at the Centre. (NNN)

BJP to win over 370 seats in Lok Sabha elections, claims Tripura CM

AGARTALA, March 22: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Friday claimed that the enthusiasm for BJP he has been witnessing during his door-to-door campaign, it is clear that the saffron party alone will cross the 370-seat mark.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has predicted that the BJP will "definitely" get 370 seats and the ruling National Democratic Alliance will cross 400 seats in the Lok Sabha polls.

The seven-phase Parliamentary elections in 545 constituencies will be held between April 19 and June 1.

"Wherever I go, I find an overwhelming response for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP. The people are enthusiastic to vote for the BJP. I am sure the BJP will cross the 370-seat mark in the upcoming elections," he said.

The chief minister was talking to reporters during his door-to-door campaign in Badharghat area under Tripura West Lok Sabha constituency.

Later, Saha inaugurated the BJP's election office for the constituency in presence of the party's state president Rajib Bhattacharjee and West Tripura candidate Biplab Kumar Deb. (PTI)

Arunachal BJP replaces candidate in Tezu assembly seat



ITANAGAR, March 22: The ruling BJP in Arunachal Pradesh replaced its candidate in the Tezu assembly seat, and fielded former minister Mahesh Chai in the place of Badang Tayang.

In the candidates' list announced on March 13, the BJP named Tayang as its nominee for the Tezu seat.

On Thursday, it issued a statement and declared Chai as its candidate.

"The party's central leadership have reviewed the ground situation and found that Chai is more suitable for the seat," state BJP's in-charge president Tarh Tarak said.

"The central leadership

took the decision to replace Tayang as they might have found that the ground situation was not suitable for him. Otherwise, this is the rarest of rare cases which generally does not happen in the BJP," he said.

Chai, a former minister, unsuccessfully contested the seat in 2019 on a BJP ticket.

Tayang could not be contacted for a comment.

The election to the 60-member state assembly will be held along with the Lok Sabha polls in the state on April 19.

The counting of votes for the assembly polls would be held on June 2, and for the two Lok Sabha seats in the state on June 4 along with the rest of the country. (PTI)

BJP fields Agartala mayor for Ramnagar assembly bypolls

AGARTALA, March 22: The ruling BJP in Tripura on Friday said Agartala mayor Dipak Majumder will be the party's candidate for Ramnagar assembly bypolls.

This seat fell vacant following the death of veteran party MLA Surajit Dutta in December last year. Voting will take place on April 19.

Majumder will take on former CPI(M) MLA Ratan Das, who will contest as an INDIA bloc candidate.

Chief minister Manik Saha congratulated Majumder for his nomination as the party candidate.

"I congratulated Mayor Dipak Majumder for his nomination as the BJP candidate for Ramnagar assembly seat. To support

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, I appeal to the electors of the assembly constituency to cast their votes for him on April 19," Saha wrote on his Facebook page.

"I am familiar with the sentiments of the people of Ramnagar assembly constituency for many years. In fact, I used to accompany former MLA Surajit Dutta during his 40-year tenure from the constituency. I am confident that the party will win from the seat," Majumder told reporters.

Asked if he intends to resign as mayor after winning the by-elections, he said, "The party has fielded me from the prestigious seat for which I thank the party's central leadership. The party will take a decision on my fate after April 19," he said. (PTI)

NF Railway makes progress in freight loading



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 22: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has been constantly progressing in freight loading and has loaded 0.832 million tonnes (MT) during February this year.

During the financial year from April 2023 to February 2024, the total count of freight loading increased to 9.183 million tonnes. During the month of February P.O.L loading has registered a progress by a good margin with few other miscellaneous commodities. During this period loading of P.O.L items increased by 28 per cent. Loading of fertilizer also registered an increased 5.3 per cent and cement by 3.2 per cent.

During the current financial year up to February, container loading increased by 8.9 per cent, loading of food grains items increased by 22.3 per cent and loading of ballast also registered an increased by 18 per cent as compared to the corresponding period of last financial year.

NFR is working dedicatedly round the clock to serve its customer and ensure essential commodities reach end users in time. The increase in freight loading year after year signifies the economic activities of the region.

Independent candidate files nomination in Nagaland



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 22: Independent candidate Hayithung Tungeo Lotha filed his nomination paper for the forthcoming election to the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland at the returning officer's office in Kohima on Friday.

Though Congress and the ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party fielded their respective candidates for the election, they are yet to file nomination, the last date of which is March 27.

Lotha filed his nomination paper before the returning officer for the Nagaland parliamentary constituency Sushil Kumar Patel, who was assisted by assistant returning officer Benjamin Longkap in examining the necessary documents furnished by the candidate.

The independent candidate is the first to file nomination for the 18th Lok Sabha election from Nagaland. The filing of nomination will come to a close at 3 pm on March 27.

'World Water Day' observed in North Garo Hills

Sensitisation programme on water conservation held as part of 'World Water Day' celebrations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 22: The public health engineering department along DWSM, JJM, RWS Division, observed the 'World Water Day' on Friday by organizing a function at the Mendipathar Cooperative Society Hall in Resubelpara in North Garo Hills district.

The function highlighted the need to conserve water. A series of programmes were held across the area to spread awareness on the importance of water. A group of cycle enthusiasts called A-we Pedallers could be seen spreading awareness on water among the masses during a cycle rally taken out in the area on the occasion.

In the field of operations and maintenance under Jal Jeevan Mission, Kontolguri Songma VWSC was adjudged the best performing Village Water and Sanitation Committee.

Addressing the gathering as the chief guest during the pro-



gramme, additional deputy commissioner of North Garo Hills district, Tennystar R Marak called for collective effort for preservation of water by initiating effective measures to check water sustainability.

"As compared to the rest of the country, our area has an abundance of water resources.

However, unscrupulous and unchecked usage of water could one day bring about the inevitable water crisis as is going on in major towns and cities," said ADC, Tennystar Marak.

He reiterated that there should be a collective cooperation from all stakeholders needs to come in place for the preser-

vation of water. All should understand the significance of maintaining this necessary resource for the future generations.

Executive engineer of the public health engineering department, Sokima Najiar in his address highlighted the theme of the programme "Water for Peace" wherein he spoke of the pressing issues of water crisis all around the world and opined that an amicable solution to resolve water crisis is by protecting, conserving and sharing water.

Status of the implementation of JJM in the district was also highlighted wherein the DPM, DPMU Silgrak Sangma informed that the district stands at 82.16 per cent in terms of providing tap water connection to every household.

NR Marak, senior SDM and HO and VWSC president, Kontolguri Songma, were among others who spoke on the issue.

Need to oppose and challenge NDA regime: Mizoram MP

AIZWAL, March 22: Mizoram's lone Rajya Sabha member and Mizo National Front (MNF) leader K. Vanlalvena, who was named the party's nominee for the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state on Friday, sparked a controversy by asserting that the BJP-led NDA regime needs to be challenged and opposed.

Vanlalvena, 54, was elected to the state's only Rajya Sabha seat in June 2020.

Despite MNF's membership in the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) and its alliance with the NDA at the national level, the party doesn't collaborate with the BJP in the state.

Vanlalvena, known for his advocacy on minority issues, emphasised his continuous opposition to NDA ideologies in the current Rajya Sabha. Addressing a gathering soon after being nominated as the party candidate for LS elections, Vanlalvena predicted that the NDA would secure victory in the forthcoming parliamentary polls.

He warned against the potential introduction of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) if the NDA retains power.

"It appears that the NDA will retain power at the Centre after the Lok Sabha polls. If it does, it is likely that the UCC will be introduced in the country. For this reason, the NDA government should be opposed. I have been constantly opposing the NDA government in the present Rajya

Sabha," the MNF leader said.

Despite the limited role of Mizoram's MP in national governance formation, Vanlalvena stressed the importance of challenging the NDA government's policies.

Born in January 1970 in East Lungdar village in Serchhip district, Vanlalvena was a high school teacher at a state-run school. He graduated with Science from the Pachhunga University College in 1993.

In college, he was actively involved in student politics, and served as the vice president of the state's apex student body Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) for two consecutive years. He later also became the president of the organisation.

He entered politics in 2002 when he was appointed the general secretary of the MNF's youth wing. He subsequently became its president. Vanlalvena had unsuccessfully contested the assembly by-poll to Aizawl North-III seat in 2015. He lost to Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) candidate C Lalsawivunga in the Aizawl South-I seat in the 2023 assembly elections.

Various parties have named their candidates, including Richard Vanlalhmangaiha from the Congress, Former Congress leader Lalhriatrenga Chhangte announced his candidacy as an independent, while the BJP is yet to announce its nominee. (PTI)

PM Modi embarks on two-day visit to Bhutan



NEW DELHI, March 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday embarked on a two-day visit to Bhutan, his first after the new government took office in the Himalayan nation.

Modi was earlier scheduled to travel to Bhutan on Thursday, but had to delay the visit by a day due to inclement weather conditions at Paro Airport, which is situated in a deep valley surrounded by Himalayan mountain ranges and has a particularly tricky landing approach. "On the way to Bhutan, where I will be attending various programmes aimed at further cementing the India-Bhutan partnership. I look forward to talks with His Majesty the King of Bhutan, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo

and Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay," Modi posted on X.

This visit is part of the Indian government's emphasis on its 'Neighbourhood First Policy'.

The prime minister will have an audience with Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, and his father Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King of the Himalayan nation.

Modi will also hold bilateral talks with his Bhutanese counterpart Tshering Tobgay.

The Prime Minister is scheduled to receive a grand welcome at the Tashichho Dzong, a traditional Buddhist monastery and the seat of the Bhutanese government.

Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay was on a five-day

visit to India last week, his first foreign trip after assuming charge of the top office in January.

During his visit, he had called on President Droupadi Murmu and met Prime Minister Modi. He also held meetings with captains of various industries, besides other important engagements.

Ahead of Modi's visit, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in a statement also said that India and Bhutan share "a unique and enduring partnership which is rooted in mutual trust, understanding and goodwill".

"The visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between India and Bhutan and the government's emphasis on its 'Neighbourhood First Policy,'" the MEA said.

"India and Bhutan share a unique and enduring partnership which is rooted in mutual trust, understanding and goodwill. Our shared spiritual heritage and warm people to people ties add depth and vibrancy to our exceptional relations," the ministry said.

"The visit will provide an opportunity for both sides to exchange views on bilateral and regional matters of interest and deliberate on ways to expand and intensify our exemplary partnership for the benefit of our people", the statement added. (PTI)

Kejriwal 'kingpin' of excise scam, claims ED

ED seeks 10 day custody in the 'Liquor Scam' case

NEW DELHI, March 22: Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi chief minister once idolised as an anti-corruption crusader, was on Friday produced before a court where the Enforcement Directorate dubbed him as a "key conspirator" in the liquor scam case and sought his 10-day custody.

The ED told Special Judge Kaveri Baweja at the Rouse Avenue court that Kejriwal received several crores of rupees as kickbacks from the 'South group' for formulating and implementing the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22.

He demanded Rs 100 crore from some accused from the 'South group' for contesting elections, Additional Solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju, who is appearing for the federal anti-money laundering agency, told the court.

The law officer said the money trail showed that a company, and every person responsible for the conduct of the company will be held responsible.

The agency alleged Kejriwal was culpable in the case not only as an individual but was vicariously responsible for the actions of his associates.

Kejriwal was produced before the special ED court after he withdrew from the Supreme Court the plea against his arrest



for 10 days' remand," ASG Raju told the court.

He alleged the AAP is not an individual but a company, and every person responsible for the conduct of the company will be held responsible.

The agency alleged Kejriwal was culpable in the case not only as an individual but was vicariously responsible for the actions of his associates.

