

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- Russians cast ballots on Day 2 of election
- Cease-fire talks with Israel and Hamas expected to restart
- 'India remains committed to partner Bhutan in its quest to become high-income nation'
- Last chance to save democracy, Constitution: Cong after EC announces LS election schedule

Assam all set for 3-phase voting post-Bihu

7-phase LS polls to begin on April 19 ● Counting on June 4 ● Poll code comes into force

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI, March 16: The seven-phase Lok Sabha polls, the world's biggest election exercise, will kick off on April 19 with the counting of votes set to take place on June 4 even as the state is set for three-phase voting for 14 Lok Sabha seats.

Announcing the election schedule on Saturday, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said over 97 crore voters – 49.7 crore males and 47.1 crore females – were eligible to cast their vote in the polling process spread over 44 days and across 10.5 lakh polling booths.

The elections will begin on April 19 followed by subsequent phases on April 26, May 7, May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1, Kumar said at a press conference.

In the previous general elections in 2019, there were a total of 91.2 crore eligible voters of which 61.5 crore – 67.4 per cent – turned out to exercise their franchise.

Kumar said the aim was to improve the voting percentage in this election and better the record of



holding peaceful and fair elections with near-zero repolls.

The Election Commission is pulling out all stops to increase voter turnout and has plans to reach out to voters over the age of 85 years at their homes to help them cast their votes. Similar facilities will be available to persons with more than 40 per cent disabilities. The model code of conduct

has come into effect with the announcement of the elections.

Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim will be held on April 19, and in Andhra Pradesh on May 13. Elections to Odisha assembly will be held in four phases on May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1.

The CEC said the poll authority is prepared to counter the chal-

lenges of four 'M's – muscle power, money power, misinformation and Model Code of Conduct violations.

Nearly 1.5 crore personnel including those on election and security duties will be deployed for the smooth conduct of polls.

Drone-based checking at borders, surveillance of non-chartered flights, a crackdown on misleading advertisements and fake news, and "ruthless" action against poll violence are part of the EC's strategy to deal with the four challenges.

Meanwhile, polls for the 14 Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam will be held in three phases just after Rongali Bihu beginning on April 19, according to the poll schedule announced on Saturday.

Five constituencies each will go to polls on April 19 and 26, while voting for four seats will take place on May 7. In the first phase, Kaziranga, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur will be held on April 19. Voters of Darang-Udalguri, Diphu (ST), Karimganj, Silchar (SC) and Nagaon will

exercise their franchise in the second phase. In the third and final phase on May 7, polling will be held in Kokrajhar (ST), Dhubri, Barpeta and Guwahati constituencies, according to the schedule announced by the ECI.

The notification for the first phase will be issued on March 20, and the last date for filing nominations is March 27. The scrutiny of nominations will be on March 28 and the last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 30.

In the second phase, notification will be issued on March 28, the last date for filing nominations is April 4, scrutiny on April 5 and the last date for withdrawal of nominations is April 8. In the third phase, notification will be issued on April 12, the last date for filing of nominations is April 19, scrutiny on April 20 and the last date for withdrawal of candidature will be April 24.

In the outgoing Lok Sabha, the BJP has nine seats, Congress three and AIUDF one, while there is one independent legislator from Assam Soon after (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Dibrugarh, Jorhat among 9 Assam seats that will witness keen contest

GUWAHATI, March 16: Dibrugarh and Jorhat are among the nine major constituencies which will be in focus during the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls in Assam.

Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal is pitted against Assam Jatiya Parishad's Lurinjyoti Gogoi in Dibrugarh while deputy leader of the opposition in the outgoing Parliament Gaurav Gogoi will take on BJP MP Topon Gogoi.

The elections will be held in three phases on April 19, 26 and May 7.

Assam has 14 Lok Sabha constituencies with BJP holding nine, Congress three, and the AIUDF and an independent one seat each in the outgoing house. The NDA alliance in the state is contesting in all the 14 constituencies. The BJP has announced candidates in 11 seats while its partners Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) will contest in two seats and the United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL) in one.

The Congress, a constituent of

the 16-party United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA), will contest in 12 seats and has left the Dibrugarh seat for BJP. There has been no decision yet for the Lakhimpur seat.

The key seats identified in Assam are Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Kaziranga, Guwahati, Dhubri, Sonitpur, Nagaon, Barpeta and Silchar.

The brief profiles of the nine constituencies are as follows:

Dibrugarh: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal is the BJP candidate for this commercially significant constituency with tea gardens and oil wells. He will take on BJP's Lurinjyoti Gogoi, UOFA's consensus candidate. Former chief minister Sonowal and Gogoi are former office-bearers of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). Sonowal, the first non-Congress candidate to win the seat as an AGP candidate in 2004, has replaced Union minister Rameswar Tel, who had won the 2019 polls by over three lakh (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Foundation Day

HOWRAGHAT: The Boro Writers Academy (BWA) has organized a five-day programme to celebrate its 40th Foundation Day from March 13 to 17 at its headquarters in Kajalgaon in Chirang district. The fourth day of the programme included a discussion on the lifestyle of prominent Boro writer and Sahitya Academy Award winner Nandeshwar Daimari. The meeting was chaired by former president of Boro Writers Academy Rakhau Basumatari and assistant secretary Rajen Narzary presented a brief biography of Nandeshwar Daimari. The event was chaired by Subungsar Musahari. The event was attended by writers from different parts of the state who read out their poems, short stories etc on the occasion. Three authors also released their books on the occasion.

Officer suspended

JORHAT: Moonmoon Sen, a junior accounts assistant of the Jorhat treasury office within the district commissioner's office complex, has been suspended from service on Saturday following her arrest by a team of the vigilance and anti-corruption wing of Assam police while reportedly accepting money as bribe from a complainant on Friday. She allegedly demanded the bribe for processing pay bills of the complainant.

Drugs destroyed



GUWAHATI: The police on Saturday destroyed drugs that had been seized during different operations. The drugs were destroyed at the Common Bio-Medical Waste Treatment Facility of M/S Fresh Air Waste Management Services Pvt Ltd at Panikhati in the city. The drugs comprised of 3,842 kgs of heroin, 2) 45.106 kgs of ganja, 319 bottles of cough syrup and 15,953 banned tablets. Indrani Barua, chairperson of the Drugs Destruction Committee of the special task force and other members of the committee executed the destruction procedures after obtaining due permission from the court and the Pollution Control Board, Assam.

2024 battle royal: 'Modi Ki Guarantee' vs Cong's 'Nyay guarantees'

NEW DELHI, March 16: Promises galore and guarantees by various political parties will compete and clash as high-decibel campaigns get underway. Here are the 10 key issues likely to be the centre of discussion in the seven-phase general elections that begin on April 19.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, brimming with confidence that he will get a third consecutive term, has pitched 'Modi Ki Guarantee' as the main theme of his campaign.

'Modi Ki Guarantee', as described on the PM's website, is a guarantee for the development of youth, empowerment of women, welfare of farmers, and all those marginalised and vulnerable who have been ignored for decades. The

idea is also about the government's aim of ensuring saturation of all welfare schemes. It is likely to be the 'catchphrase' in this election, the centre of much of the war of words between rivals.

