

**6 WORLD**

- Citing India, US lawmakers vote on bill to regulate TikTok ownership
- US Congressional committee to hold hearing on Pakistan election

**8 NATION**

- 'One nation, one election' report says 32 political parties supported
- If voted to power, INDIA bloc to be farmers' voice, says Rahul

# CM inaugurates, lays foundation of projects worth ₹153 crore

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday attended a Vikas Yatra rally at Sualkuchi, where he inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of developmental projects worth a total of ₹153 crores covering the Jalukbari legislative assembly constituency (LAC).  
 Sarma laid the foundation for the up gradation of the current 30-bedded FRU at Sualkuchi to a 100-bedded hospital at a cost of ₹45 crore, the infrastructure development and up gradation of

North Guwahati College, Pandu College, Pub Bongshor College, Saraighat College, Sualkuchi Budram Madhab Sathradhikar College at an expenditure of ₹75 crores with each of the educational institutions receiving an amount of ₹15 crores and a host of road infrastructure development projects. Some of the projects that were inaugurated by the chief minister are the renovated swimming pool at Sualkuchi, the extended entrance gate to Sualkuchi and others.  
 Speaking on the occasion, CM Sarma said,

"The projects that were either inaugurated or launched today shall contribute towards fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the residents of Jalukbari LAC in days to come. The 100-bedded hospital at Sualkuchi on becoming operational shall be of great help in filling up of the healthcare services gap in the Jalukbari LAC area. Residential quarters will be constructed for doctors and nurses in the vicinity of the hospital premises. All modern healthcare facilities such as ultrasonography and CT scan are available at the hospital. The infra-

structure development of colleges will also usher in positive outcomes in the educational ecosystem in the legislative assembly constituency."  
 The chief minister said the construction works of the upcoming Sualkuchi Stadium is underway and it will be completed this year. Construction activities of another stadium at Bongshor are also going ahead. The foundation stone for the much-anticipated Sualkuchi-Palashbari bridge over the Brahmaputra river is also expected to be laid within a short span of time.

Sarma said, "When I became a member of legislative assembly (MLA) of the Jalukbari LAC for the first time in 2001, the socio-economic scenario of the area provided a grim and shoddy picture. The constituency has witnessed much development as compared to two years back. It is rare to see educational institutions such as AIIMS, National Forensic Science University, National Law University and Judicial Academy to be concentrated in a single LAC. We need to have a 25-year development strategy for Jalukbari."

## Union home ministry launches portal for eligible people to apply for Indian citizenship under CAA

# CAA completely insignificant in Assam: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday claimed that the CAA is completely insignificant in Assam, from where there will be the "least number of applications" for Indian citizenship.  
 The Union ministry of home affairs had on March 12 launched a portal for people eligible to apply for Indian citizenship under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019.  
 "CAA is completely insignificant in Assam; the state will have the least number of applications on the portal," Sarma told a press conference here.  
 The Centre on Monday implemented the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, notifying the rules four years after the law was passed by Parliament to fast-track citizenship for undocumented

non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.  
 Sarma said the act is very clear that the cut-off date for application of citizenship is December 31, 2014, and in Assam, with the updation of the National Register of Citizens, people who applied for it and did not find their names in that list, will only apply for CAA.  
 "People seeking citizenship have to give evidence that they entered before 2014 and the NRC will be the proof in Assam, but in other states, this does not exist. If they have not applied for NRC, it becomes clear that they were not there in the state before the cut-off date, and as such cannot get citizenship," he said.  
 There has been no application from



Assam so far on the portal since it opened on Tuesday, Sarma claimed. "The NRC has the details of the number of people who have applied, and due to technology, all data will be available on the internet and nothing can be hid-

den. The data will be presented in Parliament," he said.  
 Citizenship will be granted by the central government and it is not a state subject, the CM said.  
 "We will work with reason and not emotion. Many will have to answer for the death of five persons during the anti-CAA protests in December 2019. After the application process is over, I will file a case in the high court seeking an answer to who was responsible for the deaths," Sarma said.  
 "Assam is used as a corridor and even if anybody enters, he passes through it and goes to other places, as the issue has become so sensitive and debatable in the state. Besides, there are tribunals and the concept of Doubtful or 'D' voters here," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Assam govt to hike 4% DA for employees'

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** The Assam government has decided to hike the dearness allowance by 4 per cent for its employees and pensioners on the occasion of Rongali Bihu in April, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday.  
 The increase in DA will be effective from January 1, and the arrears of the first three months will be paid in installments in May, June and July respectively, Sarma said at a press conference here.  
 The DA hike will benefit around four lakh government employees and 3.5 lakh pensioners, he said. The total DA payable to the employees will now be 50 per cent, and the 4 per cent increase in dearness allowance will involve a financial outlay of around ₹ 1,175 crore, Sarma said.  
 The chief minister also announced that to realise the benefit of 'PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana', the state government will invest another ₹ 300 crore to offer additional assistance of up to ₹ 45,000 to each household.  
 "High electricity bill is a matter of concern for many but we found that 3,000 urban households with solar panels installed at their houses are extremely happy with the cost. We decided to replicate it across the state," he said. A lower and middle-class family needs 2 KW of electricity on average and with a solar setup of 3 KW, a household can sell the additional power to the government, Sarma said.  
 The cost of a 3-KW solar setup is ₹ 1,50,000 with the central and state subsidy being ₹ 78,000 and ₹ 45,000 respectively.  
 Sarma said that the 'PM Surya Ghar' scheme to provide free electricity and also pave the way for additional income generation through rooftop solar power is revolutionary. "The scheme is not only about installing rooftop solar panels but also ensures an employment generating ecosystem for manufacturing and skilled technicians," he said.  
 Besides, the state government has made it mandatory for all government buildings constructed by the Public Works Department to have solar power, he said. The Assam Secretariat will be the first green secretariat in the country by August 15 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Kriti Singh Debarma made NDA nominee to implement historic accord: Pradyot

**AGARTALA, March 14:** Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Debarma on Thursday asserted that his elder sister Kriti Singh Debarma was named the NDA candidate in the East Tripura Lok Sabha seat to implement the "historic accord" with the Centre and the state government.  
 Kriti Singh Debarma was named as the NDA candidate for the East Tripura Lok Sabha seat on Wednesday. She will contest the polls on the BJP's election symbol of lotus and not on the Tipra Motha's symbol of pineapple.  
 "We have signed a historic accord with the Centre and the state

government for a permanent constitutional solution to the problems of the indigenous people of the state."  
 "It is very important to have a perfect person in Delhi to undertake discussions for implementing the accord," Pradyot Debarma told reporters after arriving at MBB Airport here from the national capital with his elder sister.  
 Tipra Motha has recently signed a tripartite agreement with the Centre and the state government under which, a joint working group will be constituted to solve the problems of the indigenous people. Thousands (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Ex-bureaucrats Gyanesh Kumar, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu appointed election commissioners

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Former IAS officers Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu were on Thursday appointed as election commissioners, ahead of the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls.  
 The law ministry issued a notification announcing the appointments.  
 A selection committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had met earlier in the day to recommend their names.  
 The vacancies had come up in the Election Commission (EC) after the retirement of Anup Chandra Pandey on February 14 and the sudden resignation of Arun Goel on March 8.  
 The poll panel is headed by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar.  
 Kumar and Sandhu, both 1988-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, belonged to the Kerala and Uttarakhand cadres, respectively, and are likely to assume office on Friday.



The 2024 general elections for the Lok Sabha, along with four state assemblies, are expected in April-May amid indications that the EC may announce these polls as early as this Friday.  
 Earlier in the day, at the selection panel meeting chaired by the prime minister, Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury gave a dissent note, raising questions over the procedure adopted to choose the election commissioners.  
 The selection committee has one Union minister -- home minister Amit Shah -- as

nominated by the government and the leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha as members.  
 During his tenure in the home ministry, Kumar oversaw the abrogation of the Constitution's Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir.  
 In 2014, as the resident commissioner of Kerala in Delhi, he was deputed by the state government to evacuate 46 nurses stuck in Erbil in war-torn Iraq. The operation was successful with the evacuation of 183 Indians, 70 from Kerala, from Iraq. Kumar, an IIT-Kanpur graduate, is a post-graduate in economics from Harvard University.  
 Sandhu, a former chief secretary of Uttarakhand, is learnt to have overseen the ideation for the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code in the state. He is an MBBS from the Amritsar Medical College and also has a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Anti-CAA stir: Assam DGP urges people to resolve issues peacefully



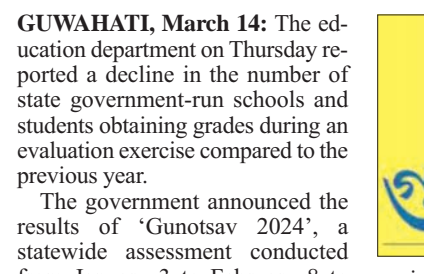
**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Assam director general of police G P Singh has urged people to resolve issues through peaceful and constitutional means rather than resorting to violence on the streets.  
 Singh's comments come amid security being beefed up across the state, with vari-

ous organisations protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA.  
 The North East Students' Organisation (NESO), the apex body of major student unions in the eight states of the region, had on Wednesday burnt copies of the rules of CAA, while the AASU staged 'satyagraha' in all district headquarters.  
 The Union government had on March 11 implemented CAA, notifying the rules to fast-track citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.  
 The state had witnessed violent agitations against the act in 2019 during which five people were killed. "Having been given the opportunity by the Government of Assam to lead the illustrious Assam Police since Jan 31st 2023, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## ASDC to declare candidate on March 18

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, March 14:** The Autonomous State Demand Committee will declare its candidate on March 18 general secretary of (ASDC), Jotson Bey said on Thursday.  
 He announced this while briefing the media at a press conference in the ASDC office in Diphu about ASDC's meeting with the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on March 12.  
 Addressing the media Bey said, "We discussed the autonomous state issue, whether the central and state governments really want to implement the autonomous state for Karbi Anglong or not. The matter has not been taken up while the Constitution of India has guaranteed its implementation. Officials talks should be held with our organization, Karbi Nimso Chingthur Asong (KNCA) and Karbi Students Association (KSA) and other autonomous state movement organisations. Chief minister Sarma has assured us to discuss the issue after the Lok Sabha elections." Terang also said that CM Sarma asserted that the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will not be implemented in Sixth Schedule areas. On border issues he assured that development works would be carried out. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Number of govt schools receiving grades in evaluation drill falls



**GUWAHATI, March 14:** The education department on Thursday reported a decline in the number of state government-run schools and students obtaining grades during an evaluation exercise compared to the previous year.  
 The government announced the results of 'Gunosav 2024', a statewide assessment conducted from January 3 to February 8 to evaluate the performance of 38,97,323 students enrolled in 43,491 schools. Schools with an enrollment of less than 30 students were excluded from the grading calculation.  
 According to the report, 32,421 schools received grades this year as

against 41,507 in 2023, down by 3.78 per cent. Out of these, 11,592 schools got A+ grade, 14,933 received A, 4,603 got B, 1,032 got C and 261 got D. In the year-ago period, 12,047, 19,085, 7,673, 1,948 and 754 schools were marked with A+, A, B, C and D grades, respectively. Likewise, 38,97,323 students received grades in 2024 compared to 41,35,163 last year, a fall of 5.75 per cent. A total of 16,12,184 students received A+ grade, 11,52,671 got A, 5,95,865 got B, 2,57,313 got C and 2,79,290 got D. In 2023, 15,77,966, 13,44,188, 6,85,372, 2,63,589 and 2,64,048 students had received A+, A, B, C and D grades.  
 The report mentioned that a total of 18,098 external evaluators, including ministers, MLAs, chief secretary, senior civil servants, police officials and college teachers were engaged in the 'Gunosav' exercise.  
 "To recognise and encourage them and to continue their constant effort in imparting quality education to children, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## NDA will return to power by winning over 400 LS seats: Rajnath Singh



**KOKRAJHAR, March 14:** Union defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday claimed that it is guaranteed that the NDA government will return to power winning over 400 seats during the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.  
 Addressing party workers of three NDA allies in Assam -- BJP, AGP

and UPPL, Singh said there will be no kutcha houses in the state and assured people that everyone will get pucca dwelling units if the Narendra Modi-led government returns to power for the third consecutive term.  
 "There is no doubt at all that our government will be formed at the Centre. I believe the NDA will win

more than 400 seats," he said, asking the party workers to campaign for this target in the run-up to the polls.  
 Singh also claimed that not just India, but the entire world knows the possible outcome of the Lok Sabha elections and has already accepted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be forming the government again. He said that the Modi government has improved the lives of the poor drastically and they have been offered concrete housing units.  
 "If we form this time, there will not be a single kutcha house left in Assam. All the dwelling units will be made pucca," the senior BJP leader said. He also mentioned various other central schemes related to water distribution, electrification, health insurance, LPG connection and vaccination drive during the Covid-19 pandemic. Singh slammed the Congress and alleged that the opposition party has always neglected (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Festival stressed on biodiversity conservation efforts, demarcation of bird sanctuaries, planting of trees for bird habitat

## Majuli to host Choraichung Festival in Dec every year



**HT Correspondent**  
**MAJULI, March 14:** The "Choraichung Festival" of "Majuli Xahitya" will be held in Majuli every year in the first week of Dec.  
 The decision was taken by the Majuli Xahitya Core Committee members Dilip Kumar Phukon, Jugal Hazarika, Gobin Kumar Khandu and president Kamal Dutta at the closing ceremony of the historic Choraichung Festival held for the first time on the river island from March 9 to 11.  
 Other resolutions passed at the meeting included demarcation of bird sanctuaries, stopping the damming of Amrit Lake and solar panels installed on the banks of bird sanctuaries, planting trees for bird habitat and undertaking biodiversity conservation efforts.  
 One of the core committee members Kamal Dutta said that other suggestions included that there should be a systematic count-

ing of the number of bird species found in the bird sanctuary. Trees should be planted based on the diet of migratory and native birds and arrangements should be made to stop fishing in the reservoirs of Choraichung. The state government should construct bird observation pillars and name boards should be erected in the reservoirs.  
 "The rest houses should be constructed on both sides for observers to rest at the banks and arrangements should be made to identify the fish found in the ponds," said Dutta. One of the resolutions read out at the opening ceremony was officially handed over to the Jorhat district commissioner.  
 Kaveri B Sharma had inaugurated the opening ceremony. The proposals were briefed to the District Forest Authority officer who inaugurated the tree plantation drive on the first day and he promised to implement a tree planting scheme on the grounds of the Bhakatiduar Higher Secondary School as well as Choraichung.  
 The first bird sanctuary in upper Majuli was declared by the then Ahom king Swargadeo Pratap Singh in 1633 AD.  
 The historic Choraichung is located between the larger Deuri boundary, Bokabil boundary and Abhaypura boundary of the island with a radius of about 5 km. There are many different species of birds in the area. The entire bird habitat of Majuli is now in danger. Everyone has a responsibility to protect birds, one of the components of biodiversity (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Fitch raises India's GDP forecast for next fiscal to 7 pc

### Fitch saw the Indian economy expanding 7.8 per cent in 2023-24 financial year (April 2023 to March 2024)

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Fitch Ratings on Thursday raised its forecast for India's economic growth to 7 per cent for the next fiscal year starting April 1 on the back of strong domestic demand and sustained level of business and consumer confidence.

With a stronger-than-expected 8.4 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) during the third quarter (October-December) of the current fiscal year, Fitch saw the Indian economy expanding 7.8 per cent in 2023-24 financial year (April 2023 to March 2024), marginally higher than the government's estimate of 7.6 per cent.

In its latest 'Global Economic Outlook', the rating agency said the country's economic growth continued to outperform quarterly forecasts with domestic demand (investment growth increased 10.6 per cent year-on-year while private consumption was 3.5 per cent higher).

For the world, Fitch Ratings has raised its 2024 global GDP growth forecast by 0.3 percentage points to 2.4 per cent, as near-term world growth prospects have improved.

This on back of a sharp upward revision to its US forecast to 2.1 per cent, from 1.2 per cent in the December 2023 Global Economic Outlook (GEO).

"Stronger US growth prospects outweigh a marginal cut to our China 2024 growth forecast -- to



4.5 per cent from 4.6 per cent -- and a minor revision to our eurozone forecast, to 0.6 per cent from 0.7 per cent," it said.

"Growth in emerging markets, excluding China, has been revised up by 0.1 percentage point to 3.2 per cent, with forecasts raised for India, Russia and Brazil."

It expected world growth in 2025 to edge up to 2.5 per cent as the eurozone finally recovers -- on a pick-up in real wages and consumption -- but as US growth slows.

For India, Fitch Ratings said, "With GDP growth having exceeded 8 per cent for three consecutive quarters, we expect an easing in growth momentum in the final quarter of the current fiscal year, implying an estimate of 7.8 per cent for growth in FY24."

Recent quarterly data has shown

that GDP is rising much faster than gross value-added -- indirect taxes net of subsidies is the difference between the two -- and this unusually wide gap may normalise.

Strong business survey data for January and February represents an upside risk to these estimates, it said.

"We expect the Indian economy to continue its strong expansion, with real GDP forecast to increase 7 per cent in FY25, a 0.5 percentage point upward revision from our December forecasts," Fitch Ratings said.

"Domestic demand, especially investment, will be the main driver of growth, amid sustained levels of business and consumer confidence."

Its forecasts imply that growth in the short term will outpace the

economy's estimated potential, and that the pace of growth of activity will then moderate towards trend in FY25, with real GDP rising 6.5 per cent.

It said consumer price inflation picked up in the last months of 2023, driven by food prices. CPI inflation reached 5.7 per cent year-on-year in December, before falling to 5.1 per cent in February.

Core inflation measures are steadily declining, underlining that developments in food prices (which account for around half of India's consumer price index) will be key to inflation developments and the pace at which inflation will approach the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) 4 per cent mid-point of its 2 per cent-6 per cent target band.

"We expect headline inflation to steadily decrease to 4 per cent by calendar year-end on the assumption that recent food price volatility will subside," it said.

The RBI has kept its key policy rate at 6.5 per cent, and in its communication has focused on confirming its hawkish policy stance of "withdrawal of monetary accommodation" and the need to bring inflation down towards target.

"We now think that the RBI will cut rates only in the second half of 2024, by 50 basis points (revised from 75 basis points in December) in view of the stronger growth outlook," it added. (PTI)

## Hyundai launches performance-inspired SUV - Creta N Line

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Hyundai Motor India Ltd. (HMIL) has unveiled the Hyundai Creta N Line, a dynamic and sporty performance-inspired SUV, on Thursday. Expanding upon the success and heritage of the Creta brand, the Creta N Line promises to inject excitement into the mid-size SUV segment with its track-inspired aesthetics and exhilarating driving experience tailored for thrill-seekers. The introduction of the Hyundai N Line portfolio heralds a fusion of distinctive N Line design language, finely-tuned dynamics, and cutting-edge technology, ensuring an engaging journey every time you hit the road.

Speaking on the occasion of the Creta N Line launch, Un Soo Kim, managing director & CEO of Hyundai Motor India Ltd., remarked, "Hyundai Motor India has established itself as a trailblazer in pioneering futuristic technology, revolutionizing the Indian automotive industry. Through benchmark products, we strive to enhance the mobility

experience and captivate customers with exceptional offerings. The introduction of the sporty and performance-oriented Hyundai Creta N Line aims to ignite the dreams and aspirations of customers who seek to stand out from the crowd and 'Live Unleashed'. Leveraging the popularity and heritage of the Creta brand, the Hyundai Creta N Line will bolster Hyundai's N Line portfolio and resonate deeply with the aspirations of modern Indian buyers. We are confident that with the launch of the Hyundai Creta N Line, we will elevate the joy of driving and meet the demands of adventure-seeking enthusiasts."

The Hyundai Creta N Line embodies Hyundai's commitment to delivering dynamic driving experiences, complemented by its legacy of innovation and customer-centric approach. The SUV is set to redefine expectations in the segment, offering a blend of performance, style, and technology to cater to the discerning needs of Indian consumers.

## Gold rises ₹ 250; silver jumps ₹ 1,700 per kg

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Gold prices rose ₹ 250 to ₹ 66,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a rally in precious metal prices in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities.

The yellow metal had settled at ₹ 65,950 per 10 grams in the previous close.

Silver also surged ₹ 1,700 to ₹ 77,000 per kg. In the previous

trade, it had ended at ₹ 75,300 per kg.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 66,200 per 10 grams, up by Rs 250 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,169 per ounce, up by USD

9 from the previous close.

Gold prices recovered from a recent low and moved higher during the European trading session on Thursday due to a pullback in the US dollar and safe-haven buying, Gandhi added.

Silver also quoted higher at USD 24.92 per ounce, and it had settled at USD 24.22 per ounce in the previous trade. (PTI)

## Paramount Global to sell 13 pc stake in Indian TV business to Reliance Industries

### Viacom18 is a material subsidiary of TV18 Broadcast Ltd

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Paramount Global has agreed to sell its 13 per cent stake in its Indian TV business to Reliance Industries for ₹ 4,286 crore, the Indian firm said on Thursday.

In a stock exchange filing, Reliance said it has signed a binding agreement with two subsidiaries of Paramount Global to acquire 13.01 per cent equity stake of Viacom 18 Media Private Limited held by Paramount Global.