Kejriwal was produced before the special ED court after he withdrew from the Supreme Court the plea against his arrest

by the Enforcement Directorate. The apex court had said the petition would be heard during the day.

The move came soon after the Supreme Court refused to grant bail to BRS leader K Kavitha, who has also been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi excise policy scam case.

The ED has claimed that Kavitha, a BRS MLC and daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, was a key member of the south cartel.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi asked Kavitha to approach the trial court, saying it is a practice which this court is following and cannot bypass the protocol.

Protests erupted in the national capital over Kejriwal's arrest with hundreds of AAP workers and supporters hitting the streets. Raising slogans "Arvind tum sangharsh karo, hum tumhare sath hain" and "tyranny won't last", they converged near the AAP offices.

Many of them, including Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj, two key ministers in the Kejriwal cabinet, were detained. They were taken away in police buses after they refused to disperse from ITO intersection, which is close to the AAP and BJP offices, violating section 144.

While accusing Kejriwal of being the "kingpin" of the alleged scam, the ED has alleged the party's communication incharge Vijay Nair functioned as his link to the south cartel, which gave the Delhi's ruling party kickbacks of Rs 100 crore in return for favours by way of wholesale and retail liquor licences.

These funds, it claimed, were used for the assembly elections in Goa and significant amounts of money were given to AAP candidates in cash. (PTI)

Kejriwal withdraws plea from SC hours after apex court agreed to hear it

NEW DELHI, March 22: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday withdrew from the Supreme Court his plea against arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in the excise policy-linked money laundering case, hours after the apex court said the petition would be heard during the day.

The apex court, which had around 10.45 am said the plea would be heard by a three-judge bench, was informed by Kejriwal's counsel around 12.15 pm that they are withdrawing the petition and would contest the remand proceedings before the trial court. The plea was initially mentioned for urgent hearing before a bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, representing Kejriwal, said he was mentioning a matter of "some significance and urgency".

"If this process goes on, I am very sorry to say, before the first vote is cast, a lot of senior leaders will be behind bars. I am imploring your lordships to take it up ur-

gently either in the middle of the board or the end of the board," Singhvi said.

The CJJ said a special three-judge bench is convening in Justice Sanjiv Khanna's court, and Singhvi can mention the matter before that bench.

"The special bench is over, almost," the senior counsel said.

"Then you can go right away to Justice Khanna and it will be taken up," the CJJ said, adding, "Just go to that bench because that bench is available."

"You can just mention that the Chief Justice has assigned it to Justice Sanjiv Khanna's court," Justice Chandrachud told Singhvi.

Singhvi then rushed to Justice Khanna's court but the special three-judge bench, also comprising justices MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi, which had assembled to hear BRS leader K Kavitha's plea challenging her arrest in the Delhi excise policy scam case and the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, was over by that time. (PTI)

ASI begins survey of Bhojshala complex in MP; puja, namaz to continue as per practice, says official

DHAR, March 22: A team of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Friday began a survey of the controversial Bhojshala/Kamal Maula Mosque complex situated in the tribal-dominated Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh.

The ASI team, comprising more than a dozen members, reached the complex in the morning. It was accompanied by senior local police and district administration officials.

The ASI team worked till noon and left the spot for the day, Ashish Goyal, one of the petitioners in the matter who was present with surveyors, told reporters. Both Hindus and Muslims consider the site a place of worship.

Asked whether Muslims would be allowed to offer prayers at the site, Dhar Superintendent of Police (SP) Manoj Kumar Singh said "puja" on Tuesdays and "namaz" on Fridays will be held as per practice. The SP said he would discuss the matter with ASI officials and make adequate arrangements for the faith-related activities.

A 15-member team reached the site early in the morning to survey the Bhojshala complex, Goyal said. He said that members of the Hindu Front for Justice, an umbrella organisation representing petitioners like him, were also present during the survey.

"Today they did the ground-level preparations for conducting the survey. As directed by the high court, new technologies like GPS and carbon-dating equipment were used by the team," Goyal said.

However, eyewitnesses said that the members of the Muslim community were not present on the occasion. As per the ongoing practice, Muslim community members offered Friday namaz at the site amid heavy police presence, they said.

Earlier, SP Singh said that the survey had begun at the Bhojshala.

"We have provided all the logistical support that the ASI team needed to conduct it. Adequate security measures were taken for the exercise and there is peace in the town," he had told PTI.

A heavy police force has been deployed at the site, eyewitnesses said.

Meanwhile, a Special Leave Petition (SLP) filed by the Muslim community against the HC order in the Supreme Court on the issue was listed for hearing on April 1, lawyer Shrish Dube, representing Hindu Front for Justice, told reporters. He said the SC refused to hear the matter on Friday as mentioned by their lawyers. The survey will continue as directed by the HC, he added.

The Madhya Pradesh High Court, on March 11, directed ASI to carry out within six weeks a "scientific survey" of the Bhojshala complex, a medieval-era monument that Hindus believe is a temple of Goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati) and the Muslim community calls Kamal Maula Mosque.

As per an ASI order issued on April 7, 2003, Hindus are allowed to worship inside the Bhojshala complex every Tuesday, while Muslims are allowed to offer namaz at the site on Fridays.

Speaking to reporters later, Dhar town's 'Shahar

Qazi' Waqar Sadiq said that no authorized member of the Muslim community was present during the survey, though Kamal Maula Mosque's representative Abdul Samad was supposed to be there.

But it seems ASI has not given him any notice and for this the central agency is responsible, Sadiq claimed. Sadiq said ASI reports of 1902 and 1903 are in its records and the first report on the site mentioned that "this is a mosque".

"A petition was again filed in the high court in 1998 by Vimal Kumar Godha on behalf of the Bajrang Dal and other Hindu bodies. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the prime minister then. A reply was filed that time that it was 'Kamal Maula Mosque' and the existence of Bhojshala was a mystery," he said. This reply is in the records of the high court and ASI cannot go back on its stand on the issue, he said.

About the SC not taking up their matter after being mentioned, he said dates keep moving back and forth and the community will get a hearing.

Sadiq said they have documents to show that namaz can be offered at the site five times a day, but they have restrained themselves in the interest of "peace and harmony".

Stressing that there is no dispute with the Hindus, he said, "Only 13-14 persons, who are the self-proclaimed leaders of the community, are creating problems. Now we think that we have to insist on starting namaz five times a day at the site. We will move the high court and the supreme court on this," he said. (PTI)

CBSA disaffiliates 20 schools for enrolling dummy students

NEW DELHI, March 22: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has disaffiliated 20 schools, five of them in Delhi, for enrolling dummy students and ineligible candidates, its secretary Himanshu Gupta said on Friday.

The board has also downgraded affiliation of three schools.

"Pursuant to the surprise inspection conducted in CBSE schools across the country to check whether the schools are running as per the provisions and norms contained in affiliation and examination bye-laws, it was found that some schools were committing various malpractices of presenting dummy students, ineligible candidates and not maintained records properly," Gupta said.

"After thorough inquiry, it has been decided to disaffiliate 20 schools and downgrade three schools," he added.

Five of the disaffiliated schools are in Delhi, three in Uttar Pradesh, two each in Kerala, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, and one each in Jammu and Kashmir, Dehradun, Assam and Madhya Pradesh. The schools with downgraded affiliation are in Delhi, Punjab and Assam. (PTI)

Ponmudy sworn in as Minister by Governor Ravi, a day after SC nudge

CHENNAI, March 22: Senior DMK leader K Ponmudy was on Friday sworn in as Minister by Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi, a day after the Supreme Court's nudge.

About three months after he lost his post following his conviction by the Madras High Court on 19 December 2023 in a disproportionate assets case, Ponmudy is now again the Tamil Nadu Minister for Higher Education.

In a simple ceremony at the Raj Bhavan, Ravi administered the oath of office and secrecy to Ponmudy in the presence of Chief Minister M K Stalin and a couple of other Ministers including Udhayanidhi Stalin and Ma Subramanian.

Ponmudy was assigned higher education portfolio, which was briefly held by Backward Classes Minister R S Rajakannappan. The subject of Khadi and Village Industries Board held previously by Rajakannappan has been restored to him.

R Gandhi had held the subject of Khadi in addition to his port-

folio Handlooms and Textiles. In December, consequent to Ponmudy's conviction portfolios were reshuffled.

Ponmudy's swearing-in as Minister marks the end of a face-off between Stalin and Ravi. While Stalin had on March 13 written to Ravi to swear-in Ponmudy as Minister and allot him higher education, it was declined by Governor who said Ponmudy's conviction had only been suspended and not set aside. Following this, the DMK regime approached the Supreme Court. Hearing the matter, the apex court expressed "serious concern" over the conduct of Governor Ravi as he refused to reinduct Ponmudy even after it suspended his conviction. The Supreme Court directed him to decide the issue within 24 hours.

Observing that Ravi was defying the top court's order, a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud wondered how can the governor say that Ponmudy's reinduction will be against constitutional morality. (PTI)

Water storage in country's key reservoirs at just 38% : Official data

NEW DELHI, March 22: Ahead of the summer season, the live storage capacity in India's 150 primary reservoirs stands at just 38 per cent of their total capacity, which is less than the last decade's average for the same period, according to data. Cities like Bengaluru are already grappling with a shortfall of around 500 million litres of water per day (MLD), against a demand of 2,600 MLD. Karnataka, among other states, registered lower storage levels compared to the same period last year, according to the weekly bulletin by the Central Water Commission.

Bengaluru hosts 14,000 borewells with 6,900 of them having dried up. Water bodies have either been encroached upon or have dried up. The city requires 2,600 MLD of water, out of which 1,470 MLD is sourced from the Cauvery River and 650 MLD from borewells, Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah had told reporters.

Several other states, including Himachal

Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (two combined projects in both states), and Tamil Nadu, also reported lower storage levels compared to last year. The total live storage capacity of these 150 reservoirs is 178,784 BCM, which accounts for about 69.35 per cent of the nation's total live storage capacity estimated at 257.812 billion cubic metres, according to official data.

According to the reservoir storage bulletin on Thursday, the live storage available in these reservoirs is 67,591 BCM, representing 38 per cent of their total live storage capacity. However, during the corresponding period last year, the live storage available was 80,557 BCM, with an average of 72.396 BCM over the past decade.

Thus, the current live storage in these 150 reservoirs amounts to 84 per cent of the storage during the same period last year and 93

per cent of the average storage over the past decade.

"The overall storage position in the country is lower than the corresponding period last year and also falls short of the average storage over the past ten years for the same period," stated the bulletin.

The Southern region, which includes states like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (two combined projects in both states), Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, monitors 42 reservoirs with a total live storage capacity of 53,334 BCM.

As of the Reservoir Storage Bulletin dated 21.03.2024, the total live storage available in these reservoirs is 12,287 BCM, which constitutes 23 per cent of their total live storage capacity.

This marks a decrease compared to the storage levels during the corresponding period last year (39 per cent) and the average storage over the past ten years (32 per cent). (PTI)

ISRO achieves major milestone in reusable launch vehicle tech with landing experiment

BENGALURU, March 22: ISRO on Friday said it has achieved a major milestone in the area of reusable launch vehicle technology through the RLV LEX-02 landing experiment.

This is the second of the series conducted at Aeronautical Test Range, Chitradurga, in Karnataka at 7.10 am.

After the RLV-LEX-01 mission was accomplished last year, RLV-LEX-02 demonstrated the autonomous landing capability of reusable launch vehicle (RLV) from off-nominal initial conditions at release from helicopter, the Bengaluru-headquartered space agency said in a statement.

"The RLV was made to undertake more difficult maneuvers with dispersions, correct both cross-range and downrange and land on the runway in a fully autonomous mode," it said.