The grand old party found some of its mojo back in the state elections of Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana when it pitched guarantees to the people which clicked electorally. For the Lok Sabha polls, the party has put forward its 5 'Nyay' guarantees aimed at ensuring justice for youth, farmers, women, labourers, as well as participatory justice.

The 'Nyay' guarantees have been presented before the people during the Manipur to Mumbai Rahul

Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. The Congress' manifesto is likely to be framed around these guarantees and the party would design its campaign around them. Whether it will result in the party's electoral resurgence only time will tell.

The INDIA bloc, including the Congress, has been raising the issue of unemployment and rising prices of essential commodities. They have stated repeatedly that lack of jobs is the single biggest issue and sought to corner the government over the issue. The BJP has hit back citing job growth and a fast-growing economy. The poll season will see intensifying debate over these bread and butter issues. The abrogation of Article 370, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CAA, child marriage, UCC key poll issues in Assam

GUWAHATI, March 16: The implementation of the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA), paving the way for granting citizenship to undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, will be a major poll issue for both the ruling and the opposition parties in Assam. The polls will be held in the state in three phases on April 19, 26 and May 7.

The ruling BJP will focus on delivering the promise of granting citizenship to Hindu Bengali migrants from Bangladesh who came before the cut-off date of December 31, 2014, while the opposition parties will highlight the violation of the Assam Accord, signed in 1985 to

end the six-years agitation against foreigners, which had the provision for "detection and deportation" of all persons who entered the state from Bangladesh post-March 24, 1971.

BJP will also focus on ending insurgency in the state by bringing the ULFA (Pro-talk) faction along with all Bodo, Karbi, Dimas and Adivasi militant outfits to the talks table and offering them a rehabilitation package. The opposition, however, will point out that talks with this faction have no meaning as this faction have no meaning as this faction have no meaning since 2009 while the ULFA (Independent), led by Paresh Barua, was yet to come for talks and was still firm on the outfit's (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

People living in camps in violence-hit Manipur to vote from there: EC

NEW DELHI, March 16: People living in camps in violence-hit Manipur will be allowed to vote from their camps in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission announced on Saturday.

Responding to a question on Manipur during a press conference on the announcement of dates of the Lok Sabha elections, chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar said "we will make all arrangements." "We have drawn a scheme, which we have notified... to allow the voters in the camp to vote from the camp. Like there is a scheme for Jammu and Kashmir migrants... same way the scheme will be implemented in Manipur. Voters will be (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong treats Muslims like slaves, says Assam MP after quitting party

Abdul Khaleque in touch with AGP, TMC, AAP following his resignation from Cong

GUWAHATI, March 16: Congress MP Abdul Khaleque from Assam, who quit the party a day ago, on Saturday accused his former party of treating Muslims as 'slaves' and attributed his resignation to personal vendetta by a senior AICC leader.

Expressing disappointment over not being nominated for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, Khaleque claimed that several parties, including Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), TMC and AAP, were in touch with him, but refrained from confirming whether he will be joining any other party at the moment.

Khaleque claimed that his resignation was not due to being denied a party ticket, but also because of broader grievances within the party, including a lack of representation for Muslims.

Khaleque, a two-time MLA and one-time MP, had sent his resignation from primary membership of Congress to its national president

on Friday, days after the party dropped him from its list of candidates for the forthcoming elections.

In the resignation letter, he claimed that the party has taken a "strange route" in the state, and "the attitude and approach taken by the party's state president and AICC general secretary in-charge has ruined the prospects of the party in Assam".

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Bhupen Kumar Borah had rushed to the MP's Guwahati residence soon after he resigned, and both leaders later indicated that there could be reversal of Khaleque's decision to quit.

Confirming his resignation on Saturday, Khaleque said, "As I was in the party earlier, I was bound by discipline. But now I can speak freely as I have quit." He claimed that he had conveyed his grievances towards Borah and AICC general secretary in-charge of Assam Jitendra Singh to the party central leadership, and even wrote to Singh with his issues concerning the party in February, but failed to get any proper response.

"Somehow, Jitendra Singh has some personal vendetta against me, I don't know the reason for it. Finally, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurating the Hospitality Skill Development Centre of Excellence, a joint initiative of the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC), Union ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship (MSDE), Indian Hotels (IHCL, Taj Group) and Tata STRIVE at Sonapur. UB photos

Poll body determined to tackle challenges: Chief election commissioner

EC gears up to deal with muscle, money, misinformation, model code violations

NEW DELHI, March 16: Drone-based checking at borders, surveillance of non-chartered flights, a crackdown on misleading advertisements and fake news, and "ruthless" action against poll violence are among the EC's strategies to deal with the four-fold challenge of "muscle, money, misinformation, and Model Code violations".

Announcing the schedule of general elections for the 18th Lok Sabha, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said the poll body is fully determined to tackle the challenges.

"The daunting challenge in conducting free and fair elections are four-fold, the four Ms: muscle, money, misinformation, and MCC (Model Code of Conduct) violations. The Election Commission is committed and has put in place measures to deal with these disruptive challenges," he said.

To tackle the first 'M' -- "Muscle" the Election Commission has issued some guidelines and regulations so that the polls can be held in

a free and fair manner.

"We have issued strict directions to DMs and SPs to ensure a level playing field. Additionally, CAPF would be deployed adequately and assisted by integrated control rooms in each district. There will also be drone-based checking at the borders," the CEC said.

Asserting that violence in elections is unacceptable, Kumar said the poll panel will be "ruthless" if any violence takes place during elections.

"In the 2022-23 election cycle, cash seizure surged over 800 per cent to Rs 3,400 crore in 11 states compared to five years ago. Enforcement agencies have been directed to crack down on illicit money, liquor, drugs and freebies, and stay vigilant against disruptive methods. "No movement of bank vehicles will be allowed after sunset and there will be surveillance and inspection of non-scheduled chartered flights. Strict vigil will be maintained over illicit online (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Need mechanism to check unaccounted donations, respect donor privacy: CEC

NEW DELHI, March 16: Chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Saturday stressed the need for a mechanism to check "unaccounted" donations while also ensuring donors' privacy is protected and they are not harassed.

Responding to a question on electoral bonds during the press conference to announce the schedule for Lok Sabha elections, Kumar said, "As far as electoral bonds are concerned, the Commission has always been in favour of transparency".

"In democracy, there is no scope for hiding things, it is all about making everybody know, we are all for transparency. This is the first part of the exercise that it must be known, the country now has to ask and find so-

lutions through an institutional mechanism where the donor's privacy is also considered," he said.

In its landmark verdict on February 15, the top court had scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional" and ordered disclosure by the EC of donors, the amount donated by them and the recipients.

Kumar said, "The unaccounted money which is used in the elections... during the elections we are very particular to control it but how do we also control the donations in the unaccounted form is something which the entire nation needs to work together... the donor's privacy is also protected so he is not harassed, how the money is channelised and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The new rates are effective from March 16

Petrol, diesel price cut by up to ₹ 15.3 in Lakshadweep islands

NEW DELHI, March 16: Petrol and diesel prices have been slashed by up to ₹ 15.3 per litre in the islands of Lakshadweep after Indian Oil Corporation removed a cost element that was imposed to recover expenditure on special infrastructure to transport fuel to the remote islands.