Similarly, in a filing on the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Paramount Global said the closing of the transaction is subject to the satisfaction of certain customary conditions, including receipt of applicable regulatory approvals, as well as the completion of a previously announced joint venture involving Reliance, Viacom18 and Star Disney.

"After the closing, Paramount will continue to license its content to Viacom18," it added.

In its stock exchange filing, Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) said Viacom18 is a material subsidiary of TV18 Broadcast Ltd. The company currently holds compulsorily convertible preference shares of Viacom18 representing 57.48 per cent equity stake on a fully diluted basis. Post the completion of this transaction, the company's equity stake in Viacom18 will increase to 70.49 per cent on a fully diluted basis.

Earlier in February, Walt Disney Co and Reliance Industries had an-



nounced the signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create a ₹ 70,000 crore behemoth.

Under the deal, that came just over a month after the failed USD 10 billion merger of rivals Zee and Sony, Reliance and its affiliates will hold 63.16 per cent in the combined entity that will house two streaming services and 120 television channels.

Disney will hold the remaining 36.84 per cent, the companies had said.

As part of the transaction, the media undertaking of Viacom18 would be merged into Star India Pvt Ltd (SIPL) through a court-approved scheme of arrangement.

Reliance had also agreed to invest at closing ₹ 11,500 crore into the joint venture to give it the muscle to fight rivals such as Japan's Sony and Netflix. The combined entity will have the largest OTT subscriber base.

Media ventures of Reliance are currently housed in Network 18, which owns TV18 news channels as well as a plethora of entertainment (under the 'Colors' brand) and sports channels. NW18 also has stakes in moneycontrol.com, bookmyshow and publishes maga-

zines. Its subsidiary NW18 owns the news channels CNBC/CNNNews. In 2014, RIL had acquired majority stake in media group Network18 from its erstwhile promoters, including its founder Raghav Bahl, for ₹ 4,000 crore. Prior to this in 2007, TV18, a part of Network18 group, had formed a joint venture with Viacom targeting hindi general entertainment category.

Reliance separately owns a movie production arm - JioStudios, and majority stakes in two listed cable distribution companies, Den and Hathway.

The JV between Walt Disney and RIL will be headed by Nita Ambani, wife of billionaire and Reliance chairman Mukesh Ambani, while Uday Shankar will be the vice chairman. Shankar is a former top Disney executive and has a joint venture with James Murdoch, called Bodhi Tree.

The transaction had valued the joint venture at ₹ 70,352 crore (USD 8.5 billion) on a post-money basis, excluding synergies.

The JV will be one of the leading TV and digital streaming platforms for entertainment and sports content in India, bringing together iconic media assets across entertainment (e.g. Colors, StarPlus, StarGOLD) and sports (e.g. Star Sports and Sports18) including access to highly anticipated events across television and digital platforms through JioCinema and Hotstar. (PTI)

## Blue Star to invest ₹ 250 cr in next fiscal

**KOLKATA, March 14:** Leading home appliances company Blue Star will invest ₹ 250 crore in the next financial year to raise the manufacturing capacity of room air conditioners at its Sri City facility in Andhra Pradesh, an official said here on Thursday.

The company now has a production capacity of 10 lakh room air conditioners across its various manufacturing facilities, including the Sri City unit. "Plans are there to raise the manufacturing capacity

to 1.8 million units in the near future," Blue Star Managing Director B Thiagarajan told reporters here.

"The present manufacturing capacity at Sri City will be added by three lakh units next fiscal, for which an amount of ₹ 250 crore will be spent," he said.

The company intends to garner a market share of 15 per cent in the room AC segment, for which there is a need to have products at various price points, he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## CAA completely insignificant

which does not exist in the other states," the chief minister said. Youths from Assam are going to Gujarat and Karnataka to work as the labour rates are high there, "so why will the Bangladeshis stay here," he said.

The data that Bangladesh has lost 1.3 crore Hindu population gets highlighted, but the fact that Muslim population has increased to 3 crore due to conversion is not mentioned, Sarma claimed.

"Our complaint is that minorities are being converted in the three countries, and it was for this reason that the CAA was enacted," he said. The CM also asserted that the BJP will win 13 out of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will return for a third term after the Lok Sabha polls, Sarma said.

"Even if a top star of Bollywood contests against the prime minister in Varanasi, Modiji will win. He is etched in the minds and hearts of people who will ensure his win," he said.

Earlier, the chief minister had claimed that the BJP was confident of winning 11 seats, but 'the Congress has committed suicide with the selection of its candidates in Nagaon and Karimganj, and hence, we will win two more seats'. Sarma, however, did not elaborate on the remark.

Referring to the high-profile Dibrugarh constituency from where Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal is contesting, the CM said it will be a 'walkover for him and he will win by over three lakh votes'.

Dhubri, a minority-dominated constituency, is the only seat that the BJP will not win, he claimed. (PTI)

## Kriti Singh Debbarma made

of party workers and supporters gave a rousing welcome to Pradyot Debbarma and Kriti Singh Debbarma. However, no BJP leader was present there. Reacting to her nomination, she said, "I will give my best and will perform whatever task is assigned to me." Pradyot Debbarma added, "After discussions with the BJP, we agreed to make my elder sister the candidate for East Tripura Lok Sabha constituency. We believe she would lead us to a solution to the problems of the indigenous people."

On Kriti Singh Debbarma set to contest on the BJP symbol, he said, "The symbol is not important, what matters is the person." Taking a dig at the CPI(M), Pradyot Debbarma said he doesn't want to do politics with "people who made him cry". "For the past 25 years, CPI(M) has been committing mistakes after mistakes... I love my people and don't want to do politics with those who had made me cry," he said.

"Now, it is clear who is going with whom. I understood the understanding (between the CPI(M) and Congress) much earlier and hence, initiated discussions with the NDA. There is no chance of the INDIA bloc in Tripura," he added. (PTI)

## Ex-bureaucrats Gyanesh Kumar

master's degree in history. He was also closely involved in the reconstruction efforts of the Kedarnath temple premises. Sandhu retired as the chief secretary of Uttarakhand in January, after a six-month extension in service. He was appointed to the post in 2021, after Pushkar Singh Dhami was appointed the chief minister of the state ahead of the 2022 assembly elections.

Last month, Sandhu was appointed as secretary, Lokpal, with a tenure of one year. He has served as the chairman of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and additional secretary in the higher education of the central government.

Sandhu did his MBBS from the Government Medical College, Amritsar, and also has a master's degree in history from the Amritsar-based Guru Nanak Dev University. He has published papers on 'Urban Reforms' and 'Municipal Management and Capacity Building'. He was conferred the President's Medal in recognition of his services as commissioner, Ludhiana Municipal Corporation, Punjab. (PTI)

## 'Assam govt to hike

this year, he said. 'Assam is contributing in a big way in saving fossil fuels and solar panels are a foolproof plan to avoid power shortage', he said. The chief minister also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Northeast's new industrial policy, Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialisation Scheme (UNNATI), 2024.

The scheme has created an environment for industrialisation in Assam as was evident from the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the ₹ 27,000 crore semiconductor assembly and test facility at Morigaon on Wednesday, he said. "We lack raw materials in the state and so we will focus on attracting two types of industries- electronics like phones, digital cameras among others and green power," he said. Sarma said an industrial conclave will be held in the state in November this year when more investments are expected to come in.

Assam is now preparing for the next generation of reforms and is the first among the states to bring accountability of employees as people can approach the Right to Public Service (RTPS) Commission. If a government employee does not complete his or her work within the deadline, they will have to pay a fine, he added. The chief minister said that the four sub-districts under Kamrup Metro will become functional from Friday, while those in other districts will become operational after the Lok Sabha polls. (PTI)

## Anti-CAA stir: Assam DGP

I remain responsible, answerable and accountable for all bonafide actions of each policeman," the DGP posted on X on Wednesday. He said that every mala fide action would be handled as per rules and procedures. "Under strong leadership, Team Assam remains committed to keeping the people of Assam peaceful at all times," Singh asserted. The Assam police had recently issued notices to opposition parties, "ordering" them to "withdraw" the 12-hour bandh on Tuesday against the implementation of the CAA, and warned that "legal action" would be taken if they failed to follow the diktat, which leaders of the parties described as an attempt to stifle the democratic right to protest.

"During the last few days, people across the spectrum have expressed opinions about the preparations made by Assam police to maintain law and order, while most have welcomed, some have questioned the intensity and quantum of preparations," the DGP said. "I request residents of the state to please bear with Assam police in facing minimal disruption that may have taken place in day-to-day life. This is essential to ensure the safety of the life and property of the people of Assam," he said. Guwahati has seen some violence at various points in the last few decades and this has been an important consideration in the planning process, Singh said. The Assam Police, anticipating protests against the CAA in the state like in 2019, have bolstered security, deploying additional personnel in sensitive areas. All police stations in the state have been asked to remain alert, while patrolling has been intensified and barricades set up in major thoroughfares. (PTI)

## ASDC to declare candidate

The delegation also appealed for intervention in the matter of Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) and Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) eviction though the subject is with the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.

On the Lok Sabha elections, ASDC President Terang said that the party will go solo. The All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHL) and Indian National Congress (INC) have refused on an alliance. ASDC will declare its candidate on March 18.

The press meet was attended by ASDC leaders Sanjay Killing, Denial Terang and Sonasing Terang.

## Number of govt schools

₹ 25,000 to each of the 12,047 schools getting A+ grade will be transferred to their bank accounts as incentive," Education Minister Ranaj Pegu said. At an official function here, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma ceremonially distributed the incentive. "It is an important day for education and sports in Assam today. We are releasing the results of Gunotsav 2024 and distributing scholarships for girl students from the minority communities. We are also giving appointment letters to sports persons," he said. 'Gunotsav' was first organised in 2017 and prior to 2024, four rounds of this exercise have been conducted covering all the districts of Assam. (PTI)

## NDA will return to power

Northeast over the years. "Only Modi gave due respect to this region. When he took charge in 2014, he instructed all ministers to visit the Northeast at least thrice every year and review the schemes of their respective departments. Now, the region is progressing very fast," he added. He claimed that what Congress could not do in 15-20 years of rule in the Northeast, Modi did it within a short span of time by unveiling thousands of crores of projects across the region.

The defence minister further claimed that India's position on the global platform has consolidated during Modi's tenure and everyone listens to what the country says, unlike the earlier times.

"India is moving ahead at a fast pace. The presidents and prime ministers of different countries have accepted that the 21st century will be India's," he added. Singh asked all workers to personally visit both old and first-time voters, and explain to them what the Modi government has done for them and the country.

"The NDA government has ruled the country for 10 years, but not a single corruption allegation has been levelled against it or any of its ministers. We had seen earlier that within 2-3 years of Congress governments, corruption allegations started pouring in," he claimed. Singh asserted that India is influenced by its golden history and it will be able to raise its head high if the NDA government returns to power again. "It was a golden bird at one point of time. It will again be a golden bird very soon. When Modi took charge, India's position was 11th in the global economy. It has now reached 5th position under Modi's leadership," he added.

India will be among the top three countries by 2027 and will become a developed nation by 2047, he said.

Singh also claimed that the BJP-led NDA government has fulfilled all its promises such as abrogation of Article 370 and abolishing Triple Talaq among the Muslim community. "We form a government not to enjoy benefits, but to build and serve the society and country. This is irrespective of communities such as Hindu, Muslim and Christian. All are our brothers and sisters. Appeasement of other parties may make one community happy, but not the future of India happy," he added. (PTI)

## Majuli to host Choraichung Festival

conservation. The 390-year-old bird sanctuary Choraichung is the basis of the bird sanctuary of Majuli to create awareness about the conservation of birds and to make bird tourism in Majuli and the little known historical treasures of the Upper part of Majuli attractive to tourists for the first time.

**LOST**  
I have lost my caste certificate (ST Plains) Anupam Senapati, Mindaimari (Bhoksong), PS: Kachuwa, DIST: Nagaon, Assam.

**LOST**  
I, Utpal Boro resident of 324, Kaki Teralangs-shu Mikir Gaon, Lanka, Hojai, Assam have lost my class 10th passed certificate, Registration Card, Admit Card and Marksheet and Class 12th Admit Card, Certificate and marksheet. Any person finding the same may return to the above address.

## Guwahati Ring Road and Kaziranga elevated projects achieve wildlife clearance

# CM inaugurates Basistha flyover and Jayanagar underpass in Guwahati NH bypass

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Taking steps closer towards providing seamless connectivity to the people of Guwahati and other places who use the city as a transit to reach their respective destinations, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday inaugurated the Basistha flyover and the Jayanagar underpass as a part of 6-laning of Guwahati bypass, at a function held here on Thursday.

It may be noted that the 4-laning work of Guwahati bypass was carried earlier by NHAI. To ease the traffic congestion in Guwahati city, the NHAI has taken up upgradation of this bypass from existing 4-lane to 6-lane including construction of flyovers and underpasses at important junctions such as Boragaon, Garchuk, Lokhra and Basistha for a total cost of ₹ 443.93 crore. The length of Guwahati bypass is 17 km (approx.) wherein four flyovers have been constructed. Moreover, underpass at Jayanagar and Beharbari in this bypass have also been constructed lending convenience to the commuters. As a result, highway traffic and city traffic have been segregated resulting in safety and comfort of road users.

Speaking on the occasion, chief



minister Sarma said, "On this auspicious day, the Basistha Flyover and Jayanagar underpass of 1.8 km long is being opened for public use. This will ease traffic congestion at Basistha junction and Jayanagar junction". He said that opening of this flyover will result in improved mobility of vehicular traffic on the national highway through Guwahati city as well as decongestion at Basistha and Jayanagar junction. He also said that along with comfort, road safety will increase manifolds thereby saving precious lives. Connectivity to Guwahati airport will improve with the reduction in

travel time with the inauguration of the flyover, the chief minister added.

Sarma also said that another important project of 4-laning work from Nrimbanglo- Jatinga - Harangajo Section in Dima Hasao District is under construction connecting Lumding with Silchar. The length of the project is 49.43 km with awarded cost of ₹ 1676.70 crore, as he asked the NHAI to complete the project by 2026.

Talking on the construction of Guwahati Ring Road along with 6 lane bridge over the Brahmaputra for a length of 63.44 km involving

a total project cost of ₹ 5729.47 crore, the chief minister said that bids for the project have already been invited and wildlife clearance and land acquisition have been achieved.

Moreover, with regard to 4-laning work from Kaliabor to Numaligarh for a total length of 85.68 km which includes elevated corridor of 35 km length in Kaziranga with a project cost of ₹ 5500.00 crore, Dr. Sarma said that wildlife clearance has been obtained and land acquisition is in process at a fast pace.

The chief minister said that the scheduled completion time of 6-laning bypass in Guwahati was in August 2024. However, NHAI has worked relentlessly to ease the traffic congestion in Guwahati city thereby providing comfort to the people of Assam and with its continuous and sincere efforts only, this work has been completed almost five months ahead of scheduled time. He, therefore, thanked Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari for all his help in according importance to the road projects in Assam.

MPs Queen Oja, Pabitra Margherita, GMC Mayor Mrigen Sarania along with others were present on the occasion.

## Kamrup(M) gets additional polling stations

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) has approved the proposal of the Kamrup Metropolitan Election District Administration to relocate dilapidated polling stations and create additional polling stations for the convenience of voters. The polling station at Lokpriya Gopinath Bar-doloi Hall No 84 in Dimoria Assembly constituency No 34 has been relocated to Chandrapur Junior Basic School polling station No 84, election officer Shekharan Phukan said. The 92nd Chandrapur Sahitya Sabha polling station in the same assembly constituency has been relocated to the 92nd Chandrapur Higher Secondary School polling station.

The two polling stations have been moved to new buildings due to dilapidated condition. An additional polling station has been created at Modern English School polling station No. 2 in the 33rd Dispur Assembly constituency. An additional polling station has been created at Narban Primary School polling station No 82 in the same assembly constituency. Similarly, an additional polling station has been created at Bengali High School polling station No 145 in the 36th Central Guwahati Assembly constituency.



tion sectorIt has gained a new momentum," he said.

Bora further urged the concerned officials to complete the construction of the buildings within stipulated time.

West Guwahati MLA Ramendra Narayan Kalita was present at the programme of Arya Vidyapeeth Higher Secondary School. Kamrup(M) district commissioner Sumit Sattawan was present at the

programme held at Ganesh Mandir Higher Secondary and Gopal Boro Higher Secondary School. The event was attended by senior officials of district administration along with officials of education department accompanied by principals of the schools were present on the occasion. Bora also laid the foundation stone of Jagannath Community Building and Skill Centre.

## Minister Atul Bora lays foundation stone of new buildings of several schools

*'Buildings will play an important role in encouraging the teachers and students'*

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Assam Cabinet minister Atul Bora on Thursday laid the foundation stone of new school buildings in several schools in Kamrup Metropolitan District under the PM Divine Scheme as part of the ongoing 'Bikash Yatra' in the state. He laid the foundation stone of new school buildings at Ganesh Mandir Higher Secondary School, Gopal Boro Higher Secondary School and Arya Vidyapeeth Higher Secondary School. The minister also laid the foundation stone of new buildings for several other schools at a meeting held at Gopal Boro Higher Secondary School. Bora said that these buildings will play an important role in encouraging the teachers and students of the schools and creating human resources. "The state is under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and the special efforts of Hon'ble chief minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma The educa-

tion sectorIt has gained a new momentum," he said.

Bora further urged the concerned officials to complete the construction of the buildings within stipulated time.

West Guwahati MLA Ramendra Narayan Kalita was present at the programme of Arya Vidyapeeth Higher Secondary School. Kamrup(M) district commissioner Sumit Sattawan was present at the

## Governor administers oath to VC of Bodoland University

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria administered the oath of office to Dr Babu Lal Ahuja as vice chancellor of Bodoland University at a function held in the Conference of Raj Bhavan on Thursday.

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

Dr Babu Lal Ahuja assured the Governor who is also the Chancellor of the Bodoland University that he would carry out his responsibilities diligently and work for the development of the university and its students.

The ceremony was attended among others by the advisor, chancellors secretariat prof MK Choudhury, commissioner and secretary to the governor SS Meenakshi Sundaram, vice chancellors of different universities, and senior officers of the state government.



Members of Anganwadi Karmi and Sahayika Santha staging a day night protest at Chachal Dharna Ground (27 days running) in Guwahati on Thursday. HT photo

## Completion of projects hallmark of PM Modi's development model: Sitharaman

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Completion of projects after laying foundation is the hallmark of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's development model, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday.

Sitharaman claimed that prior to 2014, when the Modi government came to power at the Centre, foundations were laid but projects were not completed on time.

"The delay in completing projects adversely impacted the country's image, giving the impression that India does not finish its projects," Sitharaman said at the 'Viksit Bharat Ambassador Campus Dialogue' organised at IIT-Guwahati.

"The PM believes that the government will not only lay foundations, but also complete the projects... Northeast has also benefited from this thumb rule," she said.

The Northeast is an important part in the government's development model, which is evident from the number of times the Prime Minister and other central ministers have visited the region in the last decade, she said.

"The PM has visited the region 65 times, while other Union ministers have visited 850 times. This shows the government's priority on the region's development," Sitharaman said.

She highlighted various initiatives taken by the BJP in the last decade to make the Northeast an 'engine of growth and development'.

The initiatives taken during the last ten years for the Northeast is not just to ensure that the region 'catches up with the other states, but to make sure that it marches fast and ahead in the development process', she said.

"The region's achievements in the last ten years are remarkable and have contributed immensely to India's growth aspiration", the Union minister said.

It is not about just making investments, but understanding and giving priority to what the youth wants, she added.

Referring to the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Rs 27,000-crore semiconductor assembly and test facility in Assam's Morigaon district by the Prime Minister on Wednesday, Sitharaman said this was very different from any other investments made earlier.



"Money and investments will come, but yesterday was history for the NE and particularly for Assam", she said.

Assam and the region became a part of the semiconductor value chain with the Tata group of industries coming forward to set up the most advanced technological facility, which will help the youth not only to gain employment, but also get skilled in the latest technology, the minister said.

The new policy of Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialisation Scheme (UNNATI), 2024 for the Northeast will provide a lot of initiatives and incentives for the industrial development of the region, she said.

"UNNATI is not just a scheme, but a catalyst for regional progress, driving economic growth and development by incentivising industrial expansion and optimising operations", she added.

The NDA government had initiated several projects for rail, air, road and telecom connectivity in all the eight states of the region, which changed the face of development and gave hope and aspirations to the youth, Sitharaman said.

During the last ten years, the NE states have got 17 airports, including three international, while till 2014 there were only nine airports, she said.

Most states in the region have border villages which are critical as people residing in them are 'the eyes and ears of the country's intelligence network' but the previous government did not believe in developing these villages with their view being that the enemies can have better access if the roads and other infrastructure were im-

proved, she claimed.

"The PM, however, had a different perspective and said these were the first villages and they people living here must be given better facilities. The 'Vibrant Village' scheme was launched and Rs 4,800 crore has been earmarked for this in our budget", Sitharaman said.

Referring to GST, the finance minister said NE states have been the biggest beneficiaries with its Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) increasing to 27.5 per cent from the earlier 14.8 per cent.

"More indirect tax collection means more money for development and welfare of the people", she added.

Sitharaman pointed out that methanol is being exported to Bangladesh and Nepal and the PM has focussed on NE's development with the aim to have a market in South East Asia and other neighbouring countries.