The winged vehicle, called Pushpak, was lifted by an Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter and was released from 4.5 km altitude. After release at a distance of 4 km from the runway, Pushpak autonomously approached the runway along with cross-range corrections. It landed precisely on the runway and came to a halt using its brake parachute, landing gear brakes and nose wheel steering system, ISRO said.

It added that this mission successfully simulated the approach and high-speed landing conditions of RLV returning from space.

"With this second mission, ISRO has validated the indigenously developed tech-



nologies in the areas of navigation, control systems, landing gear and deceleration systems essential for performing a high-speed autonomous landing of a space-returning vehicle," the space agency said.

The winged body and all flight systems used in RLV-LEX-01 were reused in the RLV-LEX-02 mission after due certification/clearances. Hence, reuse capability of flight hardware and flight systems is also demonstrated in this mission, ISRO said.

Based on the observation from RLV-LEX-01, the airframe structure and landing gear were strengthened to tolerate higher landing loads, it said.

The mission was accomplished by Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) along with the Liquid Propulsion System Centre (LPSC) and the ISRO Inertial Systems Unit (ISU).

ISRO chairman S Somanath congratulated the team for the flawless execution of this complex mission.

On the success of the landing experiment, VSSC Director Dr S Unnikrishnan Nair said through this repeated success, ISRO could master the terminal phase maneuvering, landing and energy management in a fully autonomous mode, which is a critical step towards the future. (PTI)

'BJP to go solo in Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Odisha'

BHUBANESWAR, March 22: The BJP will go solo in the Lok Sabha and assembly elections in Odisha, state party president Manmohan Samal said on Friday.

Talks on pre-poll alliance were being held between the ruling BJD and the opposition BJP for the past few days.

"Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will fight this election alone in all 21 Lok Sabha and 147 Assembly seats to create a developed India and a developed Odisha under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to fulfil the hopes, aspirations and aspirations of four and a half crore Odias," Samal said in a post on X.

Earlier this week, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said in Delhi that BJP national president J P Nadda will take a final call on the alliance with the Biju Janata Dal (BJD).

Samal, in his post, also thanked BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik for his party's support to the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre on various issues for the last 10 years.

"We feel that the states that have dual engine governments across the country, make extensive development and acceleration welfare work for poor," he said.

The BJP state president also claimed that many of the welfare schemes of the Modi government are not reaching the grassroots level, and the poor people of Odisha failed to the benefits. The BJD and the BJP were in alliance for around 11 years between 1998 and 2009 and fought three Lok Sabha and two Assembly elections together. (PTI)

HOLI SPECIAL TRAIN					
BETWEEN AGARTALA & GORAKHPUR JN.					
To clear extra rush during Holi 2024, it has been decided to run 05698/05697 Agartala-Gorakhpur Jn.-Agartala Holi special train. The details of the special are given below.					
Train No. 05698			Train No. 05697		
Agartala-Gorakhpur Jn.			Gorakhpur Jn.-Agartala		
Holi special Train on 24-03-2024 (Sunday)			Holi special Train on 25-03-2024 (Monday)		
ARR.	DEP.	STATION	ARR.	DEP.	
---	06:20	Agartala	18:40	---	
08:59	09:01	Dharmanagar	15:20	15:22	
10:50	11:00	Badarpur	11:20	11:30	
19:00	19:25	Guwahati	02:20	02:45	
22:25	22:35	New Bongaigaon	22:45	22:55	
02:25	02:35	New Jalpaiguri	17:30	17:40	
05:40	05:50	Katihar	13:20	13:30	
11:45	11:50	Hajipur	06:50	06:55	
17:30	---	Gorakhpur Jn.	---	23:55	

Other Stoppages : New Karimganj, New Haffong, Manderdisa, Chaparmukh, Jagiroad, Kamakhya, Rangiya, New Coochbehar, Kishanganj, Naugachia, Khagaria, Begusarai, Barauni Jn., Shahpur Patoree, Chhapra, Siwan Jn. & Deoria Sadar.

Composition : Sleeper Class (Eighteen), GSLR (Two) = 20 Coaches

General Manager (Operations), Maligaon

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

BJP has faith in dictatorship, not in Constitution, alleges Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah



BENGALURU, March 22: Accusing BJP-led NDA government of freezing Congress' bank accounts fearing defeat in the coming Lok Sabha polls, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday expressed hope that the people of the country will clearly reject the saffron party and "save" India.

BJP has no faith in democracy and Constitution, but has faith in dictatorship, he alleged, as he demanded that free and fair elections be held.

Claiming that the money voluntarily donated by the people was in the Congress accounts, Siddaramaiah expressed outrage about freezing of the entire account for a "small technical reason" and termed it as a "dictatorial attitude".

Speaking to reporters here, he said: "BJP troubling Congress like this so as to stop it from contesting the election is dangerous for democracy. This is condemnable."

BJP has the mentality of "Manusmriti", the CM said. "For

BJP there should be inequality, caste system should be strengthened, unemployment should increase, farmers' problems should not be solved."

BJP's intention is that Congress should not fight against these issues, he further said, adding that "the bank accounts have been frozen so that the Congress party does not have money for elections."

"In the name of CAA, Pulwama, Ayodhya, how many more years will you emotionally mislead Indians? You are not responding to the problems of people, but instigating them emotionally.... The people of India will remove you from power this time," he said.

AICC general secretary in-charge of Karnataka Randeep Singh Surjewala alleged that the accounts of Congress -- the principal opposition party in India -- are frozen just ahead of the elections and claimed that "democracy is under attack."

He accused BJP of using muscle and money power to lure opposition legislators and leaders in various states going against the Constitution or anti-defection law.

"Governors are now used as BJP tools, Election Commission is captured by a sinister law, ED and Income Tax departments are unleashed to conduct raids ahead of elections in various states," Surjewala said. (PTI)

Allahabad HC declares UP Board of Madarsa Education Act 'unconstitutional'

LUCKNOW, March 22: The Allahabad High Court Friday declared the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004, "unconstitutional" and violative of the principle of secularism, and asked the state government to accommodate current students in the formal schooling system.

A division bench comprising Justice Vivek Chaudhary and Justice Subhash Vidyarthi of the Lucknow bench of the court declared the law ultra vires on a writ petition filed by a person named Anshuman Singh Rathore.

In his reaction to the order, UP Madarsa Education Board Chairman Ifikhar Ahmed Javed said the board will study the decision and decide the further course of action.

"Now after 20 years, the Madarsa Education Act has been declared unconstitutional. Obviously there has been some mistake somewhere. Our lawyers could not present their case properly before the court," he said.

Senior All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) member Maulana Khalid Rashid Farangi Mahali said the order should be challenged in the Supreme Court.

The petitioner had challenged the constitutionality of the UP Madarsa Board as well as objected to the management of madarsa by the Minority Welfare Department, rather than the education department.



The petitioner and his counsel submitted that the Madarsa Act violates the principles of secularism, which is the basic structure of the Constitution, fails to provide quality compulsory education up to the age of 14 years/Class-VIII as is mandatorily under Article 21-A; and fails to provide universal and quality school education to all the children studying in madarsas.

"Thus, it violates the Fundamental Rights of the students of the madarsas," they claimed.

Opposing the petitioners, the

state government counsel said that no doubt the

Madarsa Board is providing religious education as well as religious instructions to the students, but the State has sufficient power to impart such education under the Constitution of India and is rightly permitting such education.

"Providing religious education and instructions is not barred or illegal. For such religious education a separate Board is necessarily required, which needs to have members of such particular religion," he said.

There are about 25,000 madarsas in Uttar Pradesh of which 16,500 are recognised by the Uttar Pradesh Madarsa Education Board. Of them, 560 madarsas receive grants from the government. Apart from this, there are 8,500 unrecognised madarsas in the state.

Reacting on the decision of the High Court, Madarsa Education Board Chairman Javed told PTI that his lawyer probably could not present their case properly before the court.

Javed said that the High Court's

order will have a major impact on government-aided madrasas. If the Madarsa Education Act is repealed, teachers of aided madrasas will become unemployed, he said.

"In 2004, the government itself enacted the Madarsa Education Act. Similarly, Sanskrit Education Council has also been formed in the state. The objective of both the boards was to promote languages like Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit," he said.

On the question whether this decision of the High Court will be challenged in the Supreme Court, Javed said, "Now it is for the government to decide, because the court has given orders to it."

AIMPLB member Farangi Mahali said this order of Allahabad High Court should be challenged in the Supreme Court.

He said the Muslim community has established madrasas as per its constitutional rights, "just like there are Sanskrit schools". "Modern education is also being given in madrasas. If the Madarsa Education Act itself is abolished, then teachers of hundreds of madrasas in the state will become unemployed and there will be a question mark on the future of the children studying in them," he said.

This will create a very difficult situation, hence this order must be challenged in the Supreme Court, Farangi Mahali said. (PTI)

SC denies bail to BRS leader K Kavitha in Delhi excise policy case, asks her to approach trial court

NEW DELHI, March 22: In a setback to BRS leader K Kavitha, the Supreme Court on Friday refused to grant her bail in the money laundering case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. The development came a day after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in the same case.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi asked Kavitha to approach the trial court, saying it is a practice which this court is following and cannot bypass the protocol.

"Issue notice. Counter affidavit shall be filed in six weeks. Rejoinder, if any, in six weeks. It will be open to the petitioner to move the trial court or invoke any other remedy for grant of bail," the bench said, adding all pleas and contentions available to the petitioner are left open.

It clarified that the court has not made any comments on merits of the case.

The bench said as far as Kavitha's plea challenging the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is concerned, the court is issuing notice to the ED and seeking its response.

"The petition challenging the provisions of (PMLA) will come up with the pending matters,"

the bench told senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Kavitha. At the outset, Sibal told the bench that he has one request to the court that he should not be asked to go to the high court.

"Please see what is happening in our country. People are being arrested on the basis of an approver's statement. I am very upset," he said.

The bench told Sibal, "As a counsel, you should never be upset. Don't be so emotional. Main writ petition can be put up for hearing with other petitions (pending matters) in July. As far as bail is concerned, we are very clear, you have to go to the trial court."

When Sibal referred to the arrest of former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and other political leaders, the bench asked him not to make political statements.

"We have been very clear and uniformly following this practice in this bench. All of us in principle agree we should not, because there is a political person or someone who can directly afford to come to the Supreme Court, bypass all the statutory and constitutional forums," the bench said.

Sibal then referred the statement made by the

ED in the court last year in September that she is not an accused. The bench said it is not going into the merit of the case at the moment.

"Mr. Sibal, what you are asking us to do is, according to us, not permissible. You see, what is going to happen if this court is going to entertain Article 32 petitions in all matters where a person can afford to come directly to the Supreme Court. This can't be done," the bench said.

Sibal told the bench that he will approach the trial court for relief.

Not pleased by the court's decision, Sibal said, "If history of this court is visited, this will not be of gold."

"Let's see," Justice Khanna told the veteran lawyer tersely.

The bench ordered that if any bail application is filed by Kavitha before the trial court, it should be adjudicated expeditiously.

Kavitha had moved the top court challenging her arrest by the ED in the Delhi excise policy case. A member of the Telangana Legislative Council and daughter of former state chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, Kavitha was arrested on March 15 and remanded in the ED's custody till March 23. (PTI)

Akhilesh Yadav does not allow anyone from backward classes to be leaders: OP Rabhar

BALLIA (UP), March 22: SBSP chief and Uttar Pradesh's Panchayati Raj Minister Om Prakash Rajbhar on Friday hit out at Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, accusing him of "betraying" leaders from the backward classes, Dalits and minorities.

Rajbhar, whose party is part of the ruling National Democratic Alliance, said Yadav's allies are quitting the opposition alliance as he does not want leaders from the backward communities to rise.