Petrol and diesel prices have been reduced by ₹ 15.3 per litre in Andrott and Kalpeni islands and ₹ 5.2 a litre for Kavaratti and Minicoy in Lakshadweep islands, the oil ministry said in a post on X citing information from IOC.

Petrol price in Kavaratti and Minicoy has been cut to ₹ 100.75 per litre from ₹ 105.94 previously and that on Andrott and Kalpeni to ₹ 100.75 a litre from ₹ 116.13. Similarly, diesel rates have been revised to ₹ 95.71 a litre in Kavaratti and Minicoy from ₹ 110.91 earlier and to ₹ 95.71 in Andrott and Kalpeni from Rs 111.04 previously.

The new rates are effective from March 16. "In Lakshadweep, IOC is supplying petrol and diesel to four islands: Kavaratti, Minicoy, Andrott, and Kalpeni. IOC has depots at Kavaratti and Minicoy, and



the product at these depots is supplied from the IOC depot in Kochi, Kerala.

"Retail outlets at Kavaratti and Minicoy are supplied directly through pipelines from our depots. Other two islands, Andrott and Kalpeni, are supplied from the Kavaratti depot through barrels," the ministry said in the post.

This element amounting to ₹ 6.90 a litre had been included in the price buildup of petrol and diesel for the recovery of capital expenditure made in depots at Kavaratti and Minicoy in the Lak-

shadweep islands, due to very low and unviable volumes.

This element has been included in prices for the last three years.

"Since the full recovery of capital expenditure has now been achieved, this element is being removed from the prices of petrol and diesel," the ministry said.

"This will reduce the retail selling price of petrol and diesel by around ₹ 6.90 a litre (₹ 7.60 per litre including 10 per cent VAT), providing benefits to the customer."

Due to barreling costs, markets

of Andrott and Kalpeni had higher RSP by around ₹ 10 per litre compared to Kavaratti and Minicoy.

"To equate the price of all islands, the available margin of ₹ 7.60 a litre has been distributed across the four islands based on their sales volume," it said. "This will result in a reduction of retail selling price of petrol and diesel at the main islands, namely Kavaratti and Minicoy, by around ₹ 5.2 a litre. In the other islands, namely Andrott and Kalpeni, the retail selling price will be reduced by around ₹ 15.3 per litre." Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri in a post on X thanked IOC "for extending the benefits of completion of cost recovery of capital expenditure and inter-island price rationalisation to the people of Lakshadweep by reducing fuel prices."

"The move will improve #EaseofLiving and #EaseofBusiness for the people and ensure a bright future for the islands, which are poised to become major hubs of global tourism. Truly #ViksitBharat," he said. "It is #ModiKiGuarantee that all parts of the country benefit from good governance." (PTI)

HONOR introduces protect plan

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: HONOR has introduced the HONOR Protect Plan, powered by Onsitego with the newly launched X9b, for the Indian market to provide extra assurance and peace of mind to its consumers. The scheme, valued at ₹ 2,999, is available absolutely free of cost for HONOR X9b customers, and is aimed at fostering long-term consumer trust in the brand and underscores the company's focus on promoting reliability for its products.

It includes interesting offerings like a one-time free screen replacement within six months of purchase in case of a damaged screen. Consumers will only be charged a nominal of ₹ 749 as claim processing fee.

Additionally, if a customer does not like the X9b after purchasing it, the brand is giving an option of a 30-day Assured Buy Back option up to 90% of the invoice value (ex GST). However, certain deductions or exclusions apply to ensure the integrity of the redeemed devices.

Phones with broken or damaged bodies or screens will not be accepted for redemption. Additional deductions include ₹ 1500 for missing original accessories, 20% for major scratches or dents, 15% for minor scratches or dents, and ₹ 1000 for the absence of the original box at the time of redemption.

With this comprehensive package, the company is also providing 6 months Extended Warranty Cover and doorstep pickup and delivery for repairs from brand authorized service centers guaranteeing the use of genuine components, up to 18 months.

CII Digital Saksham for micro enterprises in Assam

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has been leading transformative initiatives for the micro-enterprises in Assam, particularly in revitalizing the state's textile industry through its flagship initiative, Digital Saksham Project.

The initiative, which is in collaboration with Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, is significantly contributing to the growth of Assam's textile industry by providing digital literacy, skill development, and market access to artisans and weavers.

Digital Saksham Project aims to empower entrepreneurs at the grassroots level and foster an inclusive ecosystem conducive to industry growth and development. Digital Saksham Project not only imparts digital skills but also facilitates access to markets through digital commerce platforms, sharing knowledge for social media marketing, Handholding to register on the Udyam Portal, create awareness, and support micro entrepreneurs to register on GeM, ONDC - thus ensuring the sustainability of the sector. Commenting on Digital Saksham's achievements in Assam, Mr. Ashok Saigal, Co-Chairman of CII National MSME Council and MD Frontier Technologies Pvt. Ltd., stated, "CII is proud to have played a catalytic role in the transformation of micro-enterprises working in Assam's textile industry. By embracing digital technologies and fostering regional cooperation, we are not only preserving our rich textile heritage but also creating sustainable livelihood opportunities and driving economic growth across the state. The project provides special training in the regional languages to eliminate barriers between digital technologies and its adoption. With Digital Saksham Project, we are also supporting traditional artists, especially women entrepreneurs to share their products and the traditional arts beyond limitations of distance and geographical boundaries."

For handloom workers, specialized training that focuses on business tools and helps with Udyam registration has been arranged. Wholesalers at Mahanta Silk House are expanding their product lines in response to the wants and needs of their customers. The beneficiaries expressed an interest in increasing their production by acquiring additional handloom machines, facilitated by securing loans to boost earnings and career prospects. According to the suggestions made, items like cushion covers are being expanded and updated designs are being developed to appeal to



both domestic and foreign markets. Furthermore, the team has been helping MSME Entrepreneurs and owners with GST-free enrolment, which removes a barrier to e-commerce participation. Digital Saksham has been instrumental in promoting collaboration among different regions within Assam to harness their unique textile heritage and strengths, contributing to the Assamese Textile Renaissance. In Kamrup district, these initiatives have seamlessly integrated traditional weaving techniques with modern digital technologies, enabling weavers to enhance productivity and produce high-quality textiles. Similarly, in Lakhimpur, Digital Saksham has played a significant role in revitalizing the handloom sector by introducing digital tools and techniques for increasing the business reach thereby preserving traditional craftsmanship while ensuring competitiveness in the digital age.

Additionally, Digital Saksham's interventions in Dhemaji have facilitated the convergence of the region's rich textile heritage with digital innovation, thus opening up new avenues for growth and sustainability in the sector. Through various capacity-building programs and mentorship initiatives, Digital Saksham has empowered local entrepreneurs in Kamrup, Lakhimpur, and Dhemaji to leverage digital platforms for business expansion through increased market reach, and brand visibility, and showcasing Digital Success Stories to inspire others. Currently, Digital Saksham has reached 6,426 micro-enterprises and provided trainings to over 1,383 micro-enterprises in Assam. Going forward, Digital Saksham aims to continue its collaborations with all parties involved to accelerate Assam's transformation into a thriving center of business and industry, which would improve the state's and the people's general economic well-being.