The PM has also focused on making the region a medical and educational hub by setting up several institutes in varied fields, she said.

"This kind of development has never happened before and more will be achieved in the next few decades. If this can happen in ten years, much more can be done by the centenary year of India's independence in 2047", Sitharaman said. She also urged all Viksit Bharat Ambassadors present on the occasion to take forward the message of development taking place in the country.

The Union minister later visited the famed Kamakhya Temple, atop the Nilachal Hills, to offer prayers. (PTI)

## Hindustani Classical Music programme held

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University organised a programme on Hindustani Classical Music (Vocal) on Thursday, at the University Auditorium situated at Khanapara, Guwahati.

The event was supported by the Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth (SPIC MACAY) in collaboration with the Ministry of culture, Ministry of education, Ministry of youth affairs, government of India and SRF Foundation. Omkar Dadarkar, one of the leading vocalists of the present generation

in the field of Hindustani Classical Music of the country performed in the said programme. He was accompanied by Suprabhat Bhattacharya on tabla and Susanta Chowdhury on harmonium. Suprabhat Bhattacharya is a renowned tablaist and Susanta Chowdhury is the dean of activities and coordinator at Royal Global School, Guwahati. The registrar (i/c) of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University Professor Pranjit Bora, in his welcome address, highlighted the importance of such an event in increasing awareness about different aspects of Indian heritage and inspiring young minds.

# Purabi Milk Booth comes up opposite Guwahati Zoo

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Northeast India's largest dairy cooperative, Purabi Dairy, has set up a prefabricated milk booth opposite Guwahati Zoo recently.

West Assam Milk Producers' Cooperative Union Ltd (WAMUL), which operates the Purabi Dairy brand, has set up the milk booth near Guwahati Zoo, which will help the general public to get fresh milk and dairy products, like lassi, curd, fresh cream, ghee, paneer etc. including the newly-launched Purabi ice-cream. The booth will also have select Mother Dairy products. WAMUL is revolutionizing the dairy sector in the region with the introduction of the prefabricated Purabi Milk Booths at various strategic locations. In the initial phase, multiple Purabi Milk Booths are being established in Guwahati, offering a wide range of Purabi and Mother Dairy products to consumers.

The Purabi Milk Booth at Zoo Road

was unveiled by WAMUL managing director SB Bose, in presence of SK Parida, GM, WAMUL, SM Hussain, marketing head, WAMUL and Chirag Sevak, CFO, North East Dairy and Foods Limited (NEDFL).

Addressing the gathering, SB Bose, managing director, WAMUL said: "Asom Swad - Purabi Dairy has been at the forefront of empowering our farmers and providing quality products to our customers. The dairy has brought in positive transformation into the lives of thousands of our farmers and customers alike. Purabi Dairy remains dedicated to producing high-quality dairy products that meet the expectations of our consumers. We understand the importance of providing nutritious and safe products, and we take pride in our rigorous quality control measures. Through these milk booths, we are coming a step closer to the consumers as we bring in innovation to meet their demands." He also highlighted



the visionary Assam Dairy Development Plan initiated by Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. "Under the guidance of honourable chief minister of Assam Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, we are proud to intro-

duce these modern milk booths, contributing to the growth of the dairy sector in Assam. Over the next 3-6 months, we plan to introduce approximately 15 such milk booths in various locations of Guwahati city and ad-

joining markets. These booths, operated by franchisees, will provide employment opportunities for two-three people per booth across channels," he said.

In December last year, a Purabi Milk Booth was inaugurated at Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) at Bhangagarh in Guwahati and in February of this year the 2nd booth was opened at Khanapara IOC Petrol Pump. The dairy cooperative also opened two Purabi Parlours at Purabi Dairy premises in Panjabari and at the Purabi Cattle Feed Plant in Changsari, opposite AIIMS. These retail formats feature Purabi's entire product range, including various types of pouch milk (toned, standard, and full cream), curds, lassi, fresh cream, ghee, and honey. Additionally, consumers can explore complementary products from the Mother Dairy basket, such as butter, cheese, milkshakes, flavored milk, masala chaas, canned sweets, Mother Dairy ice cream,

and Safal packed fresh vegetables and processed veggies.

The pre-fabricated booths, a first in the Northeast for milk distribution, are specifically designed to maintain the cold chain for dairy products. The booths are insulated and capable of withstanding high temperatures, ensuring the quality of products stored in visi coolers, chest coolers, and deep freezers. Combining modern aesthetics with operational efficiency, these booths are introduced under the Company Owned Franchisee Operated (COFO) model, presenting a unique business opportunity for aspiring entrepreneurs.

The key advantage of these pre-fabricated Purabi Milk Booths is the swift setup process, allowing franchisees to commence operations within two days of completing formalities. This significantly reduces the time required to establish a similar store.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Be brave, young lovers, and follow your star.  
—Oscar Hammerstein II

## Candidate selection: Modi-Shah strategy

As the nation gears up for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has made significant waves with its recent candidate announcements. Led by the formidable duo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, the party's strategy has drawn attention and speculation alike. Over the past five years, the scrutiny of BJP Lok Sabha Members of Parliament has been apparent, culminating in a reshuffling of the candidate roster for the upcoming elections. While some sitting MPs have been axed from the lists, the question arises: Are the replacements equipped to maintain the party's electoral momentum? Prime Minister Modi's unwavering dedication, often cited in his tireless work ethic of 17-18 hours a day, has been instrumental in shaping the BJP's electoral strategy. Together with Amit Shah, Modi has meticulously crafted a lineup that blends both seasoned veterans and fresh faces, all aimed at achieving the ambitious target of 370 seats. Undoubtedly, Modi's adeptness in perception management has been a cornerstone of the BJP's electoral playbook. In this carefully orchestrated lineup, the irreplaceable presence of Modi and Shah looms large, with BJP President JP Nadda complementing their leadership.

Among the notable inclusions in the BJP's candidate list are familiar names such as Nitin Gadkari, Piyush Goyal, and Anurag Thakur. While their presence may not come as a surprise, the electorate's sentiment towards certain candidates, particularly Thakur and Goyal, hints at a desire for diversity within the party. Noteworthy is the inclusion of former chief ministers in the candidate lineup, exemplified by figures like Trivendra Singh Rawat and Basavaraj Bommai. This amalgamation of experience and fresh perspectives underscores the BJP's commitment to presenting a dynamic and balanced ticket. However, the second list's revelation of 32 ousted sitting MPs raises eyebrows. While exceptions like Tejasvi Surya highlight the party's capacity to reward merit, the overall message seems to convey a deliberate move towards rejuvenation within the party ranks. Yet, amidst the shuffle, certain stalwarts like Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje maintain their positions, reassuring their supporters and signalling continuity within the BJP's electoral framework. Geographically, the distribution of candidates reflects a strategic approach, with emphasis placed on key battleground states such as Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. However, the removal of MPs from these regions prompts speculation regarding the party's confidence in securing victories regardless of candidate identity.

In Delhi, the replacement of notable figures like Gautam Gambhir with relative unknowns underscores the BJP's calculated gamble. While some, like Manoj Tiwari, retain their standing, others face uncertainty as the electoral landscape shifts. Overall, the BJP's candidate announcements serve as a testament to Modi and Shah's meticulous planning and foresight. Their ability to blend experience with fresh talent reflects a commitment to adaptability and inclusivity within the party. As the nation eagerly anticipates the electoral showdown, the BJP's candidate lineup stands as a testament to its resolve and strategic acumen. With 370 seats as the coveted goal, Modi and Shah leave no stone unturned in their quest for electoral supremacy. In essence, the BJP's candidate shakeup represents more than mere roster adjustments; it signifies a bold statement of intent from India's ruling party. As the electoral battle unfolds, all eyes will be on the BJP as it seeks to translate its vision into reality.

## Sudha Murthy after a stellar role in Infosys enters Rajya Sabha



By: Harihar Swarup

From being the person who stood behind Narayana Murthy as he lived his Infosys dream, Sudha Murthy has over the years emerged as a more public person—as philanthropist, author of children's books, twice Padma winner, and now a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha. In 1981, she famously lent her husband Rs 10,250 that she had squirreled away, resulting in the creation of the \$80 billion Indian IT Ltd. That image of Sudha Murthy—as a woman behind the man, Narayan Murthy, who doggedly pursued business success as the founder, CEO and Chairman of Infosys—stayed until her husband retired from executive roles in the company in 2014.

But those who have known Sudha Murthy say Sudha was always her own person—the only woman in her engineering college in the 1960s in Karnataka's Hubballi, the first woman engineer at Pune's Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO), now Tata Motors, and later the winner of the Padma Shri (2006) and Padma Bhushan (2023), philanthropist and writer of books for children, and mother-in-law of UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, if that is an attainment, too.

On March 8, Sudha Murthy was made a nominated member of Rajya Sabha—one of 12 nominated by President Droupadi Murmu to the Upper House.

Speaking to media from Thailand, Sudha Murthy said the news of the nomination had taken her by surprise. "I was not expecting it... It is also a happy moment that the announcement (was), made on Women's Day. I believe this is a big platform for me. I will definitely try my best," she said.

Over the past couple of years, Sudha Murthy has made several public appearances and making

news with her comments—on being "a pure vegetarian" and a woman of "simple tastes"—setting off social media trends and triggering speculation that she may be getting ready for a political debut.

Born on August 19, 1950 in Shiggaon in Haveri district of north Karnataka, Murthy has often spoken of her father Dr R H Kulkarni, a surgeon who practiced at the government hospital in Hubballi and other parts of the state, as a major influence on her life. Her mother Vimla was a housewife. After graduating in Electrical Engineering from BVB College in Hubballi, Sudha Murthy pursued a Master's at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru where she received a gold medal in 1974. She was the first woman engineer to be hired at Pune's Tata Engineering and Company (TELCO). The recruitment was considered a watershed moment for women engineers since it was a letter to JRD Tata objecting to the firm's all-male employee policy that eventually led to her recruitment.

BJP leader and former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, also an alumnus of BVB College, recalls that when he enrolled for Bachelor's in Engineering, Sudha Murthy had graduated. "All I know was her name then—she graduated, she was the first girl student of our college. It was only after entering public life that I got the opportunity to meet and interact with her. Incidentally, her first job was at TELCO and so was mine," he says.

Sometime in the 1970, Sudha Murthy met Narayana Murthy through a common friend. In 1978, the couple tied the knot despite Sudha's family having apprehensions about Murthy, then an unemployed engineer heavily influenced by socialist values and looking to start his own business. (IPA Service)

# BJP suffers serious political tremors with epicenter in Haryana

BJP suffered serious political tremors having epicentre in Haryana on Tuesday which broke the NDA and the chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar had to resign. It's a serious political development in the country at a time when BJP and PM Narendra Modi have been seeking third term in the Lok Sabha election 2024. BJP had won all 10 seats from the state in Lok Sabha election 2019, but this development has made retaining these seats highly uncertain. This is the first casualty of the farmers movement, a result of authoritarianism of the PM Narendra Modi led government at the centre, totally drunk with the idea that "Aayega to Modi hi" (Modi indeed would return to power). This led BJP government of the state led by ML Khattar to ruthlessly suppress the farmers' agitation as well as impudent and arrogant attitude towards its own allies Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) led by Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala.

Farmers of the state were angry with BJP-JJP alliance, and Dushyant Chautala, out of fear of losing its support base tried deftly to distance itself by unreasonably demanding two seats to contest, while BJP naturally wanted to contest on all 10 seats of the state it has presently. PM Narendra Modi had claimed that BJP would win 370 seats in the forthcoming Lok Sabha election and NDA 405, but Haryana development has cast shadow on even retaining its 303 seats that the party had won in 2019.

This development signals that NDA alliance partners are not ready to submit under to the authoritarianism of the BJP leadership, and has been making very hard bargain during seat-sharing talks. Earlier, we have seen hard bargaining by BJP allies in Maharashtra and Bihar, apart from stiff talks with BJD of Odisha, and TDP of



Andhra Pradesh. State BJP leaderships are also not willing to easily submit to the whims and fancies of Modi-Shah duo this time, as seen in the revolt of Odisha BJP unit that said that they would have no alliance with BJP. Though certain BJP leaders chose to quietly leave the political scene, many others are ready to protest any injustice to them or their supporters in ticket distribution.

Resignation of the Chief Minister ML Khattar has a special significance for the state since Vidhan Sabha elections are also scheduled after the Lok Sabha election. In the Vidhan Sabha election 2019, out of 90 seats in the state, BJP had won 40, Congress 31, Jannayak Janta Party 10, Independents 7, Haryana Lokhit Party 1, and Indian National Lok Dal 1. BJP, the party that had won all the 10 seats in the Lok Sabha election only a few months ago riding on Pul-

wama wave, fell short of majority and hence it had to form NDA government with the help of JJP.

Another special feature of those two elections were that BJP had bagged 58.31 per cent of votes in Lok Sabha election, but could get only 36.49 per cent of votes in Vidhan Sabha election, indicating that Pulwama wave had subsided within a couple of months. Vote share of the Congress remained almost stagnant around 28 per cent, but JJP's vote share increased from mere 4.9 per cent to 14.84 per cent. Congress has been resurgent thereafter, and farmers' agitation has dampened the political prospects of both JJP and INLD.

In the outgoing Vidhan Sabha, BJP has 41 MLAs, Congress 30, JJP 10, Independents 7 and INLD and HLP one each. Independents are supporting BJP and hence,

there may not be immediate threat to the Khattar government numerically now, and it has been reported that BJP can form a new government. Nevertheless, the Haryana development brings ominous portent to the BJP and PM Narendra Modi for their returning to power at the Centre for the third term. If Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections were not held simultaneously, state election would be held in October 2024.

JJP wanted to contest from Hisar and Bhiwani Lok Sabha Constituencies. JJP leader Dushyant Chautala met the BJP president JP Nadda in New Delhi on March 11, where he was told that BJP would not be sharing any seat with JJP. There was also a scheduled meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah on March 11, but was cancelled. Now in a show of strength JJP is going to hold a public meeting in Hisar on March 13.

With Congress and AAP alliance in Haryana, BJP will have to fight a tough battle in retaining its seats, especially when BJP's vote share has declined sharply and has become very unpopular among farmers which is also likely to impact the political fortune of JJP which has been a partner of BJP.

By past experience, we know that PM Narendra Modi replaces the unpopular BJP leaders to save himself and his authoritarianism. There is therefore every possibility that both the state BJP leadership and several of the sitting BJP candidates may be replaced. BJP hopes that it could save BJP from double anti-incumbency, but the ground political reality suggests otherwise. Haryana political development signals that BJP will have to suffer similar political tremors in several states of the country. (IPA Service)

## Patanjali is not the only one in promoting unscientific health system

By: Dr Arun Mitra

That the government of Uttar Pradesh is dilly dalling action against Patanjali, despite Supreme Court's order is a matter of concern but is not astonishing. The State Bank of India's refusal to comply with Supreme Court order to submit details of electoral bonds by 6th March is a reflection of persistent efforts to undermine the authority of the judiciary. It would be naive to believe that these institutions are defying the Apex Court's order on their own. Officials at that level would not dare do that without the patronage from the higher-ups at the helms of affairs in the Government of India.

Patanjali has been issuing misleading statements for long and claiming remedies to various diseases without any evidence. Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 states that "no person shall take any part in the publication of any advertisement referring to any drug in terms which suggest or are calculated to lead to the use of that drug for the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment or prevention of any diseases, disorder or condition." The apex court has given order against Patanjali for its misleading ads. The Apex court in its order remarked that Patanjali's ads present its products to people as a "permanent relief", which is "misleading" and "a violation of the law". The court referred to provisions of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act,

1954 (DMR&OA) and its Rules. Ramdev's connections with higher-ups in the government are well known. When he highlighted the role of Coronil, a drug produced by his company, for the treatment of COVID-19, it was none other than the Health Minister of India Dr Harsh Vardhan, an ENT Surgeon trained in the modern medicine, who approved of Coronil and addressed a Press conference along with Ramdev even though there was no scientific evidence to prove the efficacy of Coronil. But that gave strength to the Patanjali group to issue more misleading statements about their products. He has come up with magical remedies for several diseases and has openly ridiculed the modern scientific medicine. He even blamed the use of oxygen as a cause of death of the patients during COVID.

'Yog' has been our ancient method of promoting good health, but to say that it is a remedy for various diseases including mental health issues is not correct. Mental diseases are a serious health hazard which needs to be treated with great precision by the experts. With rise in depression and suicidal tendencies it is all the more important to promote advanced methods of treatment for such disorders. Promotion of methods such as yoga will create further confusion and denial of timely scientific care for the needy. The modern medicine tells us about innumerable resources regarding suicidal risk, its identification and management, includ-

ing emergency care. There is enough evidence regarding the effectiveness of dialectical behavioural therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy in preventing suicides. It is in fact dangerous to promote yoga and such methods for anyone with suicidal ideation, and deny the evidence based critical interventions required for such people.

Despite several advances in the medical science and information mechanism, there are several myths and unscientific practices about diseases and their cure even among the literates in our country.

It is saddening that the government is not only apathetic towards irrational ideas on health on the contrary is subtly promoting them. Use of Cow urine, Astrology in the hospitals, the 'Garbh Vigyan Sanskar' by Arogya Bharti advising couples to recite Shlokas so as to have customized babies of their choice - the Uttam Santati are few examples. Even some ministers have been seen to attend the conference of 'Tantriks' and felicitate them in Gujarat. Such acts lead to misconceptions in the minds of people and spread pseudo-science.

Let us not forget that during the last few years in the name of promoting traditional methods of treatment some absurd ideas have been promoted. Pragyta Thakur, BJP Member Parliament from Bhopal said in the interview that she got cured of breast cancer by cow urine. Cow urine and cow dung have been mentioned as the



treatment of not only COVID but several other diseases. The cow dung is also being said to prevent from the effect of nuclear radiations on human body. One gram of dried cow dung is claimed to counter 109 Hz Giga radiations. Not only that, a special research project was launched at the IIT to go into the benefits of Panchgavya which is a mixture of cow milk, urine, dung, ghee and curd. This does not need any explanation that anything that has been excreted by the body is a waste product and therefore cannot be useful to our body.

In 2014 while addressing a gathering of the doctors in Mumbai the Prime Minister had said that science in India in the ancient times was so much advanced that we could transplant head of an elephant on the human body. That

Karan was born from the ear suggesting that genetic science in our ancient past was highly developed. That Kauravs were born from stem cell research. This was said by the Vice chancellor of Andhra Pradesh University Dr Nageshwar Rao at the Indian Science Congress held in Jalandhar in 2019.

Therefore when it comes to Patanjali it is required that a list of others spreading or patronising absurd ideas and spreading pseudo-science should be prepared and they be taken to task. It is the duty of medical professionals and scientists along with rationally thinking people to counter such pseudo-science to save the country from being pushed to medieval times. Health care cannot be left to belief system. (IPA Service)

## Citizenship Amendment Rules spark controversy ahead of elections

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Union government's move to notify the Citizenship Amendment Rules, 2024, operationalizing the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, just days before the announcement of elections to the 18th Lok Sabha, could raise valid concerns about the government's motives. The timing of this decision may be perceived as an attempt to influence the electorate, potentially casting doubts on the government's impartiality and commitment to upholding democratic principles. Such actions could fuel further polarization and undermine the integrity of the electoral process, which is a cornerstone of any thriving democracy.

The controversial legislation, along with the newly notified rules, paves the way for granting Indian citizenship to undocumented individuals from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, provided they belong to one of the six specified religions—Hinduism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism, or Christianity—and had entered India prior to December 31, 2014. These individuals can substantiate their claims by furnishing any one of the listed documents, such as birth certificates, tenancy records, identity papers, licenses, or educational certificates issued

by governmental authorities in their respective countries of origin. This provision has faced criticism for allegedly promoting a religion-based approach to citizenship, raising concerns about potential discrimination and undermining the secular foundations of the Indian state.

Ostensibly, the rules are intended to aid "minorities persecuted on religious grounds in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh," as asserted by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. However, Shah has taken a more expansive stance, portraying the move as a fulfillment of the "promise

of a constitutional commitment to specific religious groups, Shah's remarks could be interpreted as a departure from the principle of secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Such rhetoric may further polarize public discourse and fuel debates about the appropriate boundaries between religious identity and citizenship policies in a pluralistic society.

However, critics holding divergent views on the Constitution and its drafting process contend that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act contravenes its foundational principles, most notably Article 14, which enshrines the principle of equality before the law and equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. By selectively excluding Muslims from the specified regions, the government is arguably denying them the equal treatment guaranteed by this constitutional provision, thereby creating a discriminatory framework based on religious affiliation.

This perspective challenges the purported intent behind the legislation, which claims to offer refuge to persecuted minorities, by highlighting the inherent contradiction in granting preferential treatment to certain religious groups while explicitly excluding others. Such differential treatment, critics argue, violates the core tenets of secularism and non-discrimination that underpin the Indian constitutional order. Moreover, the selective application of citizenship criteria based on religion raises broader concerns about the



made by the framers of our Constitution to the Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, and Christians residing in those nations." This characterization suggests a broader agenda beyond merely offering refuge to persecuted minorities, potentially raising concerns about the selective application of citizenship criteria based on religious affiliation. By framing the rules as a realiza-

tion of a constitutional commitment to specific religious groups, Shah's remarks could be interpreted as a departure from the principle of secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Such rhetoric may further polarize public discourse and fuel debates about the appropriate boundaries between religious identity and citizenship policies in a pluralistic society.

potential erosion of fundamental rights and the dilution of constitutional safeguards against arbitrary state action. This interpretation contends that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act represents a departure from the spirit of the Constitution and its commitment to upholding the principles of equality, justice, and secularism.