"Akhilesh ji does not want to take anyone along. He does not want to allow any person from backward class, Dalit community or minority community to become a leader," the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) chief said while speaking to reporters at his party's office in Rasra here.

"Be it Jayant Chaudhary, Om Prakash Rajbhar, Dara Singh Chauhan, Swami Prasad Maurya (all SP leaders or leaders of parties



part of its alliance), everyone is saying the same thing. The SP leaders are betraying the backward class, Dalit community and Muslim class. This is the reason why everyone is leaving him (Akhilesh Yadav)," said Rajbhar.

On Apna Dal (Kameravadi) not being given any Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh under the INDIA bloc, Rajbhar said that if the leaders of Apna Dal (K) want to join the NDA, then they are welcome.

Apna Dal (K) has expressed displeasure over not being given a

single seat under the INDIA bloc after Yadav said that "the alliance between Apna Dal (K) and the Samajwadi Party was for the 2022 Assembly polls and not the 2024 elections."

Rajbhar's party had contested the 2022 assembly polls in alliance with the Samajwadi Party and won six seats. Later however, he parted ways with the SP. Rajbhar who had contested the 2017 assembly election in UP with the BJP returned to the NDA fold and was sworn in as a minister recently.

Asked about Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the excise policy case, Rajbhar said, "The country's money has been misused. Action is being taken against Kejriwal only after he was found guilty in the investigation," he said.

The ED is an autonomous agency and it is doing its work, he added. (PTI)

Lalu gave poll ticket to daughter after taking her kidney: Bihar BJP chief

PATNA, March 22: Bihar BJP president and Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary on Friday accused RJD supremo Lalu Prasad of "selling tickets" of Lok Sabha polls to aspirants, alleging that he didn't even spare his daughter and took a kidney from her before making her a candidate.

In a strong rebuttal, Prasad's Singapore-based daughter Rohini Acharya, who donated one of her kidneys to his ailing father in late 2022, said that she will reply

to such "low thoughts" in the court of the people.

Making her debut in electoral politics, Acharya is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Bihar's Saran constituency on RJD ticket.

Talking to reporters in Patna, Chaudhary said, "Lalu Prasad is a politician who is an expert in selling tickets. He did not even spare his daughter. First, he took a kidney from her and then gave her a Lok Sabha ticket".

Responding to Chaudhary's comment, Acharya

said people will decide what is right and what is wrong.

"I am Lalu ji's daughter. I will answer every lowly thought and lowly word of persons having low characters in the people's court," she said in a post on X.

She also shared a photo of her with Prasad sitting on a wheelchair.

"It is my duty and love towards my father to give one of my kidneys to him. Rohini is ready to sacrifice her life for her family and her birthplace Bihar," Acharya said.

She also said her parents are "greater than God" and she will always be indebted to them.

The RJD also lambasted the BJP leader for his "disrespectful" comment and claimed that such a remark is insulting to the 'kushwaha' community, the caste Chaudhary belongs to.

"Our society and community never support such cheap statements nor does it ever support such a language," said RJD leader Madhu Manjari Kushwaha. (PTI)

Noida court grants bail to YouTuber Elvish Yadav

NOIDA, March 22: A Gautam Buddha Nagar court Friday granted bail to controversial YouTuber Siddharth Yadav alias Elvish Yadav in suspected drugs case, his lawyers said.

Yadav was arrested by the Noida Police on Sunday in connection with its probe into suspected use of snake venoms as recreational drugs in parties he hosted.

The 26-year-old controversial YouTuber, also winner of reality show Bigg Boss OTT 2, has been booked under provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, the Wildlife Protection Act and the Indian Penal Code, according to police. (PTI)

Punjab: Death toll in Sangrur spurious liquor case rises to 14, two more held

CHANDIGARH, March 22: The death toll due to the suspected consumption of spurious liquor in Punjab's Sangrur district has risen to 14 as six more people succumbed on Friday, officials said.

Police said they have arrested two more people. With this, a total of six people have been nabbed in connection with the case.

Earlier on Thursday, police had recovered suspected ethanol and raw material used for making alcohol.

"Fourteen people have died in this incident so far. We have made two fresh arrests in the case. Investigations are on and culprits will not be spared," Deputy Inspector General of Police, Harcharan Singh Bhullar told PTI on Friday.

Police had earlier suggested that the sale of spurious liquor could be part of an attempt to lure voters ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

On Wednesday, five people died allegedly after consuming spurious liquor and some were hospitalised. The next day, three more people succumbed during treatment at Patiala's Rajindra Hospital.

On late Thursday night, two more people died while four others succumbed his morning, taking the total death in the incident to 14.

Officials said that most of the deaths have taken place in different villages under Dirba block of Sangrur, a few deaths were also reported from Sunam.

Punjab Finance and Excise and Taxation Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, who is under fire from the opposition over the deaths in Gujran village which falls in his Dirba assembly constituency, had on Thursday expressed grief and said whosoever responsible for this incident will not be spared.

The Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal hit out at the AAP gov-

ernment over the Sangrur hooch tragedy.

On Thursday, Special Director General of Police Arpit Shukla had said they have arrested a fourth person, identified as Patiala-resident Harmanpreet Singh, in connection with the incident.

Police had earlier recovered 200 litres of ethanol, 156 bottles of alcohol, 130 bottles containing suspected spurious liquor with labelling, 80 bottles containing spurious liquor without labelling, 4,500 empty bottles and a bottling machine etc.

A case was registered under section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code and the Excise Act and a probe is underway. The district administration has also formed a five-member committee to investigate the matter.

The committee has been asked to submit a report on the matter in 72 hours, Sangrur Deputy Commissioner Jitendra Jorwal had said on Wednesday.

A survey was also being conducted in affected villages to find out if anyone else reported symptoms of deterioration in health. Multiple teams of health officials, Anganwadi workers, police, revenue and rural development officials are conducting a door-to-door survey.

Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal has said the Sangrur hooch tragedy was indicative of the state of affairs in Punjab as well as those in chief minister Bhagwant Mann's home district of Sangrur, even as he demanded a judicial probe into the tragedy.

Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa has also criticised Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann for his "failure" to fix responsibility for the tragedy and seek the resignation of Harpal Cheema. (PTI)

Global 'Weather Kids' campaign launched to rally climate action ahead of COP30

NEW DELHI, March 22: Television screens in over 80 countries, including India, flashed visuals of young children presenting a shocking but scientifically grounded forecast for the year 2050 to encourage global climate action.

This is part of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) new "Weather Kids" campaign, created in partnership with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and The Weather Channel, the flagship consumer brand of The Weather Company.

The young television meteorologists featured in the campaign warn viewers about the catastrophic effects of rising temperatures on both people and the global economy, including a projected impact on 94 per cent of the world's children, threats to food security, and a rise in taxpayers' bills globally.

The segment ends with a powerful plea from the children: "It's not just a weather report to us. It is our future."

The campaign encourages adults to sign a pledge to act through voting, making sustainable financial decisions, and educating themselves on climate solutions and climate action in their own country.

The "Weather Kids" campaign is a part of the UNDP's efforts to inspire public conversation and mobilise action on climate change on the road to the 30th UN climate conference to be held in Brazil in 2025.

The COP30 will also mark the 10-year anniversary of the landmark Paris Agreement of 2015 and is a critical opportunity to get the



world on a path to limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius from the pre-industrial levels, as countries submit a new round of national climate plans known as 'Nationally Determined Contributions' (NDCs).

In India, the campaign is being conducted in partnership with the India Meteorological Department (IMD), India's principal agency responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting, and also one of the six regional specialised meteorological centres of the WMO.

"Our action directly impacts climate and climate change has direct bearing on our lives. We are part of the same cycle," Union Minister

for Earth Sciences Kiren Rijiju said at the launch of the campaign here.

"Climate change threatens the existence of life on planet. Since we are primarily responsible for climate change, human behaviour should change first," he said.

"The recent WMO report shows how most of the climate change indicators reached record levels in 2024. Today, more than ever, we need urgent climate action to safeguard the future of our children. Through our partnership with UNDP for this campaign, we hope to deliver a powerful message that catalyzes the masses, as underscored in the initiative of Lifestyle for Environment, or LiFE, of the Government of

India," said Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director-General (Meteorology), IMD.

The climate crisis is the defining challenge that humanity faces and is closely intertwined with the inequality crisis. The year 2023 was by far the hottest on record, as were the last nine years, said WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo.

"Extreme weather events are increasing and have huge socio-economic impacts - heat waves, floods, droughts, wildfires, and intense tropical cyclones. Meteorological and hydrological services and scientists worldwide are sounding the Red Alert and are scaling up efforts to deal with the challenge," she said.

The Weather Kids add a powerful voice to alert us to a future that will certainly materialise if we do not take meaningful climate action today, said Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator.

"Continued inertia on climate change will lead to an increasingly uninhabitable planet for the 'kids of today' and future generations. We can only course-correct if we move at speed and scale now. That includes decarbonizing our economies and advancing access to affordable, clean energy for all; protecting and restoring our natural world; and empowering communities to have their say in their countries' climate pledges."

The campaign is supported by global celebrities and UNDP Goodwill Ambassadors, including Oscar-winning Malaysian actor Michelle Yeoh, American actor Connie Britton, and Danish actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau. (PTI)

THESE STORIES FIND US: RITESH SIDHWANI ON BACKING FRIENDSHIP-THEMED FILMS

NEW DELHI, March 22: Films with friendship at the core resonate with a wider audience and such stories somehow land up at production house Excel Entertainment, says co-founder Ritesh Sidhwani. The producer formed the banner with filmmaker-friend Farhan Akhtar in 1999 and their first production "Dil Chahta Hai" (2001) is regarded as one of the best portrayals of friendship in the modern era.

In the past 25 years, Excel Entertainment has grown from strength to strength as a quality content studio, also expanding its footprint through streamers with "Mirzapur" and "Made in Heaven". But friendship stories have been a constant at the banner, be it "Rock On!!", "Fukrey" franchise, "Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara", or the upcoming "Madgaon Express".

"These stories find us. If somebody writes a film based on bromance and talks about friends, somehow it just finds its way to us knowing that we

are suckers for it. But I feel it resonates with a wider audience. "Without friends, none of us would be in this space that we are in. All of us have that special person or a friend. I don't know of anybody who didn't have that kind of (a person) in their life. That makes it a bit more relatable," Sidhwani told PTI in an interview here.

"Madgaon Express" follows the journey of three childhood friends — played by Pratik Gandhi, Divyendu and Avinash Tiwary — who embark on a trip to Goa that goes wrong. It hits the screens on Friday.