Venturing into niche domains with platforms like Marathi Entertainment Dashmani Media captivates 100 Million across varied digital entertainment spheres

MUMBAI, March 16: Under the visionary leadership of Sudhanshu Kumar, Dashmani Media Private Limited has emerged as a powerhouse in the digital entertainment sphere, boasting an expansive and diverse portfolio of platforms that cater to a wide spectrum of content preferences. From the heart of Bollywood to the pulse of regional cinema, and from the glitz of celebrity lifestyles to the adrenaline rush of sports, Dashmani Media leaves no stone unturned in delivering premium content to its audience.

A Kaleidoscope of Entertainment
Dashmani Media's acquisition of Total Filmi further enriches its impressive array of platforms, including Bollywood Society, Movified, and ENT Videos, each offering unique insights and engaging content that resonates with viewers across different demographics and interests. Bollywood Chronicle and Crazy 4 Bollywood delve into the vibrant world of Hindi cinema, offering the latest news, reviews, and exclusive celebrity interviews.

For television enthusiasts, Telly-Drama brings the latest from the small screen, while Bollywood Reels and Bollywood Dazzle cater to fans of short-form content. Regional entertainment is not left behind, with Movified Tamil and



Movified South dedicated to the southern film industry, ensuring that Dashmani Media's reach extends across the diverse cultural landscape of India.

Niche Content for Discerning Audiences

Understanding the varied tastes of its audience, Dashmani Media also ventures into niche domains with platforms like Marathi Entertainment, INTL Fashion, and Public POV, providing specialized content that ranges from regional cinema to international fashion trends and public opinion pieces. Luxe Lifestyle and Celebo offer a peek into the opulent lifestyles of the rich and famous, while Purvanchal Live and Jab We Met explore regional stories and romantic narratives.

The Sports Arena and Beyond

Sports fanatics have a reason to cheer with platforms like Cricket Junkies, Mad About Sports, and Cricket Funk, which cover the latest in cricket and other sports, ensuring that fans are always up-to-date with their favorite games. For those who revel in the paparazzi's flash, Bollywood Paparazzi, Paparazzi Shorts, and Instant Paparazzi provide unfiltered access to celebrity life, capturing candid moments and behind-the-scenes action.

Uniting Diverse Interests Under One Banner

Dashmani Media's vast portfolio, including Bachelors Society, Bollywood Shorts, Epi Creator, Bollywood Standard, and others, underscores its commitment to uniting diverse interests under one

banner, making it a one-stop destination for digital entertainment. Platforms like Glitz, Celeb Spotting, and BollyBuzz keep the audience engaged with the latest in entertainment, fashion, and lifestyle.

With Sudhanshu Kumar at the helm, Dashmani Media's strategic acquisitions and content diversification continue to set new benchmarks in the digital entertainment industry. By embracing a wide array of platforms, including Tinsel Town Tales, Paparazzi Feed, Paparazzi Reel, and Paparazzi Glimpse, among others, Dashmani Media ensures that it remains at the forefront of digital content innovation, catering to the ever-evolving tastes of its audience.

Dashmani Media Private Limited, established on 15th December 2022 and based in Mumbai, Maharashtra, is a dynamic force in digital entertainment and sports. Led by Neekeeta Singh and Sudhanshu Kumar, this innovative company stands out for its extensive audience base of 100 million across various categories including Bollywood, regional cinema, sports, fashion, and lifestyle. With a keen focus on diverse content delivery, Dashmani Media is committed to engaging and captivating audiences on multiple digital platforms. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Assam all set for 3-phase

the Election Commission announced the Lok Sabha polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a series of posts on X, highlighted the "glorious turnaround" India has seen in the 10 years of his government and said the ruling alliance will go to people based on its track record of good governance and service delivery across sectors. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said the Lok Sabha elections were "perhaps the last chance to save democracy and our Constitution from dictatorship". (PTI)

Dibrugarh, Jorhat among 9 Assam

votes. Gogoi had spearheaded the anti-CAA protests in 2019 as an AASU general secretary and later went on to form the BJP, becoming its founder president. Jorhat: Deputy leader of the opposition in the outgoing Parliament Gaurav Gogoi (Congress) will take on BJP's sitting MP Topon Gogoi in this seat. Gaurav has been shifted from the neighbouring Kaliabor (renamed as Kaziranga by the delimitation exercise) seat, which he represented twice since 2014.

Kaziranga: The contest in this seat, christened as such in the delimitation exercise last year, will be mainly between two candidates belonging to the tea tribe community. BJP's Rajya Sabha MP and the party's state spokesperson Kamakhya Prasad Tasa will take on former Sarupathar Congress MLA Roselina Tirkey.

Guwahati: This prestigious seat, being the Gateway to the North East, will witness a contest between two women candidates of the BJP and Congress. The BJP replaced sitting MP Queen Ojha with its state party vice president Bijuli Kalita Medhi, while the Congress nominated spokesperson Mira Borthakur Goswami. In 2019 too, both parties had women candidates for the seat. It has been represented by women since 2009 when BJP's Bijoya Chakravarty was elected.

Dhubri: A minority-dominated constituency, Dhubri will witness a triangular contest with AIUDF president Badruddin Ajmal making a bid for the Lok Sabha for the fourth consecutive term, but the going may be tough with the Congress putting up former minister and current Samaguri MLA Rakibul Hussain while the NDA alliance has AGP's Zaved Islam as its candidate.

Nagaon: The central Assam constituency is also likely to witness a keen contest between sitting Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi and his former confidante Suresh Bora, who shifted his allegiance to the BJP recently.

Sonitpur: It is a constituency in the North Bank of the Brahmaputra with diverse demographic equations. BJP gave the ticket to Behali MLA Ranjit Dutta and the Congress to its state general secretary Prem Lal Ganju. Both Dutta, a minister in the Sonowal government, and Ganju will contest Lok Sabha polls for the first time.

Silchar: One of the two constituencies in the Barak Valley, Silchar was declared a scheduled caste constituency in the delimitation exercise last year. It has a sizeable Hindu Bengali population which welcomes the CAA. Veteran BJP leader and Assam's excise, transport and fisheries minister Parimal Suklabaidya and Congress's youth leader and district general secretary Surjya Kanta Sarkar will fight it out for the crucial seat.

Barpeta: Earlier a minority-dominated area, the constituency's assembly segments have been reworked during the delimitation exercise and there has been a demographic realignment. As a result, the Congress replaced its sitting MP Abdul Khaleque with Assam Pradesh Seva Dal president Deep Bayan while the NDA has left it for AGP and its former minister Phanibhushan Choudhury will contest from the seat. The CPI(M), a constituent of the UOFA, has also announced that its Sorbhog MLA Manoranjan Kalita will contest from the seat. (PTI)

2024 battle royal: 'Modi Ki

CAA and Uniform Civil Code have been part of the BJP's longstanding promises to the people. The BJP has and will continue to project its achievement of implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and the abrogation of Article 370 for Jammu and Kashmir.