The opposition has put forth an additional contention, asserting that the law in question has incorporated religion as a basis for governmental decision-making, thereby compromising both the Constitution and the secular fabric of the republic. It's worth noting that the Supreme Court has yet to allocate time to hear the numerous petitions that have been filed before it, challenging the constitutionality of this law, which has now been in effect for four years.

Among the legislative initiatives undertaken by the government, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) faced the most intense criticism and opposition from various quarters across the nation, second only to the three farm laws that were eventually repealed. The CAA, coupled with the stated objective of the Union government to implement a National Register of Citizens (NRC), fueled suspicions among the populace that the administration was targeting the Muslim community. Rather than engaging in dialogue with the protesters and clarifying its intentions, the government chose to confront them with the full force at its disposal, further exacerbating the doubts and sense of alienation among the dissenters. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com))

## The 1967 elections heralded the end of Congress' monopoly over political power



By: Yashwant Deshmukh & Sutanu Guru

If someone had suggested in March 1967 that the beginning of the end of the Congress party as the dominant political force of India had started, they would have been dismissed as a crackpot. In hindsight, it is clear that the general elections held in February 1967 not only heralded the end of its almost complete monopoly over power but also unleashed forces that would eventually lead to the electoral routs of 2014 and 2019.

When Indira Gandhi managed to retain power as prime minister with a sharply reduced majority, political analysts were shocked. Today, when there are opinion polls like the one conducted by C Voter indicating that her grandson Rahul Gandhi is poised to "lead" the Congress to a third consecutive electoral rout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, political analysts just shrug and move on.

So what really happened in February 1967? The scheduled Lok Sabha and assembly elections to 16 states (there were 16 states back then) were conducted between 12 and 27 February. When the results came in, there was disbelief and shock. Out of the 523 seats on offer, the Congress tally dropped by 78 to a simple majority of 283 seats. Three of the most powerful leaders of the party who were considered the "Syndicate", S K Patil, K Kamraj and Atulya Ghosh lost their seats.

More worrying for the Grand Old Party was its performance in the assembly elections that were held simultaneously. Its stranglehold over Tamil Nadu was destroyed by the DMK. Since 1967, the Congress has never been able to form a government in Tamil Nadu. It was defeated by the Left Front in West Bengal; only to revive for a while in the run-up to the 1975 Emergency. Since 1977, the Congress has never been able to form a government in West Bengal. It failed to win even one of the 294 seats on offer in the 2021 elections.

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, and Odisha showed signs of the future terminal decline of the party in due course of time. In total, the Congress lost about nine of the 16 states, though it remained the single largest party in many. The immediate fallout after the shock of the 1967 verdict was the intensification of centrifugal forces that would lead to a split in the party and the reshaping of the party as the fiefdom of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

There can be no doubt that the 1967 elections marked the end of the Congress monopoly over power. Who then became rival claimants for power to the Congress? In some states like Kerala, West Bengal and then Tripura, the Left became a principal claimant. However, barring Kerala, the Left has become a marginal player in the 21st century.

The second claimant was a clutch of "socialist" parties, particularly in the Hindi heartland states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In reality, the 1967 success of these "socialist" parties heralded the emergence of backward castes as a decisive force and presaged what is now known as Mandal politics.

The third claimant that emerged in 1967 was the "right". These forces were represented by parties like the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra Party led by C Rajagopalachari. Both believed in markets while the difference was that Jan Sangh gave priority to Hindutva while Swatantra focused on individual liberty.

Since much has been written about all this in detail over the decades, the authors will not delve into details of the post-1967 Mandal-Kamandal battle that started in the 1970s and peaked in the 1990s. In some previous columns in this 52-column series, the authors have already written about that. What the authors would prefer is to provide an answer to a large set of political analysts who have remained baffled since 2014 by the unexpectedly strong performance of the BJP not only in Lok Sabha elections but also in many states.

Since space is limited, a few data sets would be enough to make the analysts less baffled. The Swatantra Party virtually disappeared after the 1971 Lok Sabha elections. Most of its voters eventually shifted to the Jan Sangh which became the BJP in 1980. In 1967, the combined vote share of the two in the Lok Sabha elections was 18%, compared to 40% for the Congress. But the really important data points came from the states.

Take Haryana. It has been accepted wisdom for long that the BJP was a fringe player in Haryana before it shocked everyone by winning the 2014 assembly elections. The fact is that in the 1967 Lok Sabha elections, the Jan Sangh won a 20% vote share in Haryana. The vote base was there. It just took decades for the party machinery to galvanise it. Or take Gujarat. The Jan Sangh was not very strong there. But the vote share of the Swatantra Party in the 1967 Lok Sabha elections in Gujarat was a then staggering 40%. That gives you a hint as to how the BJP has become so dominant in Gujarat.

What about Bihar? The "socialist" parties were the principal rivals of the Congress. Yet, the combined vote share of the Swatantra Party and the Jan Sangh was about 15%. In Uttar Pradesh, it was about 28%. The Swatantra Party managed a 31% vote share in Odisha. In the 2019 elections, the BJP vote share was more than 38%. In Rajasthan, the combined vote share of the two was more than 37%. We then came to the final data point from Uttar Pradesh. The combined vote share of the two was 27% with the Jan Sangh on its own managing more than 22%.

In that sense, the 1967 elections were a forerunner of the eventual rise of the BJP as the dominant political force in India. But there is a difference between 1967 and 2024. Till 1967, Congress was a monopoly. In 2024, the BJP may be dominant, but an array of strong regional parties are combating and often besting the BJP. That is good for democracy. (Courtesy: The Quint)

## Why simultaneous polls may reduce India to 'World's Largest Democracy' only in name

By: Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay

Recent disclosures to select mediapersons from within the Law Commission and the seven-member high-level committee, headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind, on One Nation, One Election (ONOE) project, makes it worryingly evident that clearance to the idea of making nationwide polls a unitary and fixed-time exercise is now imminent.

A clutch of constitutional amendments and additions, which in all likelihood will alter the basic structure of the constitution, in letter as well as in spirit, appear inevitable, unless the electorate provides a stunning mandate reversing the verdicts of 2014 and 2019. In the event of the amendments being pushed through, India will take a mammoth step in becoming the world's largest democracy in name only.

The double-edged recommendation from the Law Commission and the Kovind committee is obviously planned as a strategic poll-eve declaration, to ensure that this grossly populist and anti-democratic step, emerges as one of the foremost politically polarising issues, to benefit the Bharatiya Janata Party in the elections.

The project, one of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's favourite missions, was pushed on the basis of a quartet of questionable "justifications": excessive expenditure for holding polls in rapid succession; impediments to governance because of Model Code of Conduct (MCC); impact on the delivery of essential services; and undue burden on government personnel deployed for conducting elections.

Of these issues, flagged consistently by Modi and his party to run down regular elections, at least the two politically contentious ones – a hindrance to governance after the MCC comes into play frequently and impeding the delivery of fundamental services, can be resolved by open-ended discussion between political parties and the Election Commission of India.

But the government made no effort to secure bipartisan support for the plan after March 2016, when Modi first advocated simultaneous elections to panchayat bodies, assemblies and parliament while addressing BJP national office-bearers and state unit chiefs. Prior to this, the issue remained one of the party's numerous electoral promises made in its manifesto from 1984 onwards.

In September 2023, the government abruptly appointed the Kovind Committee and it nominated Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury without his consent.

Consequently, he opted out questioning the Committee's composition, contending that its conclusion was pre-determined. Importantly, in his first



address as president of India to the two Houses of Parliament in January 2018, Kovind made a strong pitch for simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

That speech began the practice of the president putting a stamp of approval on assertions made by the PM.

Consequently, Kovind cannot be expected to take a contrary position, rendering the Committee into an eyewitness, aimed at camouflaging a pre-decided matter.

Besides examining ways to overcome hurdles in governance posed by the MCC and reducing the burden on personnel for electioneering, the BJP also took little action in curtailing poll expenditure.

The recent Supreme Court judgment nullifying electoral bonds triggered a fresh round of debate on curbing poll expenditure. It again underscored minimal efforts on the part of the BJP and the Centre to rein in poll costs to ensure a level playing field for all parties and candidates.

There is no ambiguity that the reasons cited by the Modi-BJP combine while pursuing the One Nation One Election undertaking are essentially a composite smokescreen to hide the real motivation behind simultaneous elections. This move will negatively impact the Indian body politic once it becomes the norm if the BJP is elected again.

There is a long-held view that in a politically diverse nation like India, periodic elections ensure that no emotionally driven mandate grants absolute power to a single party. It is necessary for voters to be armed with a corrective device and frequent elections not just "rectify" verdicts, but also keep parties and governments on their toes.

For instance, if each and every state election was held alongside the parliamentary poll held after Indira Gandhi's assassination, India's political history would have been different and Rajiv Gandhi may have continued in office well beyond 1989 when his government was voted out. Likewise in 2019 when the twin Pulwama-Balakot events boosted the BJP's fortunes and gave it a mandate that was improbable previously.

The American think-tank, Center for Strategic and International Studies, a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research or-

ganisation hypothesised that if simultaneous elections were held in all states simultaneously with the 2014 parliamentary poll, the BJP would have met with greater success in the states.

Furthermore, a paper published by the University of Pennsylvania's Centre for the Advanced Study of India in 2020 empirically demonstrated that voters in simultaneous elections were more swayed by party affiliation over the candidate's individual characteristics.

Researchers also established that the probability of candidates from the same party winning Lok Sabha and Assembly seats, when held simultaneously, rises by more than 20%.

An insidious move In addition to these studies, highlighting that reasons advanced for ushering simultaneous polls are little but ruses, the government has also refused to learn from the experience of the United Kingdom which in March 2022 repealed the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, 2011 after all parties concluded that this legislation, resulted in chaos and constitutional deadlock in 2019.

For the ignoramus within the government and the BJP, The Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill was introduced on May 12, 2021, and it received Royal Assent on March 24, 2022. The passage of this Act put an end to rather 'adventurous' 2011 legislation that fixed the time between two parliamentary elections as against the tried-and-tested and democratic way of holding elections, the way it was called for generations.

Although the British law of 2011 that has now been repealed pertained only for the UK's general elections, and not for polls at the national and state level as being contemplated, its nullification has lessons for India.

It would thereby be prudent to press for greater circumspection and debate and not rush through the process of simultaneously holding polls at every level.

Just the way that the FTPA of 2011 significantly affected the British constitution, the proposed changes in the Indian constitution to usher in simultaneous polls would hollow out the spirit of Indian tenets, showcased by Modi as India's "only Holy Book." The "three major Constitutional amendments", which would be required to

usher in the proposed "fixed" electoral calendar, would also necessitate the insertion of an additional chapter in the constitution.

Most importantly, the tenures of several state assemblies would either have to be curtailed or extended between 2024 and 2029 to ensure that when the next parliamentary poll is held, all state assemblies are also dissolved and elections conducted simultaneously.

Such tenure-adjustment will violate the people's mandates in these states because it was for a specified period which could be altered only due to political exigencies like the government losing majority due to desertions, or being voted out through a no-confidence motion. In theory, these acts reflect public sentiment.

The amendments also mandate that in the event of governments losing majority, efforts should be made for the formation of either a 'unity' government or electing a new government for a curtailed period till the next 'scheduled' poll.

None of the proposals that are likely to be mooted are aimed at strengthening Indian democracy and institutions. Instead, the effort is to ensure the stability of the Executive and giving greater importance to governance. The entire effort is aimed at running the nation like a corporate structure and not a democratic country where people's mandate is supreme.

The primary intention behind pushing simultaneous polls is to weaken multiparty democracy under which different parties govern in states and replace it with a one-party system with absolute power.

This would also put a de facto end to the system of parliamentary democracy and introduce a presidential form of polity wherein the individual is of greater importance than organisation and ideology.

We need to quickly recollect that when the Constituent Assembly debated if India should retain the bicameral system or shift to a unicameral legislature, the decision was almost unanimously to retain the Upper House because it provided greater political diversity by electing its members biennially and 'corrected' political spikes.

Not just the opposition parties but even political allies of the BJP must be aware of the threat to their existence as over time, simultaneous polls will weaken India's regional parties.

One can disagree with the politics of several of these, but few can deny that the emergence of regional forces empowered new communities, previously excluded from the power structure.

Pushing through One Nation One Election on the eve of this year's parliamentary election is an insidious move and must be opposed by all democratic forces. (Courtesy: The Wire)

## Riding the storm: Russia's economic landscape since the Ukraine conflict

By: Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash

In the aftermath of the initial weeks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia became the world's most sanctioned economy. Despite expectations of an economic collapse, following the pandemic as the economy initially faltered with a GDP growth rate of -4.5 percent, by the end of 2022, Russia began to recover, reaching a modest -1.2 percent GDP growth and entered 2023 with solid growth rates, peaking at 3.6 percent. Additionally, real wages in Russia surged by 9.4 percent compared to July 2022. Which prompts the question: How did Russia maintain positive growth throughout 2023 despite enduring comprehensive Western sanctions and the financial strain of the Ukraine conflict?

**The Russian economy since 2022: War economy** Russia's economy is heavily centralised, with most state ownership in the energy, banking, defence, and transportation sectors. A significant amount of revenue is generated from the export of energy and defence. The immediate impacts of the sanctions on the economy saw inflation increase in Russia to 17.9 percent in Q2 of 2022. Russian imports were impacted due to sanctions on the Russian banking system, including its US\$300 billion out of the US\$600 billion Russia has in its foreign exchange reserves, which severed its access to the international financial system.

Policymakers have been preparing for a re-configuration of the economy since 2014, where the sectors were divided into rent-generating and rent-dependent sectors. The former, which includes Russia's profitable energy, agriculture, and defence sectors, would infuse capital into the rent-dependent sectors, such as the automobile, oil and gas parts, shipbuilding, and state sector employees. This re-configuration circulated the economy and built a form of resilience. The war in Ukraine has created an increasing demand for the military-industrial complex, creating employment in the military factories and the reconstruction of the newly occupied territories in Ukraine. Regions such as Nizhny Novgorod, Sverdlovsk, Tula, Samara, and Novosibirsk saw a high demand for labour due to the concentration of defence factories. Wages in these factories are higher than civilian ones, creating a de-commodified labour force in Russia that is flocking to the more profitable defence industry. The sudden migration to the defence sector and Russians leaving the country has resulted in significant job losses in the civilian sector; in 2023, Russia had a shortage of 4.8 million workers. All this indicates economic growth that is spurred by military spending or military Keynesianism.

**Fiscal reforms** Russia's Central Bank's role in stabilising the ruble against external shocks has been crucial. Elvira Nabiullina, the Governor of the Bank of Russia, was earlier awarded the Central Banker of the Year 2015 and 2017 for being able to build economic resilience against external shocks, and control the inflation rate in Russia, and undertake banking sector reforms. After the Ukraine war broke out, Russia's Central Bank imposed capital control laws. The Bank of Russia raised the in-

terest rate from 9.5 percent to 20 percent, which arrested capital flight and helped stabilise the ruble. Further, the Russian firms were barred from transferring foreign money overseas and faced a six-month cap on amounts withdrawn from Russian banks. The Russian firms receiving payments in foreign currencies had to convert 80 percent (later abolished) of those earnings into rubles, which is why we observe that in the first year of the invasion, the Russian economy was able to absorb the shocks. However, by mid-2023, the ruble began to devalue, mainly due to Russia's trade surplus shrinking because of increasing imports. The central bank raised the interest rate to arrest the devaluing ruble and aggressively targeted inflation. Elvira Nabiullina has expressed concern and warned that the sanctions against Russia may intensify as the economy runs the risk of overheating. Further, the legal minimum wage was raised to US\$212.60 (20,000 rubles), and pensions were hiked by 10 percent a month before the Ukraine conflict.

**Import Substitution Policies**

Scaling up domestic manufacturing in Russia has been on the minds of policymakers since 2014; the government commission for import substitution was formed in 2015, with 2,000 projects across 20 branches, a budget of over 1.5 trillion rubles, and a roadmap till 2030. Since 2014, the emphasis has been placed on non-sanctioned industries such as pharma, IT, and civil aviation (before 2022). For instance, Russian aviation companies have placed orders for the domestically manufactured MC-21 and Sukhoi Superjet-100 since Airbus and Boeing's planes have placed import restrictions on Russia. According to the National Research University of Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Russia's industry complex currently depends on imports by less than 40 percent. The dependence rate on imports varies from sector to sector. The dependence on imports is high for machinery, pharmaceuticals, fertilisers, electrical machinery, and medical instruments; as the work is underway, Russia is facing difficulties in some sectors of the economy, such as mining and manufacturing. The import substitution policy has created employment and generated economic growth in some Russian regions.

**Impact of sanctions and sanctions circumvention**

Unlike the sanctions imposed in 2014 in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea, the sanctions imposed in 2022 were an all-out sanctions campaign, similar to one imposed on Iran on paper. However, reality contrasts the intent behind the sanctions. Russia's natural gas and oil are heavily linked with markets in Europe. Even when the US imposed sanctions on Russian energy in 2015, the European Union (EU) did not sanction Russia's natural gas giant, Gazprom, or Rosneft (Russia's largest oil company). The EU continued to buy Russian energy because several central European, Baltic, and Eastern European nations are integral to the functioning of Russian energy value chains. For instance, Hungary's MOL Group and Unipetrol in the Czech Republic are among several European companies that refine Russian oil and are exempted from sanctions. Russian energy giants have a stake in companies across Europe that are involved in the mid-



stream and downstream processes. This form of dependence makes it very difficult for nations to cut energy relations with Russia. Further, year-on-year Russian exports have increased; for instance, in 2022, Russian exports stood at US\$591 billion, 20 percent more than in 2021.

Another reason the Russian economy has grown is because of laundromat countries, which purchase Russian oil and sell unprocessed/processed products to European countries. India, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Türkiye, China, and Singapore lead the group and do not purchase oil at the price cap set by the G7. This means that Western sanctions on Russia have not had a debilitating impact on Russia.

**Parallel import systems**

The Ministry of Industry and Trade published a list of goods for parallel imports, which included automobile parts, parts dedicated to rail transport, aviation spare parts, electronics, cosmetics, and even luxury goods. Parallel imports refer to goods imported into a market without the manufacturer's consent. Many unauthorised imports from Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Belarus enter Russia. From May 2022 to November 2022, parallel imports to Russia reached US\$17 billion. In 2023, Moscow imported US\$1.7 billion of advanced semiconductor chips, which are being used in their drones in the Ukraine war. Even highly regulated dual-use goods have found their way into Russia.

**Conclusion**

Ever since the war in Ukraine, the Russian economy built adaptive resilience against sanctions; the technocrats worked round the clock to ensure the ruble's stability. Despite the onset of devaluation since mid-2023, the social security measures have been satisfactory for the Russians to build a degree of resilience from the sanctions; one can go as far as to state that even the recent list of 500 sanctions imposed by the US President Joe Biden after Navalny's death may not impact the Russian economy as intended. Considering these parameters, Russia has done reasonably well and paved the way for a more than possible fifth term for President Putin in the upcoming presidential elections in March. However, the rising military spending, which is spurring economic growth, is a concern for the long term, as over-reliance on military spending can lead to economic stagnation even if the war in Ukraine were to end. (Courtesy: ORF)

# Report claims Yemen's Houthis have a hypersonic missile, possibly raising stakes in Red Sea crisis

**DUBAI, March 14:** Yemen's Houthi rebels claim to have a new, hypersonic missile in their arsenal, Russia's state media reported on Thursday, potentially raising the stakes in their ongoing attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways against the backdrop of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The report by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency cited an unnamed official but provided no evidence for the claim. It comes as Moscow maintains an aggressively counter-Western foreign policy amid its grinding war on Ukraine.

However, the Houthis have for weeks hinted about "surprises" they plan for the battles at sea to counter the United States and its allies, which have so far been able to down any missile or bomb-carrying drone that comes near their warships in the Red Sea.

The Houthis' main benefactor, Iran, claims to have a hypersonic missile and has widely arming the rebels with the missiles they now use. Adding a hypersonic missile to their arsenal could pose a

more-formidable challenge to the air defense systems employed by America and its allies, including Israel.

"The group's missile forces have successfully tested a missile that is capable of reaching speeds of up to Mach 8 and runs on solid fuel," a military official close to the Houthis said, according to the RIA report.

The Houthis "intend to begin manufacturing it for use during attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as against targets in Israel."

Mach 8 is eight times the speed of sound. Russia has maintained close ties with Iran, relying on Iranian bomb-carrying drones to target Ukraine, Russian state media, particularly its Arabic-language services, have closely reported on Yemen's yearslong civil war that pits the Iran-backed Houthis against forces of the internationally backed Yemeni government, supported by a Saudi-led coalition.

Hypersonic weapons, which fly at speeds higher than Mach 5, could pose crucial challenges to missile defence systems because of their speed and maneuverability.

The danger from a hypersonic missile depends on how maneuverable it is. Ballistic missiles fly on a trajectory in which anti-missile systems like the US-made Patriot can anticipate their path and intercept them. The more irregular the missile's flight path, such as a hypersonic missile with the ability to change directions, the more difficult it becomes to intercept.