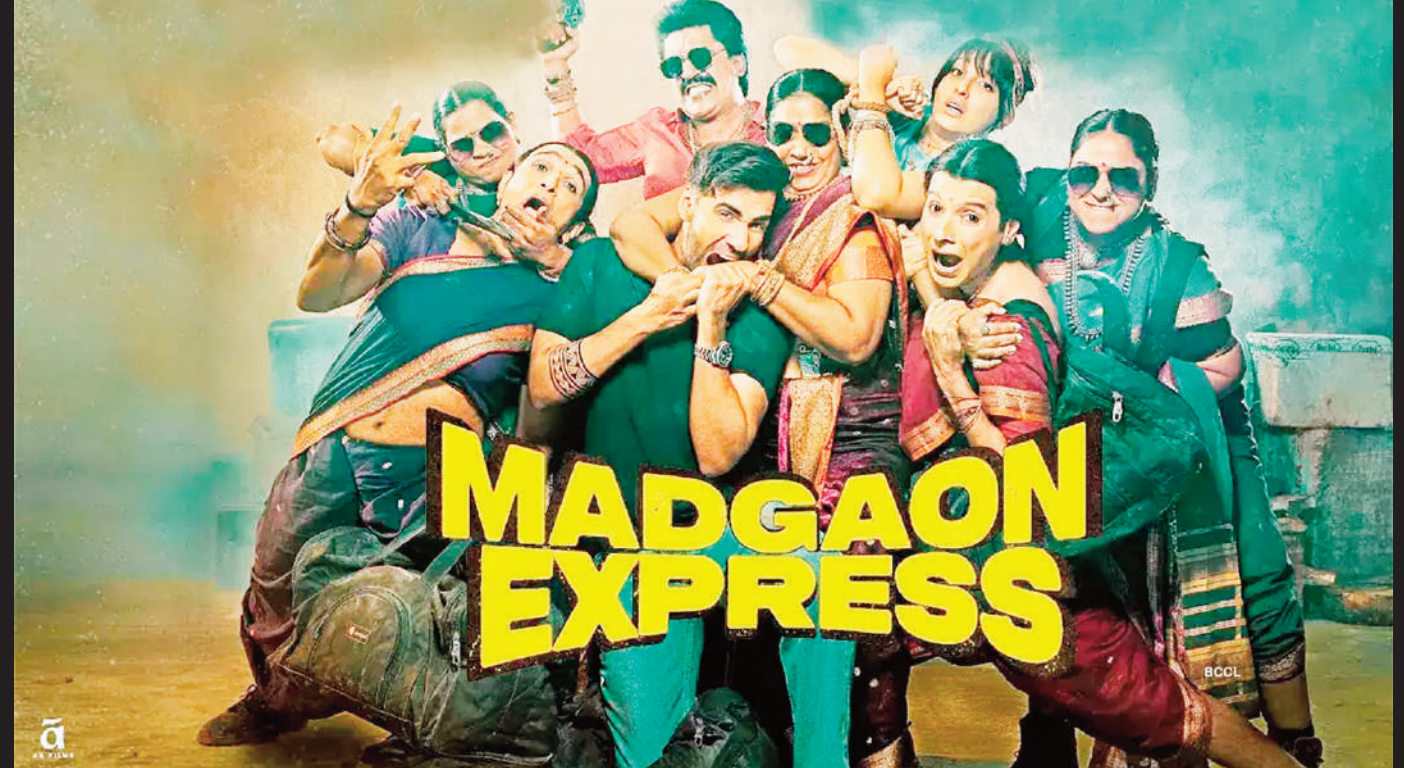
Each friendship journey has its own experience, said Sidhwani, adding that the three friends in "Dil Chahta Hai" — starring Aamir Khan, Saif Ali Khan and Akshaye Khanna — just happen to go to Goa but it wasn't a road film.

"Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara" is a road trip film, "Rock On!!" is not a road trip film but it's again about friendship. You immediately connect

with such stories, and whatever that journey is, whoever those friends are.

"Sometimes you make friends on a journey, sometimes on that journey, you start coming to realisations about the strengths, weaknesses or conflicts with each other. Everything in friendship is resolved in a much better and faster way," he added. Actor Kunal Kemmu, who is making his directorial debut with "Madgaon Express", said the film is an ode to his first journey to Goa which he undertook through a train called the Madgaon Express.

"Usually, I get asked why Goa? It's also the modes of transport you take to get to these places. Especially with friends, it will either be a road trip or plane trips. But the plane trip will not be as much fun because the kind of space and the kind of experiences you can have on a road journey or a train journey is slightly more than being on a plane."



he said. Kemmu, whose acting credits include "Kalyug", "Go Goa Gone" and "Lootcase", has directed the movie from a script he wrote. As someone who started his career as a child star with films such as "Zakhm" and "Hum Hain Rahi Pyar Ke" to his credit, the first-time filmmaker said turning director was the natural next step. "I have got an opportunity to do things as a writer, director with an ace production house with ace actors. I'm very happy with the kind of love the trailer has got which makes me believe that maybe people will come to theatres with their friends and have a great time. I can't think of a better way to kind of be able to do everything that goes into making a film for a six-year-old who spent most of his life on a film set," he added. (PTI)

CILLIAN MURPHY RETURNING AS TOMMY SHELBY FOR 'PEAKY BLINDERS' MOVIE, SAYS STEVEN KNIGHT

LONDON, March 22: Oscar winner Cillian Murphy will be reprising his favourite role of crime boss Tom Shelby from "Peaky Blinders" in a standalone feature film, show creator Steven Knight has confirmed.

The series, about the titular Peaky Blinders crime gang in the aftermath of the First World War, had ended with its sixth season run in April 2022 but Knight has always maintained that he would like to continue the story "in another form".

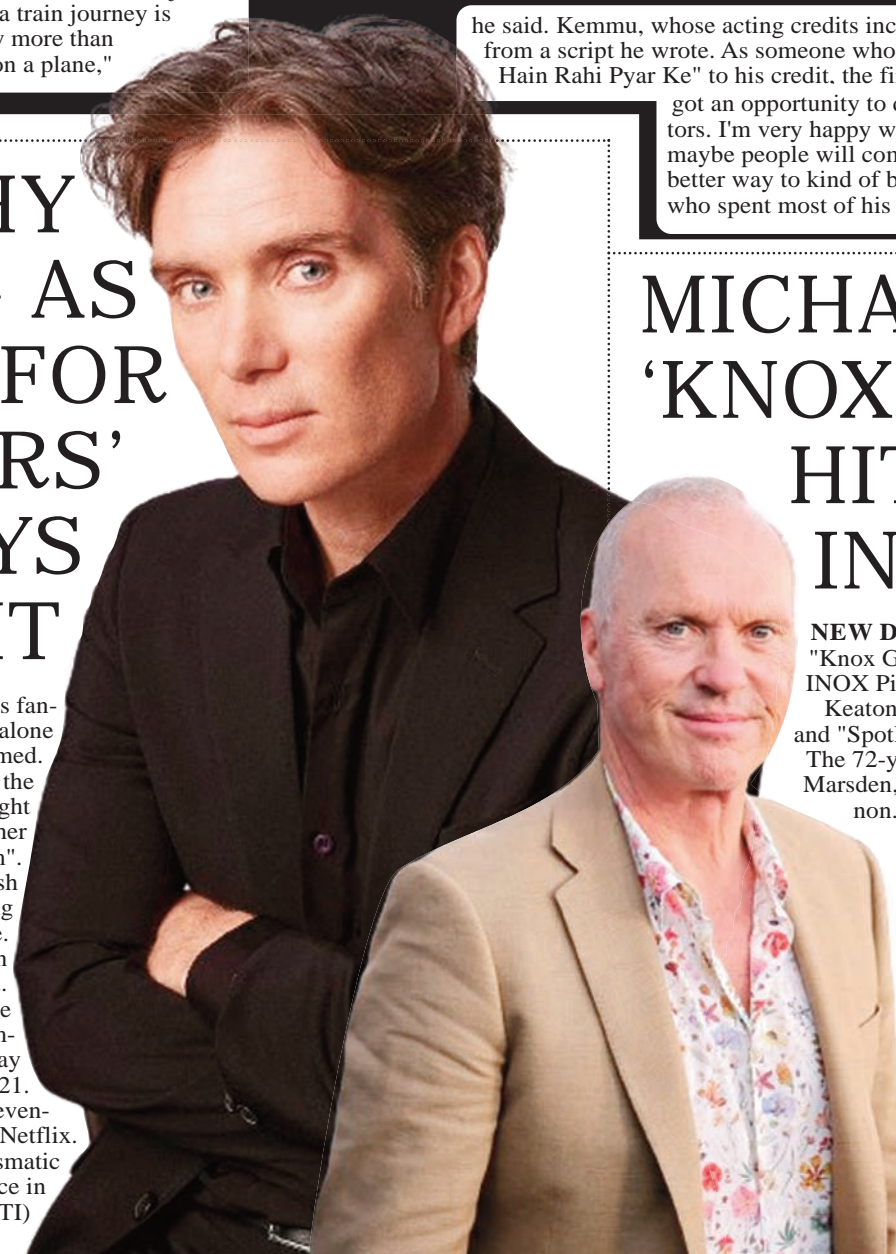
At the premiere of his latest BBC drama "This Town", Knight told British news outlet Birmingham World that Murphy would "definitely" be returning as Shelby for the movie.

"He definitely is returning for it. We're shooting it in September just down the road in Digbeth (England)," he added.

"Peaky Blinders" also features Paul Anderson as Arthur Shelby, Sophie Rundle as Ada Shelby, and Joe Cole as John Shelby, the gang's senior members. Late actor Helen McCrory starred in the show as Elizabeth "Polly" Gray for five seasons before she died of breast cancer in 2021.

The show, which started on BBC Two in 2013, moved to BBC One, and eventually became a worldwide phenomenon after it became available on Netflix.

Murphy's popularity also soared, owing to his portrayal of the charismatic Tommy Shelby in the series. He recently won an Oscar for his performance in Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer". (PTI)



MICHAEL KEATON'S 'KNOX GOES AWAY' TO HIT THEATRES IN INDIA ON MARCH 29

NEW DELHI, March 22: Hollywood actor Michael Keaton's action thriller "Knox Goes Away" is set to release in theatres across India on March 29, PVR INOX Pictures said on Thursday.

Keaton, the star of "Batman" movies as well as Oscar-winning titles "Birdman" and "Spotlight", has directed the movie from a script by Gregory Poirier. The 72-year-old veteran also features in the movie along with Al Pacino, James Marsden, Marcia Gay Harden, Suzy Nakamura, Joanna Kulig, and Ray McKinnon.

The film is about John Knox (Keaton), a contract killer diagnosed with a fast-moving form of dementia called Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Knox vows to spend his final days attempting to redeem himself by saving the life of his estranged adult son. He finds himself in a race against the authorities as well as the ticking clock of his own rapidly deteriorating mind, according to official synopsis.

"Michael Keaton's portrayal of Knox is nothing short of extraordinary, showcasing his unparalleled experience and expertise both in front and behind the cameras," Kamal Gianchandani, CEO of PVR Pictures Limited & PVR Limited, said in a statement.

"We are thrilled to present 'Knox Goes Away' to Indian audiences and are confident that it will continue to amaze them just as it has done on the international stage," he added.

"Knox Goes Away" had its world premiere at the 2023 edition of the Toronto International Film Festival. It was released in theatres in the US last week. (PTI)

ACTING IS ABOUT BEING ABLE TO TRY NEW THINGS: JAKE GYLLENHAAL ON HIS VARIED FILMOGRAPHY



NEW DELHI, March 22: Acting is all about using one's skills to try new things, says Hollywood star Jake Gyllenhaal, who didn't mind sweating it out in the gym to play a former UFC boxer in his new film "Road House".

In a career of over 20 years, the actor has created a rich tapestry of diverse performances with films such as "Brokeback Mountain", "Zodiac", "Source Code", "Prisoners", "Nightcrawler", "Nocturnal Animals", "Enemy", "Spider-Man: Far From Home" and "Ambulance".

The actor said not a lot of thought has gone into building his filmography but his choices constantly evolve with "relationships, people and things".

"I love different genres. I like the idea of being able to use my skills to try new things, try and test them and push them. I think the idea of acting, in particular, is about the fun of being able to change and try a new outfit or a different behaviour," Gyllenhaal told PTI in an interview.

"I try to use the joy of change that is inherent to acting in the choices that I make. And I try to move with things that bring me joy. That's really at the heart of it for me," he added.

"Road House" is a remake of late Hollywood star Patrick Swayze's

1989 movie of the same name. It was released on streaming service Prime Video on Thursday.