The party's government has also passed a law on the uniform civil code in Uttarakhand as a precursor to its objective of devising such a law nationally. The Modi government has projected these actions to assert that it believes in the mantra of "walking the talk". The opposition has slammed these moves as attempts to create, divide and impose uniformity. The debate on these issues is likely to get sharper and more aggressive in the poll season.

The January 22 consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya was marked by the BJP with tremendous enthusiasm. The symbolism of Modi leading the ceremony and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat along with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath being at the forefront during the ceremony was not lost on anyone. BJP leaders have credited the prime minister for making a centuries-old dream come true.

With saffron flags fluttering in most parts of the Hindi-speaking belt to mark the occasion, the impact of this can be felt by everyone. Even opposition leaders concede that the Ram temple has given the BJP the advantage in northern India. Analysts believe that much of the BJP's confidence of getting at least 370 seats stems from this 'Ram temple wave'. The Election Commission has made the data on electoral bonds public. The Congress has demanded a high-level probe by the Supreme Court against the ruling BJP and freezing of its bank accounts for alleged corruption in the electoral bonds scheme.

The issue has come to the fore right before the polls and the opposition has seized on it but whether it will work at the grassroots level or not is still to be seen. It would, however, certainly be one of the talking points during the campaign. Another recurrent campaign theme during the poll season would be the BJP's assertion that the Modi dispensation assured good governance, fast paced growth and a vision for the future have brought in the 'Amrit Kaal'. (PTI)

CAA, child marriage,

stand of sovereignty. The crackdown against child marriage in the state will also be an important issue that will find a place during the campaign trail with the BJP claiming that they have taken the step to end the social menace while the opposition will accuse the ruling party of targeting the Muslim community, in particular.

The Unified Civil Code which the state government wants to bring in by repealing the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935 and a law to make ban on polygamy effective will also be raised with the opposition parties, particularly the Congress and the AIUDF alleging that it is discriminatory against the Muslims and has been done to polarise the voters in an election year. BJP's Hindutva agenda will come under flak from the opposition, particularly in the minority-dominated constituencies like Dhubri, Karimganj, and Nagaon along with several pockets in the others. The party will highlight the infrastructural development across the state during the last ten years enhancing road, rail, air and internet connectivity.

The party has been concentrating on women voters, who constitute nearly 50 per cent of the total electorate, for the past few years with chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma assuming charge in 2021 waiving their micro-credit loans, introducing various schemes like Orunodoi and 'Lakhpati baidoes'. The opposition parties are also likely to offer various sop to the women electorate.

The BJP will highlight the various initiatives taken up for the development of tea garden workers which include model schools in the garden areas, providing banking facilities to them during COVID, health facilities among others. The opposition will also go all out to woo this segment of the electorate which has considerable sway in the Upper Assam constituencies of Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Kaziranga along with Sonipur in the North Bank.

The recent foundation stone laying of the Rs 27,000 crore semiconductor assembly and test facility in Assam's Morigaon district by the Prime Minister and the announcement of the new policy of Uttar Pradesh Transformative Industrialization Scheme (UNNATI), 2024 for the North East will definitely be highlighted by the BJP whereas the opposition will focus on how several industries in the state are facing closure and their employees have been deprived of their dues. (PTI)

People living in camps in violence

allowed to vote from the respective camps... from the lower constituency to higher and higher to lower," Kumar said. "My appeal to the voters is that let us decide through the ballot, peacefully by participating in the elections, we will make the arrangements," he added. Ethnic clashes between the Meitei and tribal Kuki communities in Manipur since May last year have resulted in the loss of over 200 lives. According to officials, over 25,000 people have been rescued by the security forces while around 50,000 are living in camps following the unrest. (PTI)

Indian Navy foils attempts

to shipping and seafarers. "The pirates onboard the vessel have been called upon to surrender and release the vessel and any civilians they may be holding against their will," the Navy said in a statement. "The Indian Navy remains committed to maritime security and safety of seafarers in the region," it added. On Friday, the Navy said an Indian warship and a long-range maritime patrol aircraft extended assistance to a Bangladeshi-flagged cargo vessel after it was hijacked. (PTI)

Cong treats Muslims like

I had to quit the party," Khaleque added. Claiming that his resignation was not due to being denied party ticket, Khaleque maintained that more Muslim candidates should have been nominated by the party in the state. The Congress has three MPs in the outgoing Lok Sabha, out of a total of 14 seats from the state. The two other incumbents, Gaurav Gogoi and Pradyut Bordoloi, have again been given party tickets.

The minority community leader alleged that a section of arrogant leaders of the Congress view the Muslims as their slaves. "No doubt that the Muslims love Congress as the party believes in equality. But some arrogant leaders think of Muslims as servants," he said. Mentioning of the party's plenary session in Raipur last year, Khaleque claimed that though photographs of former top leaders were hung at the venue, there was no picture of Abul Kalam Azad. "Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had been the party's president in the 1940s, a very crucial time. His overall contribution to the nation is also immense. When his photo was left out, it hurt many like me," he said. (PTI)

Need mechanism to check

how it is more and more white." The CEC expressed confidence that a "better" system will evolve. "In the digital age... it should be very very low cash economy... therefore one has to think of it and I am sure a better system will evolve," Kumar added. The CEC said that the Election Commission has made it compulsory for all political parties to inform it about the contributions they are receiving. The parties are also supposed to declare how much they have collected and how much they have spent in the annual accounts. "Also after every election they are supposed to give us an account of what they have spent during the particular action... we also publish this on the website of the Commission for everyone to know what is happening," he said. (PTI)

EC gears up to deal

cash transfers," he said. Warning against creating "digital memories" of any bad words during campaigning, Kumar said, "I urge parties to refrain from personal attacks and foul language. No-go areas in speeches are defined to maintain civility. Let's not cross lines in our rivalry."

"It is important because in this digital world... whatever is said once, its record will be there for 100 years. Avoid creating digital memories of bad words coming from your mouth," he said. Noting that tackling misinformation in this digital age is complex, Kumar said the EC has put in place certain measures to ensure misinformation is nipped in the bud. (PTI)

Hails GU for its pioneering role in starting an integrated master's programme as per NEP 2020

Governor Kataria attends 31st convocation of Gauhati University

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria said that he is happy for Gauhati University for starting the integrated Masters' programme in line with the NEP 2020.

Addressing the graduates at the 31st convocation of the university held in the university campus today, the Governor emphasised the importance of embracing the responsibilities that accompany academic achievements. He urged the students not to overlook the invaluable contributions of their teachers and parents, urging them to strive to make a positive impact in the lives of the underprivileged. "I encourage you to harness your full potential for the betterment of our nation and its people," he added.

The Governor emphasised Gauhati University's significant role as the first university in the Northeast region, catering to a wide demography with higher education opportunities. He observed that the primary objective of the institution should be to offer degree, diploma, and certificate programmes aligning with employment prospects and factors influencing the national economy,



leveraging both natural and human resources while ensuring their robustness and inclusivity.