China is believed to be pursuing the weapons, as is America. Russia claims it has already used them on the battlefield in Ukraine. However, speed and maneuverability isn't a guarantee the missile will successfully strike a target. Ukraine's air force in May said it shot down a Russian hypersonic Kinzhal missile with a Patriot battery.

In Yemen, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, the Houthi rebels' secretive supreme leader, boasted about the rebels' weapons efforts at the end of February. "We have surprises that the enemies do not expect at all," he warned at the time.

A week ago, he similarly warned: "What is coming is greater."

"The enemy ... will see the level of achievements of strategic importance that place our country in its capabilities among the limited and numbered countries in this world," al-Houthi said, without elaborating.

After seizing Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in 2014, the Houthis ransacked government arsenals, which held Soviet-era Scud missiles and other arms. As the Saudi-led coalition entered Yemen's conflict in 2015, the Houthi arsenal was increasingly targeted. Soon — and despite Yemen having no indigenous missile manufacturing infrastructure — newer missiles made their way into rebel hands.

Iran long has denied arming the Houthis, likely because of a yearslong United Nations arms embargo on the rebels. However, the US and its allies have seized multiple arms shipments bound for the rebels in the Red Sea. Weapons experts as well as have tied Houthi arms seized on the battlefield

back to Iran. Iran also now claims to have a hypersonic weapon. In June, Iran unveiled its Fattah, or "Conqueror" in Farsi, missile, which it described as being a hypersonic. It described another as being in development.

Iran's mission to the UN did not respond to a request for comment Thursday, nor did the US Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet, which patrols the Red Sea.

Israel's military — which also has come under Houthi fire since the war against Hamas erupted on October 7 when Hamas-led militants attacked Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage — declined to comment.

The Houthis have attacked ships since November, saying they want to force Israel to end the war in Gaza, which has seen over 31,000 Palestinians killed in the besieged strip. The ships attacked, however, have increasingly had little or no connection to Israel, the US or other nations involved in the war. (AP)

## Drama in Russia's election is all about what Putin will do with another 6 years in power



**TALLINN (ESTONIA), March 14:** As Vladimir Putin heads for another six-year term as Russia's president, there's little electoral drama in the race. What he does after he crosses the finish line is what's drawing attention and, for many observers, provoking anxiety.

The voting that concludes on Sunday is all but certain to allow Putin to remain in office until 2030, giving him a full three decades of leading Russia as either president or prime minister.

The heft of that long tenure and the thorough suppression of effective domestic opposition voices gives Putin a very strong — and perhaps unrestrained — hand.

That position is bolstered by the Russian economy's surprising resilience despite wide-ranging Western sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine.

It's also strengthened by Moscow's incremental but consistent battlefield advances in recent months, flagging support for military aid to Kyiv from the United States and other quarters, and growing skepticism in some Western countries over more progressive social attitudes that echoes Putin's push for "traditional values."

Putin, in short, would head into a new term with few obvious restraints, and that could manifest itself quickly in major new actions.

"Russia's presidential election is not so important as what will come after. Putin has often postponed unpopular moves until after elections," Bryn Rosenfeld, a Cornell University professor who studies post-Communist politics, said in a commentary.

Probably the most unpopular move he could make at home would be to order a second military mobilization to fight in Ukraine; the first, in September 2022, sparked protests, and a wave of Russians fled the country to avoid being called up. However unpopular a second mobilization might be, it could also mollify relatives of the soldiers who were drafted 18 months ago.

Some in Russia believe it could happen.

how can I make everyone else weaker?" she said. "So in order to do that, it's like you have to find a situation where you could test Article 5," and if the response is mild or uncertain "then you've shown that, like NATO is just a paper tiger," Vacroux said.

Russia could run such a test without overt military action, she said, adding, "You could imagine, like, one of the big questions is what kind of cyberattack constitutes a threat to attack?"

Although it is not a NATO member, the country of Moldova is increasingly worried about becoming a Russian target. Since the invasion of Ukraine, neighboring Moldova has faced crises that have raised fears in its capital of Chisinau that the country is also in the Kremlin's crosshairs.

The congress in Moldova's separatist Transnistria region, where Russia bases about 1,500 soldiers as nominal peacekeepers, have appealed to Moscow for diplomatic "protection" because of alleged increasing pressure from Moldova. "That appeal potentially leaves 'a lot of room for escalation,'" said Cristain Cantir, a Moldovan international relations professor at Oakland University. "I think it's useful to see the congress and the resolution as a warning to Moldova that Russia may get more involved in Transnistria if Chisinau does not make concessions."

On the Russian home front, more repressive measures could come in a new Putin term, even though opposition supporters and independent media already are cowed or silenced.

Stanovaya suggested that Putin himself does not drive repressive measures but that he approves such actions that are devised by others in the expectation that these are what the Kremlin leader wants.

"Many players are trying to survive and to adapt, and they compete against each other and often they have contradictory interests," she said. "And they are trying all together in parallel to secure their own priorities and the stability of the regime."

Russia last year banned the national LGBTQ+ "movement" by declaring it to be extremist in what officials said was a fight for traditional values like those espoused by the Russian Orthodox Church in the face of Western influence. Courts also banned gender transitioning.

Ben Noble, a lecturer on Russian politics at University College London, said he believes that the LGBTQ+ community could face further repression in a new Putin term.

They "can be held up as an import from the decadent West," he said. (AP)

## Human Development Index witnesses steep decline in the pandemic years of 2020-21

# Many countries are bouncing back from the pandemic but the poorest are not, UN says

**UNITED NATIONS, March 14:** Many countries are bouncing back from the Covid-19 pandemic, but the poorest are not and a significant number are seeing their conditions deteriorate, the UN Development Program said Wednesday.

Achim Steiner, head of the agency, said that after two decades during which rich and poor countries were coming closer in terms of development, the finding is "a very strong warning signal" that nations are now drifting apart.

The Human Development Index that the agency has produced since 1990 is projected to reach record highs in 2023 after steep declines during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. But development in half of the world's poorest countries remains below 2019 pre-pandemic levels, the report said.

"It's a rich person's versus a poor person's world in which we are seeing development unfolding in very unequal, partially incomplete ways," Steiner said at a news conference. "Why does this matter? Not only because it creates more vulnerability, it creates also more misery and protracted poverty, growing inequality."

The growing inequalities are compounded by the concentration of economic wealth, the report said.

It pointed to almost 40 per cent of global trade in goods concentrated in three or fewer countries. And it said the stock market value of the three largest tech companies in 2021 — Amazon, Apple and Microsoft — surpassed the gross domestic product of more than 90 per cent of the 193 UN member nations that year.



Steiner said the world's nations should be joining forces to focus on major threats in the 21st century, especially climate change, the next pandemic and the emergence of a digital economy and artificial intelligence. But instead, he warned,

there is increasing division and growing frustration and polarisation. He said a significant response has been the emergence of populism, which is anti-elite and hostile to international cooperation. He said that "is increasingly dividing

societies, radicalising the political discourse, and essentially turning more and more people against each other." The report says advancing global collective action to tackle the world's major challenges is hindered by an emerging "democracy paradox" — 90 per cent of people worldwide endorse democracy but for the first time over half the respondents in a global survey expressed support for leaders that risk undermining the foundations of democracy.

Territorial conflicts will continue to crop up, but the threats to human security in the 21st century will more often require being able to collaborate, Steiner said.

"We are driving ourselves deeper and deeper into a condition where our ability to solve problems is actually being compromised," he said.

"You will not stop climate change with missiles. You will not stop the next pandemic at your border with a tank, and you're certainly not going to stop cybercrime with missiles."

Steiner said it is important to dial down the temperature, misperceptions and misinformation "because they're actually being weaponised in turning people against each other." He said there also has to be a very careful look "at where inequality has become so extreme that it actually erodes the political willingness to cooperate".

The report calls for more spending on global public goods that benefit all people, including to stabilise climate and the planet, to harness new technologies to improve human development, and to improve the global financial system to

benefit low-income countries.

The agency's Human Development Index measures key issues for a long and healthy life, for gaining knowledge and for achieving a decent standard of living.

Based on the latest figures from 2022, the 10 places with the highest human development scores are Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Hong Kong, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Ireland tied for seventh, Singapore, and Australia and the Netherlands tied for 10th place. The United States tied with Luxembourg for 20th place.

The 10 countries with the lowest human development were Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Yemen, Burundi, Mali, Chad, Niger, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Somalia. All but Yemen are in Africa. (AP)

## Bill seeks to regulate ownership rather than banning it

# Citing India, US lawmakers vote on bill to regulate TikTok ownership

**WASHINGTON, March 14:** US lawmakers on Wednesday cited the bold move by India to ban TikTok four years ago as they voted in support of legislation about the Chinese app.

In a major bipartisan move, the House of Representatives passed by 352 to 65 votes the Protecting Americans From Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act co-authored by Indian American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, a Democrat, and Congressman Mike Gallagher from the Republican party.

The bill, which seeks to control the ownership of foreign apps like TikTok in the US, now heads to the Senate for it to be sent to the White House for the President to sign it into law.

Several lawmakers referred to the decision taken by India in 2020 to ban the app.

In 2020, India banned 59 Chinese-created apps, including TikTok, emphasising their priority to defend India's national security, said the office of Congressman Greg Murphy in a statement.

Lack of transparency from TikTok executives and their unwillingness to protect user privacy and information have also encouraged neighbouring governments like the European Union and Canada to prohibit the use of the application on government



devices.

"TikTok is used by China to target, surveil and manipulate American citizens," Murphy said.

"The app collects sensitive user data that is shared with the Chinese Communist Party and its intelligence services. Under its current ownership, it presents a grave national security threat," he said.

House Republicans said the ambitious data collection goals of China and the documented lack of transparency from TikTok and their executives over data and moderation practices has prompted governments, including the US, the European Union, Canada, India and several US States to ban the use of the application on government devices.

The White House said this bill when passed by the Senate would be signed into law by the President. At the same time, it insisted the bill does not ban apps like TikTok.

"We are glad to see this bill move forward. We will look to the Senate to take swift action. As we have said this is something that National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said -- this bill is important and we welcome the step in -- and ongoing efforts to address the threat posed by certain technology services operating in the US that put at risk Americans' personal information and our broader national security, including through the manipulation by foreign powers of Americans' views and beliefs," said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

## Third test flight of SpaceX's mega rocket ends with loss of spacecraft

**NEW MEXICO, March 14:** SpaceX's mega rocket blasted off on another test flight on Thursday and made it farther than two previous attempts, but the spacecraft was lost as it descended back to Earth.

The company said it lost contact with the spacecraft as it neared its goal, a splashdown in the Indian Ocean, about an hour after liftoff from the southern tip of Texas near the Mexican border.

Two test flights last year both ended in explosions minutes after liftoff.

Starship, the biggest and most powerful rocket ever built, headed out over the Gulf of Mexico after launch Thursday. Minutes later, the booster separated seamlessly from the spaceship and splashed down into the gulf and the spacecraft continued eastward. No people or satellites were on board.

An hour later, SpaceX commentators said contact had been lost with the spacecraft.

"The ship has been lost. So no splashdown today," said SpaceX's Dan Huot. "But again, it's incredible to see how much further we got this time around."

Earlier during the flight, SpaceX's Elon Musk had congratulated his team. "SpaceX has come a long way," Musk said via X, former Twitter. The rocket company was founded exactly 22 years ago Thursday.

The rocket and futuristic-looking spacecraft towers 397 feet (121 meters), easily exceeding NASA's past and present moon rockets.

NASA watched with keen interest: The space agency needs Starship to succeed in order to land astronauts on the moon in the next two or so years. This new crop of moonwalkers — the first since last century's Apollo program — will descend to the lunar surface in a Starship, at least the first couple times. (AP)

## Indian tourists shun the Maldives; industry feels the pinch: Reports

**MALE, March 14:** Indian tourists, who used to flock to the Maldives, are now shunning the island nation and its tourism industry is already feeling the pinch of declined revenue, prompting calls for mending the fence with New Delhi.

India has slipped to sixth position in 2024 compared to being a topper in visitor numbers in 2023, prompting voices from the local tourism industry to flag the danger for the tourism-dependent economy of the archipelagic country in the Indian Ocean.

A full-blown backlash was directed at the Maldives following derogatory remarks against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media by three Maldivian officials after Modi posted photos and video of the pristine Lakshadweep Islands on India's west coast on January 6 on his X handle.

According to the Maldives Tourism Ministry statistics, over 17 lakh tourists visited the island nation in 2023, out of which more than 2,09,198 visitors were Indians followed by Russians (2,09,146) and China (1,87,118).

The number of Indian visitors was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 while over 2.11 lakh Indians flew to the Maldives in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open for international tourists during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited that country during that period.

India occupied the sixth spot in tourist ar-

ivals in 2024, the Ministry's statistics showed, compared to the consistent first spot since 2020 with Indian tourists visiting the island nation even during the pandemic time.

Till about 10 days ago, the Ministry data showed that tourist arrivals from India as of March 2 was 27,224, which is a 33 per cent decline compared to last year when the corresponding number stood at 41,224.

The local tourism industry is worried about the development and already flagged caution.

Explaining how India plays a vital role in sustaining tourism-related receipts to the state during off-peak season, a news portal Sun.mv said: "Indian travellers have a counter-travel pattern to European travellers; meaning Indian visitors frequent to the Maldives during hot seasons, which coincides with a drop in European market arrivals. In other words, India is the most significant 'filler' for the Maldives tourism off-peak season."

It further reported on Tuesday, how, tourism industry experts and analysts have highlighted the adverse impacts of dwindling Indian arrivals to the Maldives, while some have forecast estimated losses north of USD 1.8 billion to USD 2 billion.

"Travel agencies and operators relying on Indian arrivals report a revenue decline of 80 per cent - a dangerous prospect," the report said. (PTI)



## If voted to power, INDIA bloc to be farmers' voice, says Rahul Gandhi; repeats caste census demand

**NASHIK, March 14:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said the opposition INDIA alliance, if voted to power, will be the "voice of farmers" and frame policies to protect them, promising to exclude cultivators from GST and restructure crop insurance scheme.

He was addressing a farmers' rally at Chandwad in Maharashtra's Nashik district along with NCP (SP) head Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, as part of the Congress' ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'.

Later in the day, Gandhi held a roadshow and a street-corner meeting in Nashik where he repeated his demand for a caste census in the country.

"The INDIA alliance government will be the voice of farmers and work to protect their interests. Mine and our (INDIA bloc) government's doors would always be open for farmers," he said at Chandwad.

The Congress leader promised loan waiver for farmers, restructuring of crop insurance scheme to benefit cultivators, to protect crop prices in formulation of export import policies and to make efforts to exclude agriculture from GST and work on only one tax.

The Lok Sabha member from Wayanad also reiterated the Congress' promise of a legal guarantee to minimum support price (MSP) as per the Swaminathan committee report.

The former Congress president claimed 20 to 25 people in the country have wealth equivalent to 70 crore of the country's population.

The Narendra Modi government waived Rs 16 lakh crore debt of industrialists, he further claimed.

"This amount is equivalent to 24 years of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) under which Rs 35,000 crore is spent every year to give employment to the poor people," Gandhi said.

He said the previous Congress-led UPA government had waived Rs 70,000 crore debt of farmers.

"If the loans of rich people can be written off, farmers also should get the benefit," he said.

Criticising the Agnipath scheme (under which soldiers are enrolled as Agniveers by the armed forces), Gandhi said the Agniveers are excluded from pension and martyrdom status and are given training for only six months.

"Like soldiers who protect our country's borders, farmers protect citizens within the country. If we don't safeguard our jawans and kisans, the country cannot progress," he said.

NCP (SP) leader Sharad Pawar accused the central government of being apathetic to the plight of farmers and the agriculture sector.

"Due to lack of a proper price for their produce, farmers are debt-ridden and committing suicide. The UPA government had waived Rs 70,000 crore loan of farmers," he said.

"It is our collective responsibility to defeat the anti-farmer, anti-youth government which invites inflation," the former Union minister said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) is with Rahul Gandhi in the struggle to fight for people's causes.

The MVA comprises the Congress, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar). It is part of the national-level opposition INDIA bloc.

Congress general secretary and party's in-charge of communications Jairam Ramesh told reporters that a separate commission would be set up to decide the quantum of loan waiver if the opposition bloc forms the government after this year's Lok Sabha polls.

A new crop insurance scheme would be worked out "in the interest of farmers and not private companies", he said.

Ramesh said The GST Act would be amended to exclude agriculture-related items from its ambit. "The Modi government's policy is to honour donors and disrespect farmers. But farmers will be the centre point of our policymaking," he said.

Later in the day, Gandhi held a roadshow and a street-corner meeting in Nashik city as part of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra and reiterated his demand for a caste census in the country. (PTI)

## 'One nation, one election' report says 32 political parties supported, 15 opposed

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** The high-level committee on 'one nation, one election' approached 62 parties out of which 47 responded — 32 in support of holding elections simultaneously, 15 against it.

Fifteen parties did not submit a response, according to the report of the panel submitted to President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday.

Among the national parties, the Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) opposed the proposal, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and National People's Party supported it.

"Responses were received from 47 political parties. Barring 15 political parties, the remaining 32 political parties not only favoured the system of simultaneous elections, but also advocated its adoption for saving scarce resources, protecting social harmony, and stimulating economic development," the report said.

"Those who opposed simultaneous elections raised apprehensions that its adoption could violate the basic structure of the Constitution, be anti-democratic and anti-federal, marginalise regional parties, encourage the dominance of national parties, and result in a presidential form of government," it said.

The AAP, Congress and CPI(M) rejected the proposal saying it un-



dermines democracy and the basic structure of the Constitution, said the report.

The BSP did not explicitly oppose it, but highlighted concerns regarding the large territorial extent and population of the country, which could make implementation challenging, said the report.

The Samajwadi Party in its submission said if simultaneous elections are implemented, state-level parties will not be able to compete with national parties in electoral strategy and expenditure leading to increased discord between these two sets of parties.

Among state parties, AIUDF, Trinamool Congress, AIMIM, CPI, DMK, Naga People's Front, and Samajwadi Party opposed the proposal to hold simultaneous elec-

tions. The AIADMK, All Jharkhand Students Union, Apna Dal (Soney Lal), ASOM Gana Parishad, Biju Janata Dal, Lok Janshakti Party (R), Mizo National Front, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, Shiv Sena, Janata Dal (United), Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, Shiromani Akali Dal, and United People's Party Liberal supported the proposal.

Others including Bharat Rashtira Samiti, Indian Union Muslim League, Jammu And Kashmir National Conference, Janata Dal (Secular), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Kerala Congress (M), Nationalist Congress Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Sikkim Democratic Front, Telugu

Desam Party, and YSR Congress Party did not respond.

Among other parties, CPI(ML) Liberation, Social Democratic Party of India opposed it, while Rashtriya Lok Janata Dal, Bharatiya Samaj Party, Gorakha National Liberal Front, Hindustani Aavam Morcha, Rashtriya Lok Jan Shakti Party, Rashtrawadi Congress Party (Ajit Pawar) were among those who opposed.

The report also said that at an all-party meeting in 2019, which was attended by 19 political parties to discuss critical reforms in governance, simultaneous elections was among the issues discussed and 16 of them favoured it.

Only three parties opposed the idea, it said.

According to the report, in the 2019 meeting the parties that had supported the idea are: the BJP, Nationalist Congress Party, Janata Dal (United), YSR Congress, Biju Janata Dal, Bharat Rashtira Samiti, Lok Janshakti Party, Shiromani Akali Dal, Apna Dal, All Jharkhand Students Union, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, National Democratic Progressive Party, National People's Party, People's Democratic Party, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party, and Republican Party of India supported the proposal.

The CPI(M), AIMIM and the RSP were the only parties that had opposed it. (PTI)

## We will take works done in past 15 months in court of public: Himachal CM on LS polls

**SHIMLA, March 14:** The Congress government in Himachal Pradesh has resolved pending problems, faced challenges of economic crises, monsoon disaster and political turmoil and will take the works done in the past 15 months in the court of the public, said chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu.

Talking to media persons here, a day after BJP named sitting MPs from Hamirpur and Shimla — Anurag Thakur and Suresh Kashyap — in its second list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Sukhu said notification of the polls is yet to be issued and the names of the Congress candidates for the parliamentary polls will also be announced.

"We have only faced challenges in the past 15 months on economic, disaster and political fronts and resolved pending issues. The BJP government never sought solutions to the issues and just lingered on the matters," he said.

The chief minister has been touring the state and making announcements in the run up to the Lok Sabha elections. Recently he had announced to give Rs 1500 per month to women in the age bracket 18 to 59 and a notification in this regard was issued on Thursday. A sum of Rs 800 crore would be spent on the initiative — Indira Gandhi Pyari Behna Sukh Samman Nidhi Yojna — benefitting over five lakh women annually, Sukhu had said.

The state cabinet had on Wednesday also given a green signal to Himachal Pradesh Rajya Chayan Aayog to go ahead with the process of declaration of results of Junior Officer Assistant (Information Technology). The JOA (IT) candidates who had appeared for the examination were protesting for the declaration

of results for quite some time.

Two of the six rebel Congress MLAs —? Rajinder Rana and Sudhir Sharma — who had voted in favour of BJP nominee Harsh Mahajan in the recently-concluded Rajya Sabha polls, had been raising the issue of these JOA (IT) candidates and youth seeking employment in general.