In this new take, Gyllenhaal stars as a former UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) middleweight fighter who ends up working at a roadhouse, an old-fashioned term for a small bar on the main road in a city or town.

The 43-year-old actor underwent a gruelling workout regime to get in shape for the movie, in which he is pitted against world famous professional mixed martial artist (MMA) and boxer, Connor McGregor.

Gyllenhaal said he likes to push himself physically, something that he has learnt from his father, filmmaker Stephen Gyllenhaal.

"I am a physical person. Since I was a kid, I have loved sports and my dad was always very athletic. He instilled that in me and I found that it's so helpful, particularly as a performer, to be in a place where you can deliver things for the stage.

"Being in shape has always been so helpful to me. And then also mental health. It's so good to be in shape and have that outlet. I've always found it an anchor for me," he added.

With the character he has played or wants to essay on screen, Gyllenhaal said he embraces the "physical, men-

tal and intellectual challenge" as part of the development process.

"And this proved to be fun, to create a character who I could get in great shape and work with fun people who I enjoy working with. I like pushing myself. I think that's interesting. And when a role gives me that opportunity, I love to do that."

"Road House", directed by Doug Liman of "The Bourne Identity", "Mr & Mrs Smith" and "Edge of Tomorrow" fame, features Gyllenhaal as Dalton, an ex-UFC fighter trying to escape his dark past and his penchant for violence.

Dalton, as per the official plotline, is barely scraping by on the reputation that still precedes him when he is spotted by Frankie, owner of a roadhouse in the Florida Keys. She hires him to be her new bouncer in hopes of stopping a violent gang, working for crime boss Brandt from destroying her beloved bar.

But the stakes get higher with the arrival of ruthless gun-for-hire, Knox. As the brutal brawls and bloodshed escalate, the tropical Keys prove more dangerous than anything Dalton ever faced in the Octagon.

Gyllenhaal had the opportunity to collaborate with the original movie's star Swayze, when they worked on

the 2001 cult classic "Donnie Darko".

"Patrick and I never spoke about 'Road House' in particular, though he knew that I was a huge fan of his. All of his films, like 'Point Break', I've watched maybe hundreds of times, and then 'Dirty Dancing' and 'Ghost' and so on," he said, recalling the actor, who passed away at the age of 57 in 2009 after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

But his version of "Road House" stands alone in a lot of ways, the actor said.

"It is a reimagining of the idea. It definitely takes some of the ideas from the original. There is a difference between the two. In this one, there is a real sense of humour. There's a different sense of tone and that tone comes from Doug Liman, our director, who is such a funny guy, but also does action so well.

"He also understands the minutiae of performance in those scenes. And so there are similarities in a way, but ultimately it is so wholly a Doug Liman film and that's what makes it different," Gyllenhaal added.

"Road House" is produced by Joel Silver. It also features Daniela Melchior, Billy Magnussen, Jessica Williams and Lukas Gage. (PTI)

India, Afghanistan play out goalless draw in FIFA WC Qualifiers

ABHA (SAUDI ARABIA), March 22: India played out a goalless draw against Afghanistan after both sides failed to turn their opportunities into goals in a Group A fixture of the 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers here.

It was end-to-end contest in the first half on Thursday night with India coming close to scoring through Manvir Singh on two occasions and the hosts too had their share of chances.

With this result, India climbed to the second spot in Group A with four points from three matches, followed by Kuwait, who are on three points from as many games.

The equation was quite clear for both teams. A win would do either side a world of good.

India have provisionally taken the second spot in Group A, three points ahead of Kuwait, who lost to Qatar 0-3 earlier in the night. Afghanistan, following a draw and to losses are fourth in the group.

A feisty midfield battle ensued in the opening exchanges as lunging tackles were frequently on display at the Damac Stadium. While Afghanistan looked to use their pace and physical build to assert dominance, India were intent on playing a passing game.

Vikram Partap Singh, who had earned his senior national team debut in January, made the starting XI for the first time, and was a constant thorn in the flesh of the Afghanistan defence.

The forward kept drifting be-

tween the centre and the wing, often switching with Manvir, which caused much confusion in the Afghanistan ranks.

With India and Afghanistan resorting to open football, the first half (45+3) saw a wave of attacking moves but the strikers were not able to come alive in the final third, leaving coaches Igor Stimac and Ashley Westwood a bit frustrated as they shouted instructions from the touchline.

India were on the offensive from the word go and caused some anxious moments in the Afghanistan defence. Had Manvir not spurned a great chance in the 17th minute, the visitors would have taken an early lead in their away leg of the second round of the 2026 World Cup

and 2027 AFC Asian Cup preliminary joint qualification match. After a few early exchanges, the Indian midfield slowly began to clamp their control. Lallianzuala Chhangte, prancing down the left, found an unmarked Manvir with a low cross. But the latter, who had drifted inside from the right flank, sent his shot wide.

Despite India's control over the game, Afghanistan kept finding chances, especially on the counter. Mosawer Ahadi was released down the right flank, as he cut in and unleashed a left-footed curler that India custodian Gurpreet Singh Sandhu grabbed with both hands. Manvir had more than one opportunity to score in the first half itself. A corner from Chhangte,

and a cross whipped in by full-back Nikhil Poojary were great chances for the India forward to score, but both went begging, as the first half came to a close.

After Manvir, it was Vikram Pratap's turn in the second half to miss a couple of chances.

While on the first occasion, the ball was just a yard too far, the 22-year-old managed to wriggle past his marker on the second opportunity, only to run into a cul-de-sac, where the angle was too narrow for him to take a crack at the goal.

His last opportunity came just minutes ahead of the hour mark, when he managed to get into the six-yard box unmarked, and connected a header onto a cross by Akash Mishra. But the effort went inches wide.

Vikram's night, however, soon came to an end. A mistimed tackle earned him a booking, and head coach Stimac took the opportunity to replace him with Brandon Fernandes.

Afghanistan kept resorting to counter-attacks and had arguably their best scoring opportunity in the 62nd minute when Rahmat Akbari's low cross found Omid Popalzay in the Indian box, but Rahul Bheke intervened just in time to deny the Afghanistan midfielder.

Stimac made a final throw of the dice with a quarter of an hour left on the clock, bringing on Liston Colaco, Mahesh Naorem, and Deepak Tangri. Colaco found a lot of joy down the right, frequently sending in crosses, but the Afghanistan defence

managed to deal with them.

Subhashish Bose, who had earlier replaced Mishra, was added to the list of Indian players who managed to get a free header inside the Afghanistan box, as he nodded a Colaco corner inches wide of the target.

As the match went into injury time, Colaco created one last opportunity, sprinting down the right flank. His low cross missed captain Sunil Chhetri, but landed at Mahesh's feet, as the latter tried to feint his marker to create shooting space but he was soon dispossessed.

India and Afghanistan will now shift to Guwahati, where they will face off again on March 26, for their second encounter in the Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup. (PTI)

Sindhu, Sen bow out; Srikanth and Rajawat in quarterfinals of Swiss Open

BASEL (SWITZERLAND), March 22: Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu's run at the Swiss Open was cut short by a Japanese teenager, while top Indian male shuttler Lakshya Sen lost to Lee Chia-Hao of Chinese-Taipei in the pre-quarterfinals of the Super 300 tournament here.

Ace Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth, Priyansh Rajawat and Kiran George won their respective men's singles round-of-16 matches to advance to the quarterfinals late on Thursday night.

Sindhu, after bowing out in the second round of the recently-concluded All England Championships, lost to Japan's 17-year-old junior world champion Tomoka Miyazaki 21-16 19-21 16-21, while Sen was eliminated by Lee Chia-hao 17-21 15-21 in just 38 minutes in the round-of-16 contest.

Srikanth, though, secured a place in the quarterfinals by defeating top seed Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia 21-61 21-15, while Rajawat got the better of Lei La Xi of China 21-14 21-13 to clinch a last-eight berth.

George struggled against French shuttler Alex Lanier before prevailing 18-21 22-20 21-18 in a gruelling 71-minute contest to book a quarterfinal berth. Srikanth will take on Lee Chia-Hao, while Rajawat will



clash against Chinese-Taipei's Chou Tien-Chen in the last-eight round. George will look to get past Rasmus Gemke of Denmark to secure a place in the semifinals.

Sindhu, who seems to be returning to form after a long in-

jury layoff, fought her teenaged rival tooth and nail before bowing out in round of 16 with the Japanese shuttler drawing on her youthful energy to make a statement against the two-time Olympic medallist.

Miyazaki, who had claimed

the gold medal at the 2022 world junior championships, and has come into the tournament after winning her maiden Super 300 crown at Orleans Masters in France last week, lost the first game 16-21 but staged a fine recovery to take

the tie into the decider before winning in 80 minutes.

Miyazaki kept hitting those high tosses to keep Sindhu at the back. The Indian had to play a lot of over-the-head returns and ended up making errors as the rallies extended.

In the end, the Japanese had six match points. Sindhu saved two before spraying into the net.

Earlier on Thursday, the Indian women's doubles pair of Treena Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand progressed to the quarterfinals with a straight-game win over compatriots Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra.

The eighth seeded Commonwealth Games bronze medallists hardly broke a sweat as they brushed aside fellow Indians Priya and Shruti, ranked 75th in the world, 21-10 21-12 in 36 minutes.

World no. 26 Treena and Gayatri, who are sharing the 14th place in the Olympic Games qualification ranking, will face Australia's Setyana Mapasa and Angela Yu in the next round.

World No. 20 Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who are 6,296 points ahead of Treena and Gayatri in the Paris qualification race at 12th spot, lost 17-21 16-21 to Japan's world No. 30 Rui Hirokami and Yuna Kato. (PTI)

Japan beat North Korea in WC qualifying then N Korea cancels visit by Japan, media says



TOKYO, March 22: North Korea reportedly canceled hosting Japan in a World Cup qualifier just hours after losing to Japan in Tokyo on Thursday.

Japan scored after just 90 seconds and held out North Korea to win 1-0 and maintain its perfect start in the second round of Asian qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. Soon after, Japan Football Association chief Kozo Tashima told Kyodo News that North Korea canceled the scheduled qualifier against Japan on Tuesday in Pyongyang, giving the news in a letter to the Asian Football Confederation.

North Korea was concerned by "a malignant infectious disease" in Japan, an apparent reference to rising cases of streptococcus infections, Kyodo said.

Ao Tanaka's strike at the National Stadium gave host Japan three wins from three Group B games. The midfielder fired home from inside a crowded penalty area after a Ritsu Doan pullback.

North Korea, cheered on by a small pocket of red-shirted fans, lacked attacking power to get back in the game. North Korea has only three points from the first three group games.

"We wanted to give our fans a good result and we are sorry we

could not but it was a good game," North Korea coach Sin Yong Nam said.

South Korea was held by Thailand to 1-1 in Seoul in its first game since Jurgen Klinsmann was fired as the coach in February. Son Heung-min put South Korea ahead after 42 minutes with a shot from close range. Just after an hour, Suphanat Mueanta leveled. "There's no getting around the fact that it was a disappointing result but there were positives to take from the game," Son said. Despite the draw, South Korea remained on top of Group C ahead of Tuesday's game in Bangkok, three points above Thailand and China, which drew 2-2 with Singapore.

Australia has won all three of its Group I games after defeating Lebanon 2-0 in Sydney.

Keanu Baccus opened the scoring after just five minutes and Kye Rowles added the second shortly after the restart.

Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates all maintained their perfect records with respective wins over the Philippines, Tajikistan and Yemen.