He also said that the university ought to serve as an informal avenue for enhancing the state's educational framework in conjunction with the formal system. This entails fostering learning and knowledge dissemination through the integration of information and communication technology and fostering diversification.

Moreover, recognizing the importance of skill development, the university should prioritize offering education and training in vari-

ous arts and crafts to enhance the employability of the youth workforce, he added.

Highlighting the significance of the community radio station of Gauhati University, known as "Radio Luit," the Governor said that it is true that this platform serves not only as a representation of the university but also as a voice for the surrounding communities. Its mission extends beyond mere broadcasting; it strives to articulate the hopes and aspirations of the diverse populace it serves. Through its programming, Radio Luit plays a pivotal role in fostering commu-

nity development, social cohesion, the promotion of democratic values, and the celebration of cultural diversity.

Moreover, the Governor underscored the profound importance of India's rich knowledge system. India stands as one of the world's oldest civilizations, with a heritage steeped in centuries of accumulated wisdom. Throughout history, Indian knowledge traditions have been orally transmitted from one generation to the next, serving as a beacon of enlightenment for humanity. Landmarks such as the Nalanda University and Taxashila University stand as testament to the intellectual richness that has flourished within the Indian subcontinent.

A total number of 54849 students received their degrees. It may be mentioned that the DSc Honoris Causa was conferred upon Prof Tankeswar Choudhury and the Honorary PhD degree was conferred upon Shri Ramen Choudhury and Parbati Baruah. The convocation was attended by around 4000 attendees, which included Vice-Chancellors from other state universities, alumni, faculty members, administrative staff and graduating students.



Dr Anima Choudhury along with other dignities releasing two books titled Thor Mela Potharor Gan and Sabda Kiron at Gauhati Press club on Saturday. UB Photos

Talk on importance of merging Industrial Consultancy held at SITM



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: Scholar's Institute of Technology and Management (SITM) hosted a stimulating talk recently centered on the theme "Importance of Merging Industrial Consultancy with the Institution for Viksit Bharat @2047." The event featured Dr. Sanjay Kumar Dey, additional chief inspector of factories in Assam, as the distinguished speaker.

The session organized by SITM aimed to explore the pivotal role of integrating industrial consultancy practices within academic institutions to contribute effectively towards the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, an initiative aimed at catalyzing India's progress across various sectors by the year 2047. Dr. Sanjay Kumar Dey, a seasoned expert in industrial consultancy and institutional develop-

ment (SITM), expressed her gratitude towards Dr. Sanjay Kumar Dey for sharing valuable insights and inspiring the academic community to embrace a collaborative approach towards institutional development. He reiterated SITM's commitment to fostering innovation and excellence through strategic partnerships with industries, thereby contributing towards the vision of a Viksit Bharat @2047.

The talk concluded on a positive note, with attendees acknowledging the importance of synergizing academic and industrial expertise to drive socio-economic growth and sustainable development in India. Moving forward, initiatives like these are expected to play a crucial role in shaping the future of education and industry collaboration, paving the way for a prosperous and technologically advanced India by 2047.

experience and insights during the discourse. Drawing upon his extensive background in the industrial sector, Dr. Dey underscored the significance of fostering collaboration between academia and industry to drive innovation, research, and economic growth. Throughout his address, Dr. Dey emphasized the need for academic institutions to proactively engage with industries, leveraging their expertise and resources to address real-world challenges and nurture a culture of entrepreneurship among students. He stressed that by bridging the gap between academia and industry; institutions could not only enhance the employability of students but also foster a conducive environment for innovation and knowledge transfer. Speaking about the significance of the event, Jhumur Lodh, Director of Scholar's Institute of Technology and Manage-



Complete solution for Japanese Language Training to Placement Solution at Pragjyotish College in Guwahati on Saturday. UB Photos

Raj Bhavan quarterly newsletter released



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria released a quarterly newsletter of Raj Bhavan titled 'Rajvaani' in a function held in the presence of the officers and staff of Raj Bhavan here recently.

It may be noted that Raj Bhavan, Assam under the leadership of Governor Kataria in his bid to document its activities, decided to publish quarterly newsletter. Therefore, the Governor released the third quarterly newsletter.

Speaking at a programme held on the occasion, Governor Kataria said that the newsletter is an attempt to document different activities that Raj Bhavan Assam engages in from time to time. It is also an effort to share the activities of Raj Bhavan with its internal and external public.

It may be mentioned that the newsletter comprises of the activities of the Governor for the period from September to November 2023.

Global Ceramics unveils Northeast's largest showroom



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: Global Ceramics Pvt Ltd, the premier destination for construction and renovation solutions, proudly announces the grand opening of its expansive showroom located at KR Mills Compound, Lokhra Road, Sawkuchi, Jyotikuchi, Guwahati, Assam. During the inauguration Ved Prakash Gupta, Neeraj Gupta, Sanjay Gupta, Rahul Gupta along with other dignitaries were present.

Speaking on the occasion young entrepreneur and director of Global Ceramics Pvt Ltd said said as the largest showroom in the Northeast region, our new facility offers an unparalleled selection of top-quality building materials from leading brands,

providing customers with a comprehensive one-stop solution for all their construction needs.

With a commitment to excellence and customer satisfaction, Global Ceramics Pvt Ltd strives to redefine the shopping experience for builders, contractors, architects and homeowners alike. Our vast inventory encompasses a diverse range of products, including but not limited to roofing materials, flooring options, plumbing fixtures, electrical supplies and many more, ensuring that every project receives the finest materials available in the market he added.

"We are thrilled to introduce our new showroom, designed to inspire and empower our customers in their construction endeavors," said

Rahul Gupta, director at Global Ceramics Pvt Ltd. "Our goal is to become the go-to destination for builders and homeowners seeking quality, variety, and exceptional service."

The grand opening of Global Ceramics Pvt Ltd's showroom marks a significant milestone in our commitment to serving the North East community with unparalleled excellence in the construction industry. Join us as we embark on this exciting journey to provide the ultimate destination for all your building material needs.

Available brands as of now Kajaria, Jaquar, Asian Paints, Dr. Fixit, AIS Windows, GC Ware, Star Cement, Jindal Panther TMT Bars etc.

Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary is maintaining the ecological balance and acting as a natural buffer

Youths foray into forest under Nature's Wonderland campaign

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: In an effort to introduce nature to urban dwellers, Aaranyak, one of the region's foremost biodiversity conservation organisations, has launched an urban nature educational campaign that has received tremendous mileage and enthusiasm among students and youths. As part of the programme intitled "Nature's Wonderland-a journey of curiosity", participants are exposed to forest life in and around Guwahati and its denizens in order to instil conservation consciousness among them.

As a part of this special nature introduction campaign, Aaranyak in collab with Guwahati Wildlife Division organised the chapter six of this campaign in Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary.

Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary, being in proximity to Guwahati, is maintaining the ecological balance and acting as a natural buffer, providing a green cover around the city. The sanctuary helps in mitigating the urban heat island effect, improves air quality and offers a visual respite from urbanisation.