There are four Lok Sabha seats in Himachal Pradesh, namely Shimla, Mandi, Hamirpur and Kangra. The BJP announced its candidates from Hamirpur and Shimla (Schedule Caste) on Wednesday and is yet to declare the candidates for Mandi and Kangra seats. The Congress has not announced any candidate so far.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Thakur, the son of former chief minister and BJP leader P K Dhimal, is a four-time MP from Hamirpur while former BJP state president Kashyap would contest the Lok Sabha polls for the second time from the Shimla seat.

The BJP had won all the four Lok Sabha seats in 2019 with a thumping majority. BJP leader Krishan Kapoor won by a margin of 4,77,623 in Kangra, Ram Swaroop Sharma by 4,05,459 votes in Mandi, Thakur 3,99,572 in Hamirpur and Kashyap by a margin of 3,27,515 votes in Shimla.

However, the death of Sharma led to bye-elections in the Mandi seat in 2021 and wife of former chief minister Virbhadr Singh and current Congress state chief Pratibha Singh won the seat by a margin of 8,766 votes in the sympathy wave after the death of her husband. (PTI)

## If they interfere with right to life of poor, they don't have right to live: Adityanath on mafias

**AMBEDKAR NAGAR (UP), March 14:** Mafias don't have the "right to live" if they "interfere" with the right to life of the poor, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said on Thursday.

Addressing a function in Ambedkar Nagar to inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of projects worth Rs 2,122 crore, the chief minister alleged that before the BJP government in the state, mafias would encroach the lands of the poor and stopped them from celebrating their festivals.

"Can any mafia encroach over the land of the poor today? Can anyone harass our daughters? They know that if they harass any daughter, 'Yamraj' will treat him at the next road intersection," Adityanath said.

"Tell me if the ongoing treatment of mafias is correct or not? Do you support it or not?" he asked the crowd gathered at the function. Adityanath said it was because of the "double engine government" that the mafias in UP were receiving this "treatment". The mafias were "creatures reared and brought up" by previous governments that served as their leaders' source of income, he said.

"But we said that these creatures don't have the right to live if they interfere with the right to life of the poor. Their right to live will be snatched from them and they will be ended if they interfere," the chief minister said.

Over 180 alleged criminals were gunned

down in encounters in the state in the six years of Yogi Adityanath government from 2017 to 2023, as per data by state police.

According to the data, more than 10,900 police encounters have taken place in the state during this period. In these encounters, 23,300 alleged criminals were arrested and 5,046 were injured. The chief minister also targeted the Samajwadi Party in his address.

"A war is going on between chacha and bhatija there. The family gets busy with 'vasooli' (recovery) whenever any recruitment is announced," said Adityanath, in an indirect dig at SP president Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle and party leader Shivalp Singh Yadav. (PTI)

## Govt forms tribunal to look into ban on Jamaat-e-Islami, J&K

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** The Centre has constituted a tribunal, consisting of Justice Navin Chawla of the Delhi High Court, for the purpose of adjudicating whether or not there is sufficient cause for declaring the Jamaat-e-Islami, Jammu and Kashmir (JeI) as a banned organisation. On February 27, the central government had extended the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami, Jammu Kashmir, for five more years for its activities against the security, integrity and sovereignty of the nation.

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of section 5 read with sub-section (1) of section 4 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967), the central government hereby constitutes the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal consisting of Justice Navin Chawla, Judge, High Court of

Delhi, for the purpose of adjudicating whether or not there is sufficient cause for declaring the Jamaat-e-Islami, Jammu and Kashmir (JeI) as an unlawful association," a home ministry notification said. The outfit was first declared an "Unlawful Association" on February 28, 2019.

While extending the ban for five more years, the home ministry said the JeI has been indulging in activities which are prejudicial to internal security and public order and have the potential to disrupt the unity and integrity of the country. The home ministry has listed 47 cases registered against the JeI and that include an NIA case for collection of funds and used to encourage violent and secessionist activities.

The funds were also used by the active cadres and members of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and other terrorist organisations through a well-established network of their cadres to organise violent protests, create public unrest and communal disharmony, thus creating a sense of fear and insecurity in Jammu and Kashmir and all over the country, the home ministry said. (PTI)

## Kejriwal hits out at Centre over CAA implementation

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal slammed the BJP-led Centre on Thursday over the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), saying an unimaginable number of people will come to India with the doors opening for minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Reacting to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's reported comments against him over the CAA, Kejriwal said the country is important.

"He (Shah) has called me corrupt, but I am not important, the country is important. He did not answer the questions raised by me. He only abused me," the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader said at a digital press conference.

At a press conference here on Wednesday, Kejriwal alleged that the implementation of the CAA ahead of the Lok Sabha polls was "dirty vote-bank politics" of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and asserted that people want the law to be repealed.

He also slammed the BJP, saying it wants to bring in poor people hailing from minority communities in neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, and settle them here by giving them jobs and houses that rightfully belong to locals.

On Thursday, Kejriwal asked the Centre from where will jobs, houses and resources come for the refugees coming to India from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

"A bigger migration than that in 1947 will happen due to the implementation of the CAA. There are 2.5 crore to 3 crore minorities in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. An unimaginable number of people will come to India if the doors are thrown open for the minorities of neighbouring countries," he claimed.

Kejriwal said the Centre says those who came to India before December 31, 2014 will be granted citizenship.

"What I want to ask them is, did people stop entering India after 2014? Earlier, infiltrators were scared of getting caught and punished but the CAA will do away with that fear. Infiltrators are still entering the country," he said. (PTI)

## Govt-appointed panel framing rules for implementation of UCC in U'khand

**DEHRADUN, March 14:** The implementation of the Uniform Civil Code in Uttarakhand will take some more time as a state government-appointed panel, headed by former chief secretary Shatrughna Singh, is working on framing its rules.

The Uniform Civil Code bill was passed by the state assembly and also received the presidential assent recently after which it has become a law.

A gazette notification has been issued on the presidential assent to the bill and its becoming an act but another notification will have to be issued before its actual implementation after the panel

frames the rules related to putting it into effect, said Shailesh Bagauli, Secretary to Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama.

The panel was set up last month, about a week after the bill was passed by the assembly and sent to the president for her assent.

Former chief secretary Singh, who heads the panel formulating the rules for the implementation of the Act, was also part of the committee chaired by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai while drafting the UCC for Uttarakhand.

With the presidential assent to the UCC bill, Uttarakhand has become the first state in

the country after Independence to take a decisive step towards implementing it.

Protection of women's rights across all faiths is stated to be at the core of the UCC which addresses areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and live-in relationships. It bans practices like polygamy, child marriage, Iddat and Halala besides making registration of marriages and live-in relationships mandatory.

It has made stringent provisions for any violations rules related to the reistration of live-in relationships.

It also makes no discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children giving

them equal rights.

It also gives sons and daughters equal inheritance rights.

There is excitement in the BJP ranks as the presidential assent to the bill comes ahead of the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Bringing a UCC in Uttarakhand was a major promise made by Dhama to the people of the state in the run-up to the 2022 assembly elections.

On several occasions in the recent past, the chief minister has attributed the historic mandate for a second consecutive term in office for the BJP to its commitment on UCC. (PTI)

## India improves position in 2022 HDI, ranked 134 out of 193 countries

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** India's ranking on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) improved by one position in 2022 to 134 out of 193 countries ranked compared to 135 out of 191 countries in 2021.

On the Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2022, India has been ranked at 108 out of 193 countries with a score of 0.437. Its rank was 122 out of 191 countries with a score of 0.490 in the GI-2021. This shows a significant jump of 14 ranks on the GI-2022 vis-a-vis the GI-2021, the women and child development ministry said.

However, the country also has one of the largest gender gaps in its labour force participation rate — a 47.8 per cent difference between women (28.3 per cent) and men (76.1 per cent). After a drop in its HDI value in 2021 and following a flat trend over the past few years, India's HDI value has increased to 0.644 in 2022, placing the country at 134 out of 193 countries and territories in the just released 2023/24 Human Development Report (HDR).

India ranked 135 out of 191 countries in 2021 on the back of a marginal in-

crease in its HDI value to 0.644 compared to 0.633 in 2021.

The data was published in the United Nations Development Programme's report titled "Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World". It builds on the 2021-2022 Human Development Report findings that saw the global HDI value fall for the first time — two years in a row. The report revealed that while rich countries attained record human development, half of the poorest remain below their pre-crisis level of progress.

In 2022, India saw improvements across all HDI indicators — life expectancy, education, and gross national income (GNI) per capita and life expectancy rose from 67.2 to 67.7 years, expected years of schooling reached 12.6, mean years of schooling increased to 6.57 and GNI per capita saw an increase from USD 6,542 to USD 6,951. Moreover, India demonstrated progress in reducing gender inequality. The country's GI value of 0.437 is better than the global and South Asian averages, according to the report.

"India has shown remarkable progress

in human development over the years. Since 1990, life expectancy at birth has risen by 9.1 years, expected years of schooling have increased by 4.6 years and mean years of schooling have grown by 3.8 years. India's GNI per capita has grown by approximately 287 per cent," it said. With an HDI value of 0.644, the latest HDR places India in the medium human development category. Between 1990 and 2022, the country saw its HDI value increase by 48.4 per cent, from 0.434 in 1990 to 0.644 in 2022. India has also shown progress in reducing gender inequality and ranks 108 out of 166 countries in the GI-2022.

"The GI measures gender inequalities in three key dimensions — reproductive health, empowerment and labour market. The country's GI value of 0.437 is better than the global average of 0.462 and the South Asian average of 0.478," the report said.

"India's performance in reproductive health is better than other countries in the medium human development group or South Asia. India's adolescent birth rate in 2022 was 16.3 (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19), an improvement

from 17.1 in 2021," it said.

The ministry said that over the last 10 years, India's rank in the GI has become consistently better, indicating progressive improvement in achieving gender equality in the country. In 2014, this rank was 127, which has now become 108.

"This is an outcome of the decisive agenda set by the government for ensuring women's empowerment through policy initiatives aimed at their long-term socio-economic and political development. The government's initiatives have spanned across women's lifecycle, including large-scale initiatives for girls' education, skill development, entrepreneurship facilitation and safety in the workplace. Policies and legislations in these areas have been driving the government's 'women-led development' agenda," the ministry said in a statement.

The UNDP report notes that inequality across the world is rising again. After 20 years of convergence, the gap between the richest and poorest countries has started to widen from 2020, it said. These global inequalities are compounded by substantial economic concentration. (PTI)

## In India's tech capital, Kannada now gets 'prominence' on signboards of businesses

**BENGALURU, March 14:** As one goes around India's tech hub, what catches the eye most these days is how the language of the land, Kannada, gets "prominence" on the signboards of businesses. A far cry indeed from the not-too-distant past when English held sway, thanks to a government directive.

With the deadline for complying with 60 per cent use of Kannada in signboards of businesses and establishments coming to an end, a vast majority of them in the city appear to have obeyed the mandate, with many even going for stopgap arrangements, aimed at ensuring compliance. A bill mandating 60 per cent use of Kannada in signboards of businesses and establishments was passed by the Karnataka Assembly in February, and the government had warned that non-compliance would lead to the cancellation of the licences of businesses.

Now, temporary boards or banners instead of boards that are not rules compliant, and also clothes or stickers covering the old boards, can be seen at several places in the city, in a bid to avoid fines and other penal action.

Many traders, who have gone for this ad hoc arrangement, cite demand and supply mismatch as the reason for not installing new boards before the deadline. They say that in the wake of rules and the deadline for compliance, board makers or artists were besieged by traders and businesses with orders. There are supply side

constraints, with an inadequate number of competent board artists to meet the surge in demand, coupled with resources and logistic issues.

"There is a delay in delivery of a new board with 60 per cent in Kannada, for which I had placed an order. So I have used this banner for the time being. I don't want to face any trouble for non-compliance," a trader told PTI on Thursday.

Bengaluru's civic body, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike had earlier set a February 28 deadline to comply with 60 per cent use of Kannada in signboards of businesses and establishments in the city limits. However, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also in-charge for Bengaluru Development, had extended the deadline by two weeks. A shop owner said he had been to several board makers and artists, and many did not take his order, citing that "their hands are full."

"While some of them were ready to take orders said there will be some delay. I finally agreed to it. My board will come in a couple of days. Till then I have covered my existing board with stickers," he said. Agreeing that there have been some delays on their part in delivering orders on time as required by the customers, board designers and manufacturers say, the process is time-consuming, and they are also facing a shortage of manpower to meet the sudden rise in demand, along with logistic issues. (PTI)

# Bhutanese PM Tobgay begins India visit

Tobgay's visit to India came against the backdrop of China and Bhutan looking at an expeditious resolution of their festering boundary row

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on Thursday began a five-day visit to India, his first foreign trip after assuming the charge of the top office in January.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold wide-ranging talks with his Bhutanese counterpart this evening with an aim to further bolster India-Japan ties. Tobgay was received at the airport in the national capital by Union minister Ashwini Kumar Choubey.

"The visit of @PMBhutan is in keeping with the exemplary ties of friendship between India & Bhutan," external affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on "X".

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Bhutan on extending cooperation in the field of energy efficiency.

The Cabinet also cleared the signing of an agreement between Bhutan Food and Drug Authority (BFDA) and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for cooperation in the



area of food safety.

In a statement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Wednesday said Tobgay's visit will provide an opportunity to the two sides to review the progress in the "unique partnership" and to discuss ways to expand the "enduring" ties of friendship and cooperation between India and Bhutan.

Tobgay's visit to India came against the backdrop of China and Bhutan looking at an expeditious

resolution of their festering boundary row that could have implications for India's security interests. Around five months back, Bhutan's then Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing.

A Chinese readout on the talks said Bhutan firmly abides by the one-China principle and stands ready to work with China for an early settlement of the boundary issue and advance the political

process of establishing diplomatic relations. New Delhi has been keeping a close eye on the negotiations between Bhutan and China on their boundary row as it could have implications for New Delhi's security interests, especially in the Doklam tri-junction.

In August last year, China and Bhutan agreed to expedite and take simultaneous steps to implement a "three-step roadmap to resolve their festering boundary dispute.

In October 2021, Bhutan and China signed an agreement on the "three-step roadmap" to expedite negotiations to resolve their boundary dispute.

The signing of the pact came four years after the Indian and Chinese armies were locked in a 73-day stand-off at the Doklam tri-junction after China tried to extend a road in the area that Bhutan claimed belonged to it.

The India-China stand-off in the Doklam plateau in 2017 even triggered fears of larger conflict between the two neighbours. Bhutan had said the area belonged to it and India supported the Bhutanese claim. (PTI)

# BJP misused central agencies to garner ₹ 400 crore through electoral bonds: Cong

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** The Congress on Thursday alleged that the BJP has misused central agencies like ED and CBI to garner ₹ 400 crore through electoral bonds from 45 companies after raids on them and demanded that it should come out with a white paper on its finances if it cared about democracy.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge cited media reports saying fresh investigations have revealed that 15 more companies donated to the BJP after raids were conducted on them by central probe agencies. "Was it blackmail, extortion, loot and coercion to get more donations? A fresh investigation shows 15 more companies, donated to BJP after ED, CBI, IT raids, making it a total of 45 companies paying BJP nearly ₹ 400 crore," Kharge alleged in a post on X.

"According to reports, 4 shell companies also funded BJP. Dictatorial Modi Government has frozen Congress party's bank accounts, while it extracts money by using Central agencies," he also alleged.

The Congress chief claimed that

the BJP used "unconstitutional and illegal electoral bonds to pad its "loot chest", and has also "manipulated" Electoral Trusts to "increase its donation loot" by 10 times.

"If BJP is bothered about 'Mother of Democracy', then it should bring a white paper on its own finances, through an independent investigation," Kharge demanded.

He cited some media reports that claimed that 15 more donors of the BJP include four shell firms, 11 companies that faced central action and that 30 firms who donated ₹ 335 crore to the BJP were also stung by I-T, ED, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Wednesday announced sharing details of electoral bonds "in time" and asserted that the commission believed in complete transparency.

Kumar, who ended his nationwide visits ahead of the Lok Sabha election schedule announcement, also said that the poll body was ready to hold assembly as well as Lok Sabha elections in the Union territory.

The State Bank of India (SBI) on Wednesday told the Supreme

Court that a total of 22,217 electoral bonds were purchased by donors between April 1, 2019 and February 15 this year, out of which 22,030 were redeemed by political parties.

In a compliance affidavit filed in the apex court, the SBI said as per the court's direction, it has made available the details of electoral bonds to the Election Commission of India before the close of business hours on March 12.

It said details, including date of purchase of each electoral bonds, names of the purchaser and the denomination of the bonds purchased have been furnished.

The affidavit, filed by SBI's chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara, said the bank has also furnished to the EC details like date of encashment of the electoral bonds, the names of political parties which received the contributions and the denominations of the bonds.

"A total number of 22,217 bonds were purchased during the period April 1, 2019 till February 15, 2024. At the time of collating the information for the ECI, the details were segregated as below..." it said. (PTI)

# Centre revises flexible complementing scheme for scientists

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** The Centre has revised a flexible complementing scheme related to the recruitment and promotion of scientists in different central government departments, according to an official order.

The move was necessitated considering the evolving advancement in the field of science and technology, and the requests of the various central government ministries/departments in this regard.

Based on the recommendations of the sixth Central Pay Commission (6th CPC), the flexible complementing scheme (FCS) for scientists, that existed in some of the scientific ministries/departments of the government of India, was modified and instructions on modified flexible complementing scheme (MFCS) were issued by the Personnel Ministry in September 2010.

These guidelines are not applicable to Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Departments of Atomic Energy and Space, where the scientists are governed by another scheme called merit based promotion scheme.

"Subsequent to the issue of these guidelines, a need was felt for enhancing the educational qualifications in the MFCS by several ministries/departments in order to recruit scientists as per their work function and detailed deliberations were held on the issue," an order issued by the Personnel Ministry said.

Keeping in view that the field of science and technology is evolving, the requests of the various ministries/departments have been examined and suitably incorporated in the revised scheme, it said and issued a revised FCS.

"Provisions of revised FCS would be effective from July 1, 2024," the order issued to all central government departments/ministries said.

In order to obviate future concerns relating to interpretation regarding educational qualifications or inclusion of new disciplines, the revised scheme provides for setting up of an inter-ministerial committee under Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) with Secretary, Department of Science and Technology as member and secretary of the concerned ministry/departments as the co-opted member, it added.

All scientific ministries/departments presently implementing MFCS and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology shall initiate action for incorporating the provisions of the revised FCS by amending the provisions of relevant recruitment rules so that recruitment rules are brought in conformity with the provisions of the revised FCS, the order dated March 13 said. (PTI)

# 'Bharat Shakti' given strategic message to adversaries about combat potential of India's armed forces: Sources

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Integrated mega exercise 'Bharat Shakti' at Pokhran has given a "strategic message to the adversaries" about the combat potential of India's armed forces, sources in the defence establishment said.

Homegrown aircraft roared in the air while indigenously built battle tanks and artillery guns spewed fire dominating the arid terrain of Pokhran in Jaisalmer district during the exercise held on March 12 which was witnessed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the country's top military brass.

"The live fire and static display have given a strategic message to the adversaries about the combat potential of our armed forces in terms of capability and capacity," a source in the defence establishment said.

The exercise was organised under the aegis of the Indian Army.

The synergised demonstration of indigenous defence capabilities during 'Bharat Shakti' is a "testimony to its commitment towards modernisation through indigenisation," the sources said.

Roars of LCA Tejas and ALH Mk-IV filled the air while Main Battle Tank Arjun, K-9 Vajra, and T-90 Bhisma tanks, and Dhanush and Sharang artillery gun systems ruled the firing ranges on the ground. Pinaka rocket system in action drew huge cheers from the crowd.

'Bharat Shakti' exercise was held for about 50 minutes during which India showcased the prowess of its indigenous defence



equipment. The field firing ranges at Pokhran in Rajasthan is located near the international border.

The exercise showcased India's military prowess and integrated multi-domain operations of the three services and the "shock and awe" impact that the armed forces seek to achieve in an operational situation with manoeuvre and fighting capabilities.

As awestruck spectators watched the exercise in Rajasthan, Modi said "Pokhran has become witness to the trinity of India's 'aatmanirbharta', belief and self-pride".

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar, IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari and Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande and Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma also attended the tri-services firepower and manoeuvre exercise, a first-of-its-kind on such a scale.

"Exercise 'Bharat Shakti' not only dis-

played the indigenous defence capability of the armed forces, it also displayed the integration and jointness that is being achieved in various aspects like communications, training, inter-operability and logistics," the source added.

Coordinating actual fire and manoeuvre drills by various arms and services is essential requirement of such large-scale exercises, which gives "first-hand experience of dealing with such issues in actual battles".

All these activities also include, move of large number of equipment and weapon pieces for firing and display, which involves "coordination with other two services at the highest level", sources in the military establishment said. While efforts are in place and extensive plans are being made to "orchestrate integration and bring jointness among the services", 'Bharat Shakti' epitomises these efforts and highlights the contributions of the Indian Army towards achieving the much-awaited integration, they said.

The exercise showcased an array of indigenous weapon systems and platforms as a demonstration of the prowess of a rising India, premised on the nation's 'Atmanirbharta' initiative, the sources added.