In Jordan's first action since losing the Asian Cup final to Qatar in February, it beat Pakistan 3-0. Qatar defeated Kuwait by the same scoreline. (AP)

US beat Jamaica 3-1 to reach CONCACAF Nations League final

ARLINGTON (TEXAS), March 22: The United States escaped defeat with an own goal in the sixth minute of second-half stoppage time, Haji Wright scored twice in extra time and the Americans rallied past Jamaica 3-1 Thursday night to reach the CONCACAF Nations League final against Mexico or Panama.

Greg Leigh scored 30 seconds in for the 57th-ranked Reggae Boyz, and the No. 13 Americans were on the verge of losing their third straight match. Instead, Wright scored in the sixth and 19th minutes of extra time and the U.S. will try to win the Nations League for the third straight time on Sunday.

Both of Wright's goals were set up by Gio Reyna, who entered at the start of the second half after being limited to 42 minutes over four substitute appearances for Nottingham Forest since he was loaned from Borussia Dortmund on Jan. 31. Four minutes of second-half stoppage time originally were signaled and later five, and the clock was at 5:25 when Christian Pulisic's corner kick to the near post was headed in by Miles Robinson. The ball deflected off Jamaican forward Corey Burke and past goalkeeper Andre Blake,

the latest goal for the Americans since Ricardo Clark scored in the seventh minute of stoppage time to beat Venezuela 1-0 in a 2012 exhibition.

Wright, whose extra time goal last weekend lifted Coventry City to an FA Cup quarterfinal, was a late injury replacement on the roster and had not played for the U.S. since the 2022 World Cup. He entered in the 63rd minutes and scored after the ball was knocked away from Pulisic. Reyna picked up the ball just past the center circle by Reyna and side-footed a through ball to Wright, who cut left to create space and slotted past Blake. Then Reyna won a ball from Keroy Anderson and made another incisive pass through the defense. Wright spun to control the ball and scored from 8 yards for his fourth goal in eight international appearances.

Leigh put Jamaica ahead after a throw-in deflected off Antonee Robinson to Fulham teammate Bobby De Cordova-Reid, who lofted the ball past Chris Richards and across the goal. Leigh was left unmarked by Joe Scally and headed the ball between goalkeeper Matt Turner and the post for his first goal in 13 international appearances. (AP)

Deniz Undav eyes Germany debut and shot at Euro 2024 squad

BERLIN, March 22: Deniz Undav's goals for Stuttgart this season have earned the forward his first call-up for Germany for the upcoming friendlies against France and the Netherlands.

On Saturday, he could make his debut playing against French star Kylian Mbappé in Lyon, or it could come Tuesday against the Dutch in Frankfurt.

"To be honest I don't care who I'm playing against. I just hope that when I come in, I give everything and that's the only thing that matters to me," Undav said Thursday. "Hopefully the two test games are positive and then we can see."

If Undav impresses Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann, he could even make the European Championship squad. Ger-

many hosts the tournament this summer and could benefit from Undav's goals and drive.

Undav is one of six new call-ups made by Nagelsmann as the coach attempts a shakeup to get the German team out of its decline.

"Deniz is very talented between the lines, someone who moves a lot in central positions and his passing is clean in the final pass," Germany teammate Niclas Füllkrug said of the 27-year-old forward.

Füllkrug, who has 10 goals in 13 appearances for Germany, knows Undav after twice losing to his Stuttgart team with Borussia Dortmund this season. Stuttgart knocked Dortmund out of the

German Cup and Undav scored when Stuttgart won their league meeting. They meet again in the Bundesliga on April 6.

For now though, they're teammates.

"We've already done one or two training sessions together, and we were on the same team together," Füllkrug said. "We worked quite well in harmony at times, and I also liked it because he's someone who always has the urge to move forward and looks for the last ball and doesn't have the urge the pass back. That's where I think his great strengths are. Of course, he also has a nose for where the ball will fall."

Undav has 15 goals in 25 games this season for Stuttgart, where he's enjoying another loan spell from Premier League

club Brighton.

It's been a fast ascent for a player who largely escaped attention since making his senior debut for TSV Havelse at fourth-tier level in April 2015.

Four years ago, Undav was still playing in Germany's third division for SV Meppen, where his performances earned a switch to Belgian team Union Saint-Gilloise.

Brighton signed Undav in January 2022 and loaned him back to Union for the rest of the season. He scored five goals for the English team before being loaned out again — to Stuttgart's benefit. Stuttgart is third in the Bundesliga and closing in on Champions League qualification. (AP)

Controversies off the track follow F1 to Australia for the season's third Grand Prix

MELBOURNE, March 22: For the third Formula 1 Grand Prix in a row, controversies off the track are threatening to overshadow the almost predictable action on it.

News this week ahead of the Australian GP that the FIA's Ethics Committee had cleared its president, Mohammed Ben Sulayem, from "interference of any kind" at two F1 events last year was followed quickly by a social media post from Susie Wolff, director of the all-female series F1 Academy and who is married to Mercedes F1 boss Toto Wolff, announcing that she had filed a criminal complaint in the French courts against the sport's governing body for statements made about her in December.

It's all against the backdrop of ongoing furor surrounding Red Bull Racing and its team principal Christian Horner.

Mercedes' star, seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, was quick to support

Wolff's legal action.

"I think she's so brave, and she stands for such great values," Hamilton said Thursday at Melbourne's Albert Park circuit. "She's such a leader. And in a world where often people are silenced, for her to be standing up sends such a great message."

The off-track issues continue at Red Bull Racing, where a recently suspended team employee has exercised the right to appeal Red Bull's clearance of alleged misconduct by Horner and filed a formal complaint with the FIA.

The chatter about Red Bull at Albert Park, therefore, hasn't been about its all-conquering RB20 car, which has secured perfect 1-2 results at the season-opening events in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, but whether Max Verstappen was preparing to leave for Mercedes.

"I'm happy within the team," the three-time F1 world champion said Thursday, rejecting speculation about a switch. "Of

course, it's very important that we try to keep the key players in the team for a longer period of time because that's where the performance is. And at the end of the day, it's a performance business."

Verstappen is the favorite Sunday to take his third straight win for 2024, his second at the Albert Park track in as many years, and his record-equaling 10th straight that dates to last year's Japanese Grand Prix.

Verstappen was second-fastest in the first of Friday's two practice sessions at Albert Park, finishing .018 seconds behind McLaren driver Lando Norris' time of 1 minute, 18.564 seconds. Mercedes' George Russell was third-fastest, .033 behind Norris.

The top seven cars were separated by a tenth of a second. Ten minutes were lost during the one-hour session after Alex Albon lost control and slammed into a wall, escaping without injury but damaging his Williams.

Sergio Pérez, who was sixth-fastest in the first practice, is again expected to follow Verstappen home for another 1-2 Red Bull finish, with the Mexican driver in far more stable form than last season.

Ferrari remains its closest rival to the Red Bulls, with Charles Leclerc, fourth-fastest in the opening practice, hoping to lock out the front row with Verstappen for the sixth straight event and be more competitive in the Melbourne race.

"We're in a better situation compared to last year," Leclerc said. "However, we are speaking about maybe four tenths (of a second) a lap in the race, which is still significant. I am more optimistic, not looking at the gap, but more looking at the overall situation at the team. . . . Ferrari's performance here could be compromised after Carlos Sainz declared he's ready to return to

Shreyas' comeback in spotlight in Starc vs Cummins showdown



KOLKATA, March 22: Shreyas Iyer's comeback from a long injury layoff will be in focus as IPL's two biggest signings, Australian pacers Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins, go head to head in

Kolkata Knight Riders' opening match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Saturday.

The Indian batter, after missing the entire season last year due to a back injury, returns to lead KKR, who have made some tactical additions while keeping the nucleus of the side intact.

Shreyas sparked with the bat with a 95 in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy triumph recently but it remains to be seen whether he'll be available for all the matches, given his fitness concerns.

KKR's most successful leader Gautam Gambhir is back in his second innings as a mentor. His partnership with head coach Chandrakant Pandit, a shrewd tactician in domestic circuit, will be the key to their revival.

"This is your franchise, make it or break it," team principal owner Shah Rukh Khan has told Gambhir. Under the former India cricketer's captaincy, KKR had a golden run from 2011-2017 - two IPL titles, five playoffs and a runners-up finish in the now defunct

Champions League T20 tournament.

The biggest signing of this IPL is with KKR, and by acquiring Starc at a record sum of Rs 24.75-crore, the left-arm quick will be under huge pressure to perform.

His spell in power-play and the death overs will be the key. Starc and Andre Russell are the only two experienced pacers in KKR's ranks, and with no like-for-like replacements for them, their workload management will be crucial.

KKR boast of a star-studded top-order batting lineup in Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Phil Salt, Venkatesh Iyer and Shreyas to go with the Russell-Rinku Singh firepower at the death.

But the Gambhir-mentored side will rely heavily on the home conditions to offer some spin so as to give the likes of Sunil Narine, Varun Chakravarthy and Suyash Sharma some assistance.

Starc will have his skipper Cummins leading SRH in the adjacent dug-out as the Australian captain will also have his task cut out.

Cummins (Rs 20.50-crore) is the second-most expensive buy in this IPL and all eyes will be on him to revive the fortunes of the side that has had two wooden-spoon finishes in the last three seasons.

On paper, KKR with a star-studded batting and spin-heavy attack to complement Starc's pace, will be overwhelming favourites.

But SRH, under the shrewd captaincy of Cummins, will definitely fancy their chances. Travis Head and Heinrich Klaasen's batting firepower in the power-play and death overs will be vital.

Their bowling also looks balanced with the experienced Cummins and India's veteran death-overs specialist Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the lineup, while the likes of Washington Sundar and Wanindu Hasaranga will be crucial in the spin department.

It remains to be seen whether Hasaranga, the ace Sri Lankan all-rounder who has been banned by the ICC for the Tests against Bangladesh, will be available for SRH's opener.

Squads:

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), Nitish Rana (vc), Manish Pandey, Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh, Sakib Hussain, Anukul Roy, Venkatesh Iyer, Sherfane Rutherford, Angkrish, Raghuvanshi, Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, KS Bharat, Phil Salt, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Dushantha Chameera, Varun Chakravarthy, Mitchell Starc, Muejeb Ur Rahman, Harshit Rana and Suyash Sharma.

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Travis Head, Wanindu Hasaranga, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaasen, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upendra Singh Yadav, Umran Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shabbaz Ahmed, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh, Jhathavedh Subramanyan.

Time: 7.30PM IST. (PTI)

Guwahati's Yashvi shine in Speed Skating Competition

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 22: Yashvi Kankaria, a student of Class I studying at Vandya International School, Amingaon, Guwahati, has clinched two gold medals in the 300-meter and 700-meter races, respectively, in the under 10 years age category at the 6th All Assam Inter-School Speed Skating Competition. The competition was organised by the Guwahati Roller Sports Academy at Dispur Skating Ring, Guwahati, from March 21-22.

Sathiyani wins first-ever WTT Feeder title

NEW DELHI, March 22: Star paddler G. Sathiyani has become the first-ever Indian to win a men's singles trophy at a WTT Feeder Series event in Beirut, Lebanon.

He defeated compatriot Manav Thakkar 3-1 (6-11 11-7 11-7 11-4) on the final day of WTT Feeder Beirut 2024 on Thursday night.

Seeded No.11, Sathiyani enjoyed a rewarding path to the final in the Lebanese capital, taking down No.5 seed Harmeet Desai (15-13 6-11 11-8 13-11) and top seed Chuang Chih-Yuan (11-8 11-13 11-8 11-9) along the way. But the match Sathiyani will remember most is the final as he overcame an early setback to see off No.9 seed Thakkar in four games. The result marks Sathiyani's first men's singles success at a WTT event, and his first singles title at an international ranking event since ITTF Czech International Open 2021.

Meanwhile, Xia Lian Ni picked up her second WTT Feeder title in women's singles, producing an excellent display to break down Suh Hyo Won's defensive barrier 11-9 11-5 11-5.