The presence of the sanctuary plays an instrumental role in protecting the water resources. A total of 16 nature enthusiasts joined the nature trail in the journey to understand the ecology and species diversity of the forest



in this nature trail event organised on March 13.

Wasima Begum, Aaranyak's environment facilitator, said that as of now there have been six "Nature's Wonderland-a journey of curiosity" programmes that have been conducted, that have involved over 150 students and youths. Apart from Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary, the activities were conducted also at Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden, and Rani Reserve Forest of Assam. Sagarika Pathak, a MSc student

who attended one of the programmes stated, "I am a nature lover and I joined Aaranyak on this nature trail programme at the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary under the guidance of an expert team of Aaranyak. Throughout the journey, Aaranyak's experts helped us identify various species of plants, birds, insects, and small mammals we encountered along the way as well as educated us on their importance for environment and our wellbeing. Furthermore, this special nature

education programme also includes a number of other activities including "Find a tree", learning sessions on bird watching, and several other games that teach more about nature.

The programme is supported by Wipro Earthian and LEA Associates South Asia Pvt Ltd (LASA) and is being led by Aaranyak's senior official Jayanta Kumar Pathak. Aaranyak Official Pranab Goswami coordinates this event with environmental educator Wasima Begum.



Market shops displaying varieties of colour powders, pigments, plastic made holi pichkaris (water gun toys) etc. Ahead of Holi at Guwahati on Saturday. UB Photos

Pita Putra: Rural realities through Borgohain's literary lens

By: Dipak Kurmi

Homen Borgohain, a versatile literary figure, excels as an essayist, modernist poet, proficient short story writer, and significant Assamese novelist. Additionally, he has made notable contributions as a minor literary critic and journalist. Borgohain's editorial roles in various newspapers have left an indelible mark on Assamese journalism. During the 1950s, he played a pivotal role in shaping Assamese literature, aspiring to integrate the best global literary influences. Engaged with the literary journal Ramdheni under the editorship of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Borgohain endeavored to introduce the finest ideas and knowledge from around the world to Assamese literature. In his early literary pursuits, Borgohain was captivated by French symbolists and English modernist poets. Noteworthy is his translation of a Baudelaire poem into Assamese for Ramdheni, highlighting his enduring fondness for symbolists, which permeates his creative works in a latent form.

The post-independence Assamese novel stands out for its stark portrayal of political decadence, escalating poverty, and widespread illiteracy among the masses. It captures the rapid erosion of age-old values and institutions, painting a vast panorama of societal upheaval. The dream of freedom, initially uplifting the hopes of the masses to unprecedented heights, was shattered by the prevalent corruption, tyranny, and leadership crises following the transition to independence. Homen Borgohain's novels align with this thematic narrative, sharing common ground with many of his contemporaries who delve into social realism. As a dedicated journalist, Borgohain possessed a unique insight into the workings of political leadership. Throughout his creative works, he consistently aimed to unveil the callous indifference of these leaders towards the needs of the people.

In addition to the acclaimed "Pita Putra," first published in 1975, Homen Borgohain crafted a compelling literary oeuvre, featuring notable works such as "Subala" (1963), "Tantrik" (1967), "Astarag" (1968), "Kushilov" (1970), "Timir Tiriha" (1975), "Haladhya Choraye Bao Dhan Khay" (1973), "Matshyagandha" (1987), and "Saudor Puteke Nao Meli Jay" (1987). Borgohain's realism extends beyond mere photographic representation; as a novelist, he consistently engages with significant issues afflicting Indian society, including poverty, unemployment, inflation,

casteism, and top-level corruption. Embarking on his literary journey as a short story writer and poet in the fifties, Borgohain solidified his reputation in the seventies as one of the pre-eminent Assamese novelists. Notably, his work "Pita Putra" stands as a seminal contribution to Assamese literature.

"Pita Putra," aptly named, unfolds the narrative tapestry of two generations and delves into the complexities of the generation gap. However, it is the narrator who breathes life and structure into the story. Borgohain, the novelist, possesses a profound understanding and connection with rural Assam, capturing its peculiar and unpredictable rhythms and the essence of its way of life. The novel's drama unfolds in the remote village of Mohghuli in Assam, against the backdrop of the transition to independence. Yet, as the protagonist's narration unfolds, it not only imparts a vivid portrayal of life but also serves as a window into the intricacies of existence, offering a substantial slice of that rural reality.

The initial chapter of the novel meticulously establishes its tone and atmosphere. A poignant strain of loneliness and isolation envelops the central character, Sivanath, creating a pervasive sense of inaction and inertia. Though endowed with the ability to think, feel, smell, and see, Sivanath remains incapable of stirring himself into action. Memories and desires stir within him, yet ideas fleetingly cross his mind before he can translate them into action. His outlook on life resonates with resignation, fixating on the dirt, filth, reek, and stink of all that undergoes decay and decomposition. The once idyllic countryside has lost its charm, devoid of the freedom associated with fields and skies. The environment feels stuffy and suffocating, permeated by the putrid smell of earthworms, cockroaches, and their droppings. Schoolboys trudge through knee-deep mire under an unrelenting sun, and the sights and smells turn nauseating. Open spaces serve as makeshift latrines for children, and human excreta floats in creeks and drains after summer showers. Amid this ugliness and squalor, wild flowers attempt to rise above, but their efforts ultimately falter.

Within the novel, two distinct realms unfold: the external world of action and events in Mohghuli, and the predominantly inner, private domain of the central character. A meticulous documentation of numerous facts illustrates how Sivanath engages with the transpiring events. He meticulously studies, argues, analyzes, and reduces occurrences to their logical



conclusions. However, when confronted with the imperative to decide and act, he retreats into his familiar shell. Over time, as changes unfold, Sivanath becomes increasingly estranged by the evolving patterns. The chasm between his expectations and the harsh reality steadily widens, silently shattering his heart. His incapacity to actively engage in the world of action leaves him dwelling in one realm while holding onto beliefs rooted in another. Consistently withdrawing into an isolated realm of ideas, Sivanath finds himself compelled to seek refuge in values he may not genuinely embrace.

"Pita Putra" stands as a meticulously crafted and ambitious work by the novelist. In the backdrop of a remote village like Mohghuli, the narrative avoids grandiosity, steering clear of elevating everyday occurrences with lofty ideals to mystical heights. However, the novelist doesn't diminish the significance of small things. Each episode, narrated by the author or characters, though seemingly trivial, unveils facets of the old ways undergoing dissolution or the emergence of new ways through conflicts. The novel's strength lies in its attention

to the intricate details, showcasing the nuanced transformations within the community, without losing sight of the profound impact of seemingly minor events.

The narrative of "Pita Putra" ruthlessly dismantles illusions and dispels myths. The apparent self-sacrifice of the land surveyor, resigning from his job to join the freedom movement, is revealed to be a calculated strategy aimed at amassing wealth and attaining power. Sivanath's father, once revered by his son as a saint, is exposed for indulging in inappropriate behavior, stealing glances at a young woman crossing a stream. The unquestioned authority that Sivanath's family held over the surrounding villages has crumbled with the passage of time. Villagers, far from being simple and innocent, are portrayed as crafty and cunning. The notion of a collective village life, where people share each other's sorrows and happiness, is shattered as yet another myth. The novel, in its unrelenting portrayal, challenges preconceived notions, unraveling the complexities and contradictions inherent in human behavior and societal structures.