For live fire demonstration, the efforts by the Army as being the lead service, "are visible". Starting with meticulous planning in utilising the available resources in Pokhran for integrated firing which can be attributed to "battle space management akin to actual operations", they said. (PTI)

# 'Engage experts in K-RIDE to fast-track Bengaluru suburban rail project'



**AHMEDABAD, March 14:** Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has requested the Karnataka government to transform Rail Infrastructure Development Company (KARIDE) Limited (KRIDE) by engaging people with high technical expertise to speed up the Bengaluru suburban railway project.

"A company called KRIDE, which the state government controls, is doing the Bengaluru suburban railway project. It doesn't have people with high technical expertise. I request the Karnataka government to engage such experts so that the project work can be expedited," Vaishnaw, who was in Ahmedabad recently, told PTI.

"Bengaluru suburban railway project is very important for the people but unfortunately KRIDE at present lacks the kind of expertise it should have. We need people like E Sreedharan who transformed the public transport system in the country," he added.

In June 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while talking about the project, said, "We will work hard to fulfil the dreams of the people of Bengaluru in the next 40 months which were pending for the last 40 years."

Recently, when the state government announced the revised deadline and extended its project completion date from December 2025, as promised by PM Modi, to December 2027, BJP MP from Bengaluru South Tejasvi Surya questioned the extension and blamed the state government for the delay.

Vaishnaw too feels that KRIDE lacks the competence to finish it on time. "The state government needs

to understand that railway is a technical subject and bring technical people in KRIDE," he said.

According to a press statement issued by the Railway Ministry in January 2021, the Centre had approved the ministry's proposal for the construction of the suburban rail project in October 2020.

It further said that the project, which envisages the construction of four suburban rail corridors with a total route length of 148.17 km, would be implemented by Rail Infrastructure Development Company (Karnataka) Limited (KRIDE), a joint venture company set up by the Ministry of Railways with the Government of Karnataka as a special purpose vehicle.

Proposing to complete the project in six years at an estimated cost of Rs 15,767 crore, the January 2021 release said, "The project envisions the creation of a dedicated suburban railway system in Bengaluru City to provide a safe, accessible and comfortable mode of public transport. The project will ease traffic congestion, enhance rural-urban connectivity and provide a cleaner mobility solution to lakhs of daily commuters."

"It will provide an economic, efficient and eco-friendly transit alternative to the Garden City of Bengaluru. It will alleviate the massive transport problem of Bengaluru and link all parts of the city seamlessly.

"By providing rapid connectivity to Bangalore International Airport, IT hubs and the commercial centres, the rail network will boost productivity and growth by reducing commuting time," it added. (PTI)

# Govt cracks down against OTT platforms for vulgar content

**BHARUCH, March 14:** The parents of some girl students appearing for Class X examination in a Gujarat school have alleged that the administrator of the exam centre forced their wards to remove hijab before a paper, prompting the education department to take action against the school official.

According to the parents, the incident occurred at Lions School, a private school in Ankleshwar town in Bharuch district, on Wednesday before the mathematics paper.

Following the allegation, the state education department on Thursday ordered the removal of the exam centre administrator, Iiben Suratiya, who is also the principal of that school.

The action against her was taken

by District Education Officer Swati Raol, after she met the parents of these girl students, officials said.

The Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (GSHSEB), which conducts the Class X exams, made it clear that there are no specific rules about the clothes worn by the examinees, and they can appear for the exam in any "decent" attire.

Talking to reporters, a parent said, "The school principal and other staff harassed the girl students, including my own daughter, by asking them to remove their hijab ahead of the exam. My daughter cried for three hours after returning home. It happened with nearly a dozen girls yesterday. We

want the authorities to take action against those involved in this act."

Lions School has been selected as one of the exam centres by the GSHSEB. As per the rules, it is compulsory to have CCTV recording of each and every classroom, where students write their exam papers.

According to the parents, one such CCTV footage accessed by them showed that some women supervisors asked two Muslim girl students to remove their hijabs. The women can be seen collecting the hijab from the two students.

When confronted by the parents, Suratiya told them that she asked the girls to remove the hijabs because their faces were not clearly visible in the video recording. (PTI)

# Govt cracks down against OTT platforms for vulgar content

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Government on Thursday said it has taken action to block 18 OTT platforms and social media accounts associated with them for publishing obscene, vulgar and in some instances pornographic content. In a statement, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting said 18 OTT platforms and 19 websites, 10 apps (seven on Google Play Store, three on Apple App Store), and 57 social media accounts associated with them have been disabled for public access in India.

Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Anurag Thakur has emphasised the responsibility of the platforms to not propagate obscenity, vulgarity and abuse under the guise of 'creative expression'. (PTI)

# Experts lay stress on early screening, awareness for combating chronic kidney disease

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Early detection and screening, coupled with awareness on preventive lifestyle habits, is key for kidney health, experts said at the Kidney Care Summit 2024.

The virtual summit was organised by the Integrated Health and Wellbeing Council on Wednesday and supported by RG Hospitals to promote awareness and educate people on the imperative role that kidney health plays in the overall wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Discussing about kidney stones as a major risk factor for Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD), Dr Manish Singla, chief urologist, RG Hospital, Delhi, cleared many myths and misconceptions related to kidney stones and said "patient counselling, along with initiating a multi-disciplinary approach in managing the disease, can ensure better health outcomes for individuals".

In India, nearly 58 lakh people die every year from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) that include different kinds of kidney ailments as well. Several studies have estimated that the number of new patients diagnosed with End Stage Kidney Disease (ESKD) in India is also more than one



lakh per year and kidney diseases exert significant pressure on the out-of-pocket expenditure incurred by a majority of the patients.

Taking part in the inaugural session titled "Overview of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) in India: Current Challenges and Future Directions", Dr Urvasi Prasad, Director, Office of Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog, observed that public-private partnerships

can provide better opportunities for integrated kidney health management, instead of working in silos.

She further elaborated that "focusing on prevention is indeed crucial, especially in large populations where the burden on healthcare systems can be overwhelming and hence, prevention can play a key role in bringing down sheer numbers as well as the cost involved". (PTI)

According to the experts, lifestyle-related conditions, such as obesity, high stress levels and inadequate sleep, can also have negative effects on kidney health. Many of these factors can be avoided through the adoption of a healthier and more active lifestyle, which can lead to sustainable improvements.

In keeping with the theme of the World Kidney Day 2024 -- "Kidney Health for All, Advancing Equitable Access to Care and Optimal Medication Practice" -- the summit saw fruitful discussions on accessibility and affordability in innovative kidney care and management as well as strategies for bridging regional inequality in kidney care in the country.

Commencing the summit, Kamal Narayan, CEO of the IHW Council, said, "In addressing kidney ailments, prioritising prevention over treatment through healthy lifestyle choices is paramount. Nonetheless, it is equally crucial to create a supportive and enabling environment for chronic kidney patients and their caregivers, while also guaranteeing accessible and affordable kidney care that leaves no one behind." (PTI)

# Tinsukia: First legacy waste free district in NE India

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** The Tinsukia district administration, in coordination with five municipal boards in the district namely Tinsukia, Doomdooma, Digboi, Margherita, and Makum Municipal Board, initiated an ambitious initiative to make the district legacy waste-free in March 2023. The first project was initiated by pooling in Oil India Limited CSR Funds for the bio-mining of legacy waste of Tinsukia and Makum Municipal Board. Since then, 75,000 metric tons (MT) of waste have been treated at the dumpsite at Tingrai, Tinsukia. This has been an emotional issue for the people of the region for a long time, as they were unable to pass the area on Tinsukia Dulaian Road due to the bad smell and filthy flies buzzing all around. Additionally, in Doomdooma Municipal Board, 18,000 metric tons (MT) have been treated, while in Digboi and Margherita, 25,000 and 30,000 metric tons (MT) of waste, respectively, have been processed utilising the bio-mining technique, mak-



ing the district's total reach 1.53 lakh metric tons (MT) within the span of a year.

This marks the commitment of the state government in fulfilling its green agenda in line with the guidelines issued by the NGT. The agency entrusted to execute these projects in all the ULBs is M/s Call and Fix.

Swapneel Paul, district commissioner, Tinsukia, has stated that the treatment of waste in all the sites combined has

yielded more than 80 bighas of reclaimed land near the urban centres of the district, which can now be used for developmental activities.

He has also mentioned that an MOU was executed with Dalmia Cement, where refuse-derived fuel (RDF) coming out as a by-product of the process is sent to the cement factories for their utilisation. This initiative has made Tinsukia a model district in the reclamation of land through biomining of legacy wastes.

## NFR to run five special trains to clear festive rush

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** In a bid to clear the extra rush of passengers during the ensuing festive season of Holi, it has been decided to run five pairs of passenger special trains. The special trains will be operated between Sealdah- Jagiroad- Sealdah, New Tinsukia - Jaynagar- New Tinsukia, and Udaipur - Katihar- Udaipur, each running for two trips. The Holi Special trains between Hapa - Naharlagun - Hapa and Ranchi - Purnia - Ranchi will run for a single trip each.

Special Train no 03105 (Sealdah - Jagiroad) will depart on March 15 and 22, 2024 at 09:00 hours from Sealdah to reach Jagiroad on the next day at 06:30 hours. In the return direction, Train no 03106 (Jagiroad - Sealdah) will start its journey on March 16 & 23, 2024 from Jagiroad at 13:00 hours to reach its destination at Sealdah on the next day at 13:00 hours. Train no 05974 (New Tinsukia - Jaynagar) will depart on March 19 & 26,

2024 at 05:00 hours from New Tinsukia to reach Jaynagar on the next day at 09:30 hours. In the return direction, Train no 05973 (Jaynagar - New Tinsukia) will start its journey on March 20 and 27, 2024 from Jaynagar at 12:10 hours to reach its destination New Tinsukia on the next day at 21:00 hours. Train no 09623 (Udaipur - Katihar) will depart on March 19 and 26, 2024 (Tuesday) at 16:05 hours from Udaipur to reach Katihar at 02:45 on Thursday. In the return direction, Train no 09624 (Katihar- Udaipur) will start its journey on March 21 and 28, 2024 from Katihar on Thursday at 15:00 hours to reach its destination Udaipur at 04:15 hours on Saturday. Train no 09525 (Hapa - Naharlagun) Special will depart from Hapa at 00:40 hours on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 and reach Naharlagun at 16:00 hours on Friday. Similarly, Train no 09526 (Naharlagun - Hapa) will depart from Naharlagun at 10:00 hours on Saturday, March 23, 2024 and reach Hapa at 00:30 hours on Tuesday.

## Nagaon district library hosts special concert

HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, March 14:** The 150th birth anniversary of Pandit Vishnu Digambara Pulaskar, the premier icon of Indian classical music, was celebrated with an exceptional concert of Indian classical music at the Nagaon District Library Auditorium on Tuesday. The program was organised by Shastriya Sangeet Manch, Nagaon. Dr Mridul Hazarika, vice-chancellor of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, inaugurated the program, while Ritu Rajnish, principal of Delhi Public School, Nagaon, was present as a special invitee. Artists Ranjan Bezbaruah and Dr Joyshri Pathak anchored the entire program.

During the program, Dr Santosh Kumar, professor at the department of Music, Sikkim University, and his disciple Gopal Poudel featured a flute performance, while Rishika Ghosh from Guwahati performed Khayal, Bhajan, and Dadra. Besides, Maitri Deka performed Vedic Mantra, while Indrani Bora led Saraswati Vandana. A Chota Khayal, directed by Suwagmoni Mahanta, was performed by a group of students. Noted musicians like Munin Goswami, Tarun Ch Kalita, Prashun Ghosh, Nayan Kamal Saikia, Kanak Hira, Tapan Das, and Snehmeed accompanied the session as instrumentalists of various musical instruments, as stated in a press note here.

## BPF MCLA Joy Mushahary joins UPPL



HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, March 14:** The holistic approach for the development of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) government led by Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Region, has connected the public and the leaders of the Opposition parties also. Accordingly, Joy Mushahary, BPF MCLA of the Salbari constituency, along with several BPF party leaders, formally joined the UPPL party on Thursday at a program held at Kushrabari Playground under the Salbari constituency in Baksa district.

Joy Mushahary, who was regarded as one of the prominent leaders of the BPF party, was elected to the BTC Legislative Assembly in 2020 from the Salbari constituency. He joined the ruling UPPL party on Thursday

and was accompanied by more than 2,500 BPF party workers, including leaders from the district and block committees.

Rajya Sabha MP and UPPL working president Rungwra Narzary, BTR executive members Ranjit Basumatary, Dhananjay Basumatary, Rakesh Brahma, and senior party leaders graced the program and offered a warm welcome to Joy Mushahary and the newly joined members with traditional Aronai and party mufflers.

MP Narzary said that the BTR government led by Pramod Boro is working dedicatedly towards the welfare and development of the common masses across communities.

He said that the BTR government is committed to working for the all-round development of society, and accordingly, various missions have been launched and are being implemented across the Bodoland region.

He said that the developmental and welfare activities initiated by the BTR government are getting impressive attraction among the citizens in the entire Bodoland region.

"Let us all unite and work together for the peace, integrity, justice, prosperity, and development of our region under the umbrella of our UPPL party in the Bodoland region," Narzary added.

## Assam Rifles distributes equipment

HT Correspondent

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 14:** In a collaborative effort between Assam Rifles and Gyan Jyoti Organisation, the distribution of assistive equipment to people with disabilities was carried out on Thursday at Battalion Headquarters, Lokra, stated a press release. Under this program, people with disabilities were identified in Sonitpur district and provided with tailored assistive devices to meet their unique needs. These devices ranged from mobility aids like wheelchairs and crutches to hearing aids and other supportive tools, fostering independence and improved accessibility. The distribution process was meticulously organised, ensuring that the right equipment reached the intended beneficiaries.



partment of Environmental Science, and Prof Ashalata Devi, DST's CoE principal investigator (PI) and convener of the event, were also present on the occasion.

Delivering the inaugural address, Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, VC, said that the reality of climate change looms larger, and its impacts are becoming increasingly evident. He further stated that in the case of the northeast, these effects are particularly pronounced due to its delicate ecosystem.

Speaking on the occasion as

chief guest, Dr Anita Gupta said that the aim of the conclave is to provide a common platform for the exchange of knowledge and discussion to address significant climate change-related issues in the northeast region. Dr Gupta urged that from academicians to scientists to policymakers, each has a role to play in shaping a more sustainable and resilient future for generations to come.

Speaking as the guest of honour, Dr Susheela Negi said that the conclave is an initiative towards fostering dia-

logue and collaboration in addressing the pressing challenges posed by climate change in the vulnerable ecosystem of the eastern Himalayan region.

During the inaugural ceremony, a book on 'Compendium on Climate Change: Adaptation and Resilience in North East India' was released by the dignitaries on the dais. The event featured various technical sessions focusing on climate change-induced impacts such as habitat loss, decreased carbon storage, declines in crop yields, changes in the distribution of wild plant species, etc.

Dr NH Ravindranath, retired professor from the Centre for Sustainable Technologies, IISC, Bangalore, and Dr BK Tiwari, retired professor from the Department of Environmental Science, NEHU, Shillong, were also among the dignitaries gracing the inaugural function.

# Protests persist against CAA implementation

Activists voice opposition, demand repeal amid ongoing demonstrations

HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, March 14:** Activists of Margherita Regional Student Union on Thursday hoisted a black flag at NH 315 Block Timali Margherita against the BJP-led government, which has notified the rules for implementation of Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Margherita Police interrupted the activists of Margherita Regional Student Union who had hoisted the black flag. Activists of Margherita Regional Student Union shouted various slogans.

Rupam Baruah, literary secretary of Tinsukia District Student Union, said that it is very unfortunate that the government, both at the Union and state levels, which promised to safeguard the 'Jati, Mati, and Bheti' of Assam and Assamese people, have failed in every sphere, which will completely ruin the art, culture, language, religion, and tradition of greater Assamese society. Rupam Baruah said that Assam and Assamese people shall never accept the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) at any cost. All Assam Student Union (AASU) and other indigenous organisations of Assam shall fight against the BJP-led government until CAA is canceled by hook or crook, said Rupam Baruah.

**Our Demow correspondent:** The All Tai Ahom Students Union (ATASU), Nitaipukhuri, and Panidiehung Regional Committees protested against the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in Nitaipukhuri near Demow on Wednesday. The activists of All Tai Ahom Students Union (ATASU), Nitaipukhuri, and Panidiehung Regional Committees held placards and protested



in Nitaipukhuri near Demow on Wednesday, demanding the exemption of the CAA at the earliest.

**Our Sivasagar correspondent adds:** The anti-CAA stir launched by the combined Opposition parties and some organisations in Sivasagar continued on Thursday in Doulmukh Chariali, despite a vigilant police force patrolling the town on all streets. Over a hundred activists of Rajjor Dal led by Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi took part in the demonstration from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm and chanted slogans against the government. The agitators vowed their commitment to continue the fight against the Act and the government that has implemented it. The Sivasagar MLA read out a copy of the oath to the activists, and they all pledged to defeat the BJP in the upcoming elections in the state. The activists demanded protection of the land, people, and the culture of Assam.

**Our Gossaigaon correspondent adds:** A strong protest by the Trinamool Congress Committee workers under the aegis of the Kokrajhar district Committee was carried out at Padmabil in Gossaigaon expressing

dissatisfaction and demanding the repeal of the contentious Citizenship Amendment Bill Act implemented by the central government.

Trinamool Congress workers in Gossaigaon burnt copies of the CAA amid massive protests in various parts of the state, starting from Lower Assam to Upper Assam, demanding the repeal of the Citizenship Amendment Bill passed by the Central government in the Parliament.

The agitators of Trinamool Congress displayed placards at the district office in Padmabil and threatened that the law that the saffron party wants to impose the burden of foreigners on the greed of votes will not be tolerated.

Uttam Kumar Talukdar, district president of TMC, while burning the copies of CAA, promptly demanded the repeal of the CAA Bill Act-2019 and said that the bill, which was designed to forcibly impose the burden of foreigners in the interest of vote banks, will not be accepted. If the government does not repeal the CAA Bill Act-2019 at its earliest, then an intense democratic movement across the state will be carried out.

## Governor administers oath

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Governor Gulab Chand Kataria administered the oath of office to Dr Babu Lal Ahuja as vice chancellor of Bodoland University at a function held in the Conference of Raj Bhavan on Thursday.

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

Dr Babu Lal Ahuja assured the Governor, who is also the chancellor of Bodoland University, that he would carry out his responsibilities diligently and work for the development of the university and its students. The ceremony was attended, among others, by the advisor, chancellors secretariat Prof MK Choudhury, commissioner and secretary to the Governor SS Meenakshi Sundaram, vice chancellors of different universities, and senior officers of the state government.

### KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

#### DEPARTMENT OF S. E. WORKS

#### KAAC::: SECRETARIAT

DIPHU-782460

No. KAAC/HRN/W-06 (Pt)/2023.24/ 117

Dtd.13 /03/2024

#### TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender affixing non refundable KAAC court fee stamp (receipt) Rs. 10 00 (Rupees Ten) only eventually to be drawn up in form are hereby invited from KAAC registered contractor/reputed firms of works department and will be received by the undersigned up to 4 P.M. on 18/03/2024 and will be opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the tenderer or their authorized agent if any.

If the day of the opening of tender happens to be a holiday/non-working days, the tender will be opened in the next day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject any tender without any reason thereof and will not be bound to accept, the lowest tender quoted rate.

SL No	Name of Works	Tender Amount	Earnest money	Time allowed for completion
1	Construction of Boundary wall at Rangina Chatravas At Phudum Sarpo.	Rs. 72,00,000.00	ST/SC/OBC =1% General = 2%	60 days

Detail N I T documents and name of works amounts may be obtained from Office of the 514 Works), KAAC, Diphu during working hours on payment of Rs. 500/-

#### Terms a Conditions

##### N.B.

- The rate to be quoted as % (Percent) above/below/as per schedule rate for building/sanitary/works for all division under PWD for the year 2021.
- Earnest money should be deposited in favour of the undersigned in the form of call deposit/bank draft & should be attached with the tender without which no tender will be accepted.
- The Contractor shall Repair/Re-Construction if the works executed failed due inferior quality of works The KAAC Authority will take legal action if the contractor refuse to repair/Re-construction the woks.
- The work must be carried on as directed by the E.E (W), KAAC/KAAC Authority.
- The following up to date documents should be enclosed with the tender.
  - Professional Tax Clearance Certificate.
  - Sale Tax Clearance Certificate/GST.
  - Council Registration.
  - Call Deposit.
  - Council receipt
  - Caste Certificate.
  - Aadhaar Card
  - Pan Card
  - Account number
- Payment will be made subject to availabilities of fund
- The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest quoted rate.

Sd/-

Superintending Engineer (Works)

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council

DIPHU.

# Messi leads Inter Miami in 3-1 win over Nashville, exits early because of leg injury



**FORT LAUDERDALE (FLORIDA), March 14:** Lionel Messi had a goal and an assist before leaving the game due to a leg injury as Inter Miami beat Nashville 3-1 in the second leg of the CONCACAF Champions Cup round-of-16 matchup on Wednesday night. Messi found his former Barcelona teammate, Luis Suárez, in stride for a goal that opened scoring in the eighth minute. The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner then added a first-half goal to give Inter Miami an early 2-0 lead. The

Argentine superstar checked out of the match in the 50th minute. Coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said after the game that Messi is dealing with a mild leg injury that started bothering him during the game, so the team took him out as a precaution.