A wildcard entrant for the event, Ni dropped just one game on her way to the semifinal, and was even more clinical at the penultimate hurdle, needing just three games to dispatch No.2 seed Chen Zhu-Yu (11-7 11-9 11-4). (PTI)

IPL: Comeback-man Pant the highlight as Delhi Capitals take on Punjab Kings

CHANDIGARH, March 22: Rishabh Pant's resilient return to the cricket field in multiple roles will be the focus when Delhi Capitals take on Punjab Kings in their IPL opener here on Saturday, both teams hoping to erase the disappointment of below-par performances in the last season.

Pant's miraculous escape from a life-threatening car crash in December 2022 has now become a tale of perseverance after the big-hitting wicketkeeper-batter made a faster than expected recovery to be back in action.

He has been cleared to play as a keeper-batter and has the additional responsibility of captaining the side, taking back the position from David Warner, who led DC to a ninth-place finish in the 10-team tournament last year.

"He (Pant) has probably batted more in the last week than he has ever batted leading into most of the IPLs. I think from his point of view, he wants to get a bit of trust back in his body again," said DC coach Ricky Ponting on Thursday ahead of the match to be played at the newly-constructed Maharaja Yadavindra Singh cricket stadium in Mullanpur here.

It has taken 15 months of hard work, courage and determination for Pant to be ready to lead DC again. He is a massive shot in the arm for the team whose best-ever performance in the IPL till date is a runners-up finish in 2020.

It is not yet clear whether Pant will start his keeping duties immediately. In case he doesn't, DC will fall back on either West Indian Shai Hope or South Africa's Tristan Stubbs. DC have a potent fast bowling arsenal, backed up by an explosive batting lineup.

Warner, who recently retired from the Test cricket, will be hoping to make a mark and secure a spot in the T20 World Cup-bound Australian side.

In Prithvi Shaw, Mitchell Marsh, Pant and Stubbs, DC have explosive batting line-up, while their bowling attack will be led by Anrich Nortje in the company of Indian veteran Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel.

The Punjab trophy cabinet is empty too. They have made it to the final only



once, in 2014, losing to Kolkata Knight Riders on that occasion.

After finishing sixth for four consecutive seasons between 2019 and 2022, PBKS dropped to eighth in 2023, and will look to turn things around this time.

In Shikhar Dhawan, PBKS have a skipper who would be desperate to prove a point after being side-lined from the national set-up.

PBKS have a new vice-captain in Jitesh Sharma but Jonny Bairstow's form would be a concern.

The side have some feisty all-rounders in Sikandar Raza, Sam Curran, Liam Livingstone and Rishi Dhawan while the bowling attack will be led by Kagiso Rabada in the company of Arshdeep Singh, Harshal Patel and Nathan Ellis.

But they have rarely come together as a unit to go the distance, making Delhi the favourites for the day game.

Teams (from):

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (C), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Swastik Chikara, Yash Dhull, Anrich Nortje, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Khaleel Ahmed, Kuldeep Yadav, Mukesh Kumar, Pravin Dube, Rasikh Dar, Vicky Ostwal, Axar Patel, Jake Fraser-Gurk, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Sumit Kumar, Abhishek Porel, Kumar Kushagra, Rickey Bhui, Shai Hope, Tristan Stubbs.

Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (C), Jitesh Sharma, Jonny Bairstow, Prabhsimran Singh, Liam Livingstone, Harpreet Bhatia, Rilee Rossouw, Shashank Singh, Chris Woakes, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Ashutosh Sharma, Tanay Thyagarajan, Atharva Taide, Rishi Dhawan, Sam Curran, Sikandar Raza, Shivam Singh, Prince Choudhary, Harpreet Brar, Arshdeep Singh, Kagiso Rabada, Nathan Ellis, Rahul Chahar, Vidwath Kaverappa, Harshal Patel.

Match starts at 3:30PM IST. (PTI)

Kotian replaces Zampa at Royals; Sharath joins Titans

NEW DELHI, March 22: Mumbai's crisis man Tanush Kotian, who played a key role in their record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy triumph this season, was on Friday drafted in by Rajasthan Royals as a replacement for Aussie Adam Zampa.

Kotian joined at his base price of ₹ 20 lakh, the IPL announced.

Zampa, who picked up eight wickets from six matches for the Royals last season, was retained at his ₹ 1.5-crore contract but the Australian leg-spinner pulled out citing heavy workload in the build up to the T20I World Cup in June.

Kotian, an off-spinner and a handy lower-order batter, was expecting an IPL contract in 2023 after playing a vital role in Mumbai's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy triumph but was reported for a suspect bowling action.

But the 25-year-old showed resilience to fight back and become the player-of-the-tournament (502 runs and 29 wickets) in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy triumph this season.

Kotian, who usually bats at No. 8, scored an unbeaten 120 in second innings and followed it up with an 89 not out in the quarterfinal and semifinal games against Baroda and Tamil



Nadu respectively.

IPL also announced Karnataka wicket-keeper-batter BR Sharath as a replacement for Robin Minz at Gujarat Titans.

Jharkhand's Minz was ruled out after getting injured in a freak motorcycle accident recently.

Sharath, who represents Karnataka in domestic cricket, has so far played 28 T20s, in addition to 20 First-Class matches and 43 List A games, and has 328 T20 runs against his name.

He will join GT for his base price of ₹ 20 lakh. (PTI)

It was inevitable, had to happen: Ashwin on Dhoni relinquishing CSK captaincy

JAIPUR, March 22: Veteran all-rounder Ravichandran Ashwin says Rituraj Gaikwad has not been rushed into leadership role in the IPL because the way Mahendra Singh Dhoni is, the legendary player must have spoken to the opener for the CSK captaincy long back.

A day before the start 2024 season, Chennai Super Kings (CSK) announced that Dhoni has handed over the reins of the team to Gaikwad.

CSK had attempted the leadership transition even in the 2022 edition, but it did not work out, with Ravindra Jadeja handing back the captaincy duties to Dhoni after eight games.

Ashwin said the decision was not surprising.

"This decision was inevitable and it was coming at some stage. I have known MS Dhoni, and he keeps the team at the forefront and keeps thinking about the team's well-being," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

"Because of that, two years ago, he had given the captain's armband to Jadeja. He has handed it to Rituraj now. The decision had to happen, while who and how was the question."

Ashwin reckoned that the decision couldn't have been a last-moment one.

"Rituraj wouldn't have thought that he would be playing only as a batter until yesterday. I believe Dhoni must have told Rituraj last year - 'Brother, you are going to take charge. You can do it. I will be there, so you don't need to worry,'" said Ashwin.

As far as Gaikwad as a leader is concerned, Ashwin backed him to succeed, drawing his character parallel to Dhoni's and rating both as calm and composed personalities.

"I have known Rituraj, an extremely cool and calm, and a very good human being. Extremely elated for him," added Ashwin.

Following his official announcement as CSK's skipper, Gaikwad admitted that Dhoni had given him a subtle hint about a change in the team's leadership last season.

"Last year itself, Mahi bhai had hinted about captaincy at some point in time. He just hinted that 'be ready, it shouldn't be a surprise to you'. When we came into the camp, he involved me in some of the match simulations," he told IPLT20.com. (PTI)

Want to bat as long as possible and get better every day, says 'nervous' Pant

CHANDIGARH, March 22: Rishabh Pant is experiencing an entire gamut of emotions from nervousness to excitement as he gears up for his first competitive game in nearly 15 months when he leads Delhi Capitals in their IPL opener against Punjab Kings here on Saturday.

Coming back after a painstakingly long rehab following a horrific car crash in December, 2022, Pant feels grateful to be back on the 22-yard strip.

"Jittery, nervous, excited...all of it, but at the same time, just happy, being able to come back to professional cricket. I'm just looking forward to playing my first game tomorrow," Pant said ahead of his team's first match of the season.

The ace keeper-batter knows that it will take time to get back to his old self and he wants to take one day at a time with extended batting sessions at the DC nets as that will give him a better chance to execute his wide range of strokes.

"Every time I take the field, it's a different feeling altogether. I think, as a batter, as long as I can bat. It is better because the more I bat, I will be in a better position to execute shots, muscle memory is intact even though I haven't played for nearly a year and half," the swashbuckling batter said.

"But I have been playing since childhood, so it doesn't go away that easily. So, the more I practice, the better chance I will give myself as a crick-



eter," he added.

Having endured a painful break, Pant doesn't want to look too far ahead.

"I just want to be there in the moment. I don't think much ahead. I take one day at a time, and give my 100%. Every time I take field, I love this game more and more," he added while talking about Delhi Capitals' pre-season camp in Visakhapatnam.

Just like his batting, Pant wants to keep his team's approach as simple as possible.

"Most of the conversations are pretty simple. We just want to go out there, have fun, not complicate things and give our 100% in all the games," he said.

Head coach Ricky Ponting couldn't be happier that his skipper is back where he belongs.

"We are about to start an IPL, it's re-

ally an exciting time of the year. It becomes more exciting when your captain is back in your team. Last year, we missed him. He is our leader. He is the heartbeat of this franchise and having him back is going to make this team a lot stronger," Ponting said when asked about Pant's return.

Pant termed Pant's comeback as an "amazing story that cricket loving people of India should be proud of."

"When I met him during the IPL last year, he was on his crutches. Then we met at a camp in Kolkata, where he had started walking and was about to start jogging. Then I met him at the start of the camp. Look where he is now.

"Lot of people felt he might not come back but in his heart and mind, he never had those doubts at all. Matter of time for him to come back," the coach said.

Ponting feels that if Pant is a bit nerv-

ous going into his first game, it is a good sign.

"He will be a little bit nervous tomorrow, playing his first game in a while but nerves are always good because it means something to you. The day you are not nervous is the day you shouldn't be playing cricket anymore," Ponting was blunt.

The Australian didn't rule out a special effort from the left-hander on his return.

"We had a week's training in Vizag before coming here and trust me Rishabh is back and ready to play. He is batting and moving behind the stumps beautifully. Sometimes he bats too much and I have to drag him out of nets," the coach said in jest.

"I've seen where his game is at, and don't be surprised if something special happens tomorrow. His attitude and smile and what he wants to do for the team is infectious. Everyone wants to be like Rishabh," the Australian said.

The Capitals did their pre-tournament camp in Visakhapatnam as Feroz Shah Kotla was being used for WPL matches and Ponting wanted a good start.

"Make no mistake, we have got a great team this year. Our preparations have been absolutely perfect. We are just looking to topping it off today, and make sure we put in a performance that I know would be good enough to win the game tomorrow," Ponting said. (PTI)

ATURKIMI ACADEMY, DIPHU
under the aegis of Aturkimi Society, Diphu
Affiliated to CBSE, New Delhi, Affiliation No. 230122, School Code:35205

ADMISSIONS OPEN
From Montessori to Class IX (Session 2024-25)
New Session will begin from 5th of April 2024
First Private CBSE School in Town
Results of All India Secondary School Examination (Class X) SCHOOL TOPPERS

Limited Seat

NEET (UG) - 2023 Qualified Candidates

Our facilities:
Boys & Girls Hostel, Creche (Baby Sitter), Computer Lab, Science Laboratory, Digital Smart Class, Art & Music(Vocal) Class.

Registration Forms are available at School Office on all working days from 1st week of February 2024 from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Aturkimi Academy, Diphu
Rukasen, Amlapaty, Karbi Anglong

atulkimiacademy@rediffmail.com
Log on to http://www.atulkimiacademy.org

9191395350 (Principal)
9134995738 (Vice Principal)
9022519927 (Primary Headmistress)
9024227231 (Headmistress)