He had rested during Sunday's 3-2 loss to Montreal, which is the only game he has missed this season. Martino said Messi will likely miss the team's MLS match Saturday against D.C. United. "I don't want to risk it," Martino

said. He added that Messi will undergo tests, and the team will evaluate from there.

Messi was replaced Wednesday by Robert Taylor, who scored in the 63rd minute to give Inter Miami a 3-0 lead.

Inter Miami advanced to the CONCACAF Champions Cup quarterfinals with the win and 5-3 advantage in aggregate goals in the total-goals series.

The teams had tied in the first leg in Nashville last Thursday. Messi scored in regulation, and

Suárez scored the tying goal in stoppage time to rally Miami to a 2-2 draw. Messi went down late in regulation of that game when Nashville defender Lukas Macnaughton stepped on his left calf. A trainer checked on Messi, who remained on the pitch.

He had been listed as questionable with a shin injury entering Sunday's game against Montreal, but Martino said after that match that the plan was always to rest Messi for that game.

The rest seemed to bode well

for Messi's performance Wednesday, as he wasted no time making an impact.

He earned a free kick after a foul by Nashville's Anibal Godoy just four minutes into the match, but had his attempt blocked. The 36-year-old seized his opportunity a few minutes later, using his impressive vision to fit a pass to a streaking Suárez, who sent the ball into bottom right corner of the net.

Messi then used a pass from Diego Gómez to score from inside the penalty area as fans started chanting his name. Taylor later got on the board with a header off an assist by Suárez.

"Lionel Messi himself was very, very sharp in the first 15 minutes," Nashville coach Gary Smith said after the match. He was then asked his thoughts when he saw Messi trotting off the field early in the second half.

"Firstly, thank goodness," Smith said jokingly. "He's such a huge influence on the rest of the group. Yes, they have other very good players, but there is no one that can do what he can do. ... Delighted to see him go off, I honestly thought that their performance dipped, and it gave us a little bit of an incentive."

Nashville had a chance late in the second half when Hany Mukhtar got past Miami's defense and sent a shot into the back of the net. Officials overturned the goal after a lengthy review, ruling that Mukhtar was offside. (AP)

## Domestic umpiring standards under scanner after CK Nayudu Trophy howler



**BENGALURU, March 14:** The dubious dismissal of Karnataka opener Prakhari Chaturvedi in the recent Col. CK Nayudu Trophy U23 final against Uttar Pradesh has raised concerns about the standards of umpiring in domestic matches.

The unsavoury incident happened in Karnataka's first innings after Chaturvedi played a pull against UP pacer Kunal Tyagi well away from his body.

The ball, which took a rather healthy edge off Chaturvedi's bat, moved further away from stumper Aaradhya Yadav who had to make a full-length dive to his left to make the collection.

But the ball rolled out of Yadav's gloves before he could complete the catch even as the wicketkeeper thudded on to the ground.

However, the on-field umpire upheld the appeal for caught behind much to the dismay of batter Chaturvedi, who made 33 and 86 in Karnataka's maiden victory in the tournament which came by virtue of their first innings lead here at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

"Yes, it was a clear case of not out as I later saw the clippings. The ball came out of UP wicketkeeper's hands before he completed the catch. The umpire should not have given it out," a former First-Class umpire told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"It is important to maintain top standards because these junior tournaments are stepping stones for several budding cricketers. Imagine how bad that boy (Chaturvedi) would have felt after spending close to an hour at the crease, only to get out like that."

"Also, umpiring standards have a direct relation with the overall quality of a match," he said.

So, how can one ensure consistency and high level of accuracy in domestic umpiring?

"The BCCI has laid out some strict parameters in the umpires' selection process and many state associations themselves have umpires associations working hard to ensure a good level of officiating."

"But I feel former cricketers should be encouraged to take up umpiring as they know the game closer than anyone else. We have had S Venkataraghavan, Peter Willey, David Shepherd and Dickie Bird who were excellent umpires as they leaned on their experience from their playing days," he added.

Recently, former India batter Manoj Tiwary had lashed out at poor standards of umpiring in domestic cricket.

Another former First-Class batter said instances of umpires making childish mistakes were quite common in domestic circuit. (PTI)

# Watson undecided on Pakistan head coach role despite PCB accepting fees demands

**KARACHI, March 14:** Former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson, who is in line to take over as Pakistan cricket team's head coach, is yet to make up his mind despite the PCB accepting his remuneration demands.

According to sources in the board, Watson has demanded \$2 million annually, which is approximately around 46 million rupees per month, the highest fee ever paid to a foreign coach. Former foreign coaches of Pakistan such as Richard Pybus, Bob Woolmer, Geoff Lawson, Dav Whatmore,

Grant Bradburn and Mickey Arthur were paid much less than what Watson has demanded. "He has a young family in Australia and also has commitments in the USA Major League. So, he is weighing his options as the board wants him to spend maximum time in Pakistan helping them also discover and groom talent at domestic level," the source said.

He conceded Watson was taking time to ink the contract because of the frequent changes within the PCB and the coaching staff.

Watson, at present, is coaching the Quetta Gladiators in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) and has no prior experience of coaching an international team although he has dabbled in coaching roles in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi had made it clear that he would want a foreign coaching set-up to run the team with the full backing of the board.

Naqvi, despite being appointed as minister of interior, has also indicated he has no intention of leaving his post in the

board and will do both the jobs simultaneously.

However, it will not be the first time an official heading the PCB has also held a position in the government, and the source said the International Cricket Council (ICC) had no objection to Naqvi donning the dual role.

Naqvi has already got six bureaucrats of the Punjab government to work on deputation in the board and also announced that he would be taking no salary as minister of interior. (PTI)

## Indian boxing's HPD Dunne resigns, foreign coach set to be sacked after Olympic Qualifier debacle

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** India's dismal performance in the recent Olympic Qualifiers for boxing has triggered a coaching crisis just four months before the Paris Games as High Performance Director Bernard Dunne has stepped down while foreign coach Dmitry Dmitruk is likely to be shown the exit door very soon.

Dunne, a former Irish professional boxer who was appointed as the HPD in October 2022, sent out his resignation from Italy, where he was with the Indian team for the first World Olympic Boxing Qualifiers.

After two qualification events - the Asian Games and the first World Olympic Boxing Qualifier - not one Indian male pugilist has been able to book a place for the Olympics.

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) has called an executive meeting on Friday to assess the situation. "Bernard is out. We have called an executive meeting tomorrow, where we will assess everything. A call on Dmitry's future will also be taken in tomorrow's meeting," BFI Secretary General Hemanta Kalita told PTI.

Dmitruk assumed charge in February last year, just ahead of the women's World Championships. The federation is now looking at Indian coaches to take charge of the men's and women's teams with two months left for the final Olympic qualifier in May.

"There will be no foreign coaches as of now. We will be looking at Indian coaches," he added.

At present, long-serving C A Kuttappa is the only Indian in men's coaching staff, while the women do not have an Indian

coach after Bhaskar Bhatt stepped down to once again take over as youth coach in June last year.

Indian boxers cut a sorry figure at the recently-concluded first World Olympic Boxing Qualifiers in Italy where all nine pugilists -- two women and six men -- returned empty-handed.

Barring Nishant Dev (71kg), who was a win away from winning a quota, all other boxers crashed out in the opening round in Italy.

More than the defeat, it was the manner in which the boxers lost, including a first-round RSC and a knockout, that has triggered concerns.

All four quotas in boxing have come in the women's competition with two-time world champion Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg), and Tokyo Olympics bronze-medallist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) securing their passage to Paris.

Indian boxers now have one last chance to book their Olympic tickets during the second World Olympic Boxing Qualifier, scheduled to be held in Bangkok from May 23.

With very little time left, the BFI will have to take several big calls, including continuing with the contentious selection process that was drafted by Dunne.

The Irishman did away with selection trials, instead opting for an evaluation process, in which the boxers were judged on various parameters.

Many boxers and even coaches, including former men's chief coach Narendra Rana, resisted the move alleging that the process is "subjective". (PTI)

# Bournemouth comes back from 3-0 down to beat Luton 4-3 in the Premier League

**BOURNEMOUTH (ENGLAND), March 14:** Bournemouth completed a stunning comeback to beat Luton 4-3 in the Premier League on Wednesday after being 3-0 down at halftime.

Antoine Semenyo's 83rd-minute strike at Vitality Stadium sealed the win for Bournemouth and prevented Luton from climbing out of the relegation zone.

Bournemouth is the third team in Premier League history to come back from 3-0 down at halftime and win. Manchester United and Wolverhampton were the other two teams to achieve that feat.

"I haven't been involved in a

game like that before," Semenyo said. "Even when we are down at halftime we know that man to man our game is about bravery. So in the second half whether we are down or up we are going to be pressing the same way. We know that we are going to have chances and second half today was amazing."

Luton had looked set to climb up to 17th in the standings and above Nottingham Forest on goal difference after strikes from Tahith Chong, Chiedozie Ogbene and Ross Barkley before halftime. But Bournemouth powered back after the break through Dominic Solanke, Illia Zabarnyi and a double from Semenyo.

"It's going to hurt but we have to pick ourselves up," Luton manager Rob Edwards said. "We have another huge game (against Forest) in a few days time and we've got no other option but to pick ourselves up and go again."

The game had been rescheduled after the original fixture was abandoned when Luton captain Tom Lockyer suffered a cardiac arrest on the field in December.

Lockyer was in attendance along with the medical staff who treated him on the field and received a standing ovation from fans. He was soon celebrating with the rest of the visiting fans when Chong headed Luton in front in the ninth.

## Pant's resilience, mental strength was quite something: Medical staff that worked with him

**BENGALURU, March 14:** The medical staff that nursed Rishabh Pant back to full fitness after the horrifying car crash in 2022 has raved about the resilience and mental strength shown by the cricketer, saying he persevered through a "frustrating" recovery process.

Pant is set for his cricketing return in the IPL on March 23 when he will captain Delhi Capitals against Punjab Kings in Mohali. "I feel very close to normal," Pant told 'bcci.tv' with a radiant smile. It seemed far fetched 15 months ago when he suffered multiple injuries in the crash. However, it has come true thanks to the expert care he got from the likes of Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, Director, Centre for Sports Medicine, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital in Mumbai, and some dedicated staff at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru. Pardiwala remembered how arduous Pant's recovery journey was.

"As surgeons and as doctors,

it's very important for us to inform our patients, their family and all the stakeholders of the actual status of the injury. Rishabh's mother was with him. She was very concerned whether he would ever be able to walk again," Pardiwala said.

"I told her that 'this is such a critical injury and we will definitely aim for him to get back to competitive cricket. But that's going to be a long-drawn process.'"

However, Pardiwala was left astonished when he saw Pant's confidence as he entered the recovery phase. "When I told Rishabh 18 months, he said 'okay, I am going to show you I can do it in 12 months'," he said.

Pant stayed true to his words as he put in the hard yards at the NCA during his recuperation.

"When I started walking without crutches, that was a high point. Then started jogging a little bit, that was a high for me, then started batting, then started keeping as I took joy in every-



thing," said the 26-year-old.

But each of those baby steps had to be taken with utmost care because of multi-level complexities. Pardiwala said the complex knee injury, the trauma following the accident and Pant's own frustration at being away from the cricket field had to be dealt with in an effective manner.

"For any surgeon, knee dislocation is one of the worst injuries because everything breaks. You

Ogbene doubled Luton's lead in the 31st and Barkley made it 3-0 with a powerful effort in the first minute of first-half stoppage time. Bournemouth had come back from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 with Sheffield United on Saturday and produced an even more impressive fightback on this occasion.

The home team scored three in 14 minutes after the break, with Solanke pulling one back in the 50th. Zabarnyi headed in a second in the 62nd and the scores were level two minutes later when Semenyo struck at the near post. Semenyo hit the winner with an effort across Luton goalkeeper Thomas Kaminski to seal

a spectacular win.

"We finished the game very happy obviously, but there were moments during the game where we were struggling and it was difficult to keep believing," Bournemouth manager Andoni Iraola said. "The players did it and we could finish the comeback in the end." Bournemouth midfielder Tyler Adams entered in the 71st minute for his first Premier League appearance for the southcoast club. The United States captain had hamstring surgery last October. He had appeared in just one game since March 11, 2023, playing 21 minutes against Stoke on Sept. 27 in the English League Cup. (AP)

riod for Rishabh. We had to support him through that phase."

Dhananjay Kaushik, the NCA physiotherapist, said Pant came to him with a dilapidated knee after the accident, but he too was amazed at Pant's positive attitude. "None of the ligaments (on Pant's injured right knee) were spared during that accident. ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament), PCL (Posterior Cruciate Ligament), a part of the quadriceps, you name it and he did not have it. "I think if there is anyone who could make a comeback, it is Rishabh Pant, with the attitude he has got," said Kaushik.

Nishanta Bordoloi, the strength and conditioning coach at NCA, said the whole episode left Pant a transformed human being.

"It has made him a better human being. He is now respecting life, as a whole, more. It has just made him more resilient and stronger. He was a very good human being, he has become an even better human being now," said Bordoloi. (PTI)

# Mumbai clinch Ranji Trophy for 42<sup>nd</sup> time, beat Vidarbha by 169 runs in final

**MUMBAI, March 14:** Domestic heavyweights Mumbai ended their eight-year barren run to lift a record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title here on Thursday, beating a resolute Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of a thoroughly engrossing summit clash.

The fate of the final -- Mumbai's 48th in the 90 years of the tournament's history -- here at the iconic Wankhede Stadium was sealed when the hosts set a 538-run target for the visiting team.

Vidarbha captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session on the last day after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win.

The team was eventually bowled out for 368 in a contest that ebbed and flowed with Vidarbha frustrating the hosts for long periods of play on the last two days.

Wadkar led the fight for his side with his first century of the year which also helped him cross the 600-run mark this season. Dubey brought up only the second fifty of

his first-class career.

Together, they forged the longest stand of the innings, consuming 255 balls in 194 minutes from day four until a little after the resumption of the second session on the final day.

Wadkar fell shortly after play resumed -- leg before off Tanush Kotian (4/95) -- and once the pair was broken, it all ended in a jiffy for the visitors who have now lost the Ranji Trophy final for a third time after winning two titles.

Tushar Deshpande continued to employ the short ball to dismiss Dubey (65 off 128 balls, 5 x4s, 2x6s) and Aditya Sarwate, who missed the majority of the game owing to a back spasm.

While Kotian cleaned up Yash Thakur (6) for his fourth wicket, Dhawal Kulkarni signed off from all forms of cricket with the final wicket of the game in the form of Umesh Yadav for a fairytale ending. Mumbai skipper Ajinkya Rahane praised Vidarbha for their gritty display before lifting the trophy and rightly so.

For a team which paid a heavy price for a poor first-innings score



-- 105 to concede a 119-run lead in response to Mumbai's 224 -- Vidarbha showed resilience to give a fine account of themselves in the second innings.

Mumbai began the final day hoping to break the sixth-wicket stand between Wadkar and Dubey early but their wait only extended since the batters overcame all challenges that the hosts threw at them.

With the pace bowlers not being able to trouble the batters, Mum-

bai hopes were pinned on their spinners but their own error cost Rahane's side early on.

Kotian appealed for a bat-pad catch at silly point against Dubey in the 101st over of the innings but the appeal was turned down.

In a show of desperation, Mumbai went for the DRS intervention which confirmed the ball had not grazed the bat and was also going to miss the leg stump.

Kotian then found an outside edge off Wadkar's bat which fell

## Erratic Sindhu goes down to An Se Young in All England Championships



**BIRMINGHAM, March 14:** An error-prone PV Sindhu suffered a straight-game defeat to her nemesis An Se Young of Korea in the women's singles second round at the All England badminton Championships here on Thursday.

Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, seemed to be in good touch as she fought hard against the world No. 1 Korean but failed to curb her mistakes as she slipped to a 19-21, 11-21 loss in their 42-minute clash.

It was the Indian's seventh successive loss to the indomitable An Se Young, who had become the first Korean woman singles player to win the World Championships last year.

The Korean won in Malaysia and France this season, while Sindhu is on a comeback trail after recovering from a left knee injury.

The Indian tried to attack but her 22-year-old opponent looked in a different league as she varied the pace of the rallies and used her repertoire of strokes well to come up trumps.

For Sindhu, things went downhill after the break in the second game as errors kept piling up. Sindhu was up 4-1 but An Se Young started reading the game better and slowed down the rallies. She kept sending the tosses and clears, waiting for errors from Sindhu, who invariably sent the shuttle well and long.

Soon the Korean was 9-6 up. She committed two unforced errors before charging to the net to put one away and when Sindhu faltered at the net it was 11-8 in favour of Young.

Sindhu kept the attack, producing a backhand push and a cross smash. The Korean, however, stayed solid in her defence to move to 13-10 and then 15-11 with another precise smash.

Sindhu tried to charge to the net and target her rival's body but Young's instinct helped her to survive twice as she sent the shuttle away.

From 13-17, Sindhu fought back to 16-17. But Young again pulled away with two points before grabbing four game points with a forehand drop. Sindhu pounced one at net and then produced a tight smash on her rival's forehand to stay alive. The Korean then slipped during a rally as Sindhu made it 19-20.

However, just in time, An Se Young sent a backhand sailing over Sindhu's head to the backline to seal the opening game.

The second game started on a tight note before An Se Young opened up a three-point lead. While Sindhu struggled to get winners, Young kept varying the pace and sending everything back.

Another cross court smash took the Korean to 9-4. She grabbed a five-point lead at the interval with another incredible cross court net shot.

Frustration was piling for Sindhu as she wasted a video referral after going long by a big margin and dumped into net twice next as the Korean led 15-9. Another backhand and a forehand return went to net as it became 10-18. Two more unforced errors from the Indian helped An Se Young grab nine match points. She sealed the match with another lovely return at the front court. (PTI)

## RCB kick-starts pre-tournament camp, Kohli expected to join in next few days

## Nagaland to host Northeast Games 2024 from March 18

**BENGALURU, March 14:** Royal Challengers Bangalore began their pre-tournament camp without their numero uno Virat Kohli, who might take a few more days to join before the team starts its IPL campaign against reigning champions Chennai Super Kings on March 22.

Most of the domestic players joined the camp under the guidance of new head coach Andy Flower and Director of Cricket Mo Bobat and they went through the paces on the opening day of the camp on Wednesday.

While skipper Faf du Plessis was in attendance along with West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph, Kohli, easily the biggest 'Box Office' in Indian cricket, is yet to hit the straps after a paternity break that ruled him out of the marquee five-Test series against England.

"Kohli is expected to join in the next few days," a BCCI source, who is tracking developments within IPL teams, told PTI. Kohli might make his first appearance for the franchise during 'RCB Unbox', a high-profile annual event held at the Garden City in which fans get a glimpse of their favourite stars.

As RCB started their training session, skipper Du Plessis told the team it was lucky to have Flower as its coach.

"I think he's an incredible coach. So I feel team is very lucky to have him, kind and big hearted man," Du Plessis was quoted as saying on RCB 'Bold Diaries'.

Flower, on his part, said: "New chapter to write in RCB story, we have been given the chance to write and it is a privilege, something to be very excited about." (PTI)

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, March 14:** Nagaland will host the six-day Northeast Games 2024 from March 18. This is one of the biggest sporting events to be hosted by Nagaland where players from all northeastern states will compete in 15 disciplines. To be hosted in partnership by the Nagaland Olympic Association with state youth resources department, the tournament stands as a significant platform to celebrate and promote the rich sporting culture of the region. It is also an endeavor aimed at fostering unity and solidarity among the North East states, the Nagaland Olympic Association said.

In the run-up to the preparations, the hosting venues will conduct practice sessions, rehearsals and sound checks for the various events including the opening and closing ceremonies. There will also be cultural performances and featured shows every evening during the entire duration of the games.

Meanwhile, the North East Sports Association announces the schedule and venues for the games. The games will commence with an opening ceremony at 7 pm on March 18 at the Games Village, Regional Centre for Sporting Excellence in Chumoukedim, promising a spectacular start to this celebration of athleticism and sportsmanship. The games will be held in three districts of Chomoukedima, Dimapur and Kohima. While the main events will be held at the Regional Center For Sporting Excellence in Chumoukedima district, athletics will be held in Kohima and lawn tennis at Kuda village in Dimapur district. Football and archery will take place at Chumoukedima police complex. The Northeast Games 2024 will conclude with a closing function at the Games Village at 7 pm on March 23, where athletes will be honoured for their performances and commitment to the spirit of fair play.

Government of Assam  
Department of Industries, Commerce & Public Enterprise

**MoU Signing Ceremony with Mega Investors**

AND

**Ceremonial Distribution of CMAAA Benefits**

**Ceremonial Distribution of Startup Grants**

AND

**For Distribution of Startup Grants**

**Total investment ₹2050 Cr**

**Investment MoU with 7 Companies**

**Total employment to be generated 6500 persons**

**Chief Guest**  
**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**  
Chief Minister, Assam

**Total amount of Grant ₹ 11 Cr**

**Srimanta Sankaradeva International Auditorium, Panjabari**

**15 March 2024**

**2:00 pm**

Janasanyog/D/19521/23/15-Mar-24

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