Amidst the ever-shifting cycles of change and the expansive panorama, the novelist delves into profound epistemological inquiries, perpetually seeking the essence of values and institutions. While the portrayal of life remains elemental, the author strategically raises fundamental questions regarding existence. Employing a dynamic narrative, the author frequently shifts the point of view, striving for authenticity and a sense of detachment. Notably, when minor character Divakar asserts that the village has become a refuge for sinners due to the influence of illicit liquor and the disintegration of age-old customs, it's crucial to differentiate his perspective from that of the author. The author refrains from glorifying traditional customs and values but instead acknowledges their efficacy in adapting to changing circumstances. For instance, in discussing social boycott, the author expresses sensitivity to the torment inflicted on an individual while highlighting the community's obliviousness to it. The same community that enforces a boycott over a person sharing a meal with a lower-caste individual remains silent regarding a brutal assault by one of their members on his wife. Shockingly, wife beating is normalized, rationalized as a consequence of the woman's supposed sins in a past life.

At the heart of the novel's narrative lies the pivotal tale of three sons breaking away from

their elderly father, symbolizing a clash between the ideals and values of two distinct generations. This rupture signifies the inevitable transition from the old to the new, where the established order gives way to transformative forces. Interestingly, the three sons serve as a dramatic manifestation of the internal conflict within the old man. He, burdened with unresolved contradictions, struggles to harmonize the irreconcilable opposites within himself. As the sons mature and disrupt the established order, the old man finds himself powerless, relegated to the role of a helpless and silent observer when the foundations crumble, and the anticipated consequences unfold. The novel poignantly captures the complex interplay of generational conflicts and the individual's internal strife in the face of inevitable change.

In the novel's conclusion, a peripheral character contends that the liberation of the toiling masses from their misery can only be achieved through class struggle, even as he indulges in intoxication. The author subtly communicates a distinct perspective, suggesting that human suffering is less a result of steadfastly held erroneous beliefs and more a consequence of hypocrisy and self-deception. The narrative implies that while some advocate for transformative actions, their own actions, often influenced by inebriation, underscore the complexity and contradictions inherent in addressing societal issues. The author skillfully underscores the notion that the roots of human misery lie not solely in misguided convictions but also in the pervasive influence of hypocrisy and self-delusion.

Homen Borgohain crafts prose that is both straightforward and lucid. In moments of intense emotion, his eloquent language seamlessly transitions into a poetic cadence, adding depth to compelling situations. The narrative occasionally incorporates verses and adages, seamlessly weaving them into the fabric of the story, becoming integral elements of the scrutinized life depicted in the novel.

"Pita Putra" stands as the creation of an extensively informed, self-aware, and purposeful writer. While it unfolds in a distant Assamese village, its essence captures the spirit of rural Assam, and by extension, resonates with the broader rural landscape of India. This novel, a literary gem, has left an indelible mark, and its significance is evident as it remains a must-read for numerous Assamese readers. *(The author is a columnist who can be reached at dipaknewsline@gmail.com)*

How Goa and Kashmir are coming closer

By: Vivek Shukla

Imagine Kashmir is coming close to Goa. Surely, both are among the most sought after tourist destinations of not only India, but of the world. While the fun loving Goans have been visiting Kashmir for holidaying since long, the same was not true for the Kashmiris till as recently as couple of years ago.

However, things are fast changing and people of Kashmir valley are also visiting Goa for their leisure trips in a big way. To gauge the changed thinking of people of Kashmir, you have to be on any Delhi-Goa flight. It is like seeing a believing experience. You would find many, many Kashmiris, including ladies, kids and senior citizens, are taking Goa bound flights from the Indira Gandhi International airport. That also reinforces the point that the once troubled Kashmir is changing fast and peace returns there. During his recent trip to Srinagar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that Kashmir has been transformed economically since it was stripped of its semi-autonomous status. He was accorded a very warm welcome by the people of Kashmir. That was unthinkable till couple of years ago. "I am working hard to win your hearts," he told a rally in Srinagar. Thanks to peace and stability in Kashmir valley, Kashmiris have now started going to even Goa during their holidays.

As there is no direct Goa flight from Srinagar, Kashmiris first come to Delhi and then move to Goa. Of course, Kashmiris living in other parts of the country also visit Goa frequently.

Well, Kashmiris leave for Goa in hoards when their own state experience extremely cold conditions. You can say from November to January, Kashmiris find Goa as a place to visit and stay. Like other tourists, the carefree mood of Goa and the inclusive Goan society greatly fascinates Kashmiri tourists. They can be spotted at famous beaches of Goa like Calangute, Baga, Anjuna and Candolim.

If you talk to Kashmiri tourists in Goa, they would surely tell you two things: A. They were sick and tired of long unrest in valley. As things are getting better and better in their own state and it is experiencing growth, development and return of peace, they find Goa as a great place to unwind. B. Kashmiris visiting Goa also say that thanks to the efforts of Goan government led by the Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, the interests of tourists are served. Tourists visiting here feel safe and secure in Goa. This is a huge compliment to the government of Goa.

Kashmiris apart, now the government of Goa is trying to attract



'quality tourists' i.e. those who can spend more and more. Pramod Sawant, the energetic Chief Minister of Goa, has recently said that his government is taking several steps to attract more and more quality tourists to Goa. Getting quality tourists will benefit all stakeholders from shack owners to taxi operators, adding, "If we want quality tourists then we have to provide quality services."

While tourists pour in Goa across the year, the tourists flock in Goa from the first week of October before reaching its peak during the Christmas-New Year period and continue until the end of May. Goa receives around eight million tourists every year around one-tenth of whom are foreigners.

It goes without saying that the year 2024 stands as a significant juncture for Goa, as many events of the G20 summit were held here marked a significant moment. It even hosted a tourism ministerial event that underscored Goa's emergence as a vital player on the world stage. The events mark a convergence of international leaders and policymakers engaging in discussions about global economic matters. This event not only highlighted the region's natural beauty but also its role in shaping global tourism trends. The G20's influence during India's presidency had sparked noteworthy repercussions on Goa's tourism sector.

In fact, post the G20 summit, numerous airlines from previously unconnected locales are considering direct flights to the newly developed MOPA international airport. It is a superb airport. It can match any world class airport of the world in terms of facilities and infrastructure.

Once noted Cricket Writer and commentator late Tony Cozier has told me that the breathtaking beaches and the life of Goa can attract anyone. Well, the reason why Goa gets so crowded with foreigners is that unlike warm, sunny, skylit Goa, their countries are very cold

and snowy all the time. They love coming to Goa and warming their body. It is also an advantage for their extreme milky skin as they lay on the beach getting tanned and acquiring the right skin tone as per their desire. From earthen dressing to the golden beaches, everything makes these tourists happy. All they want is some yummy coconut water, soft music and the aroma of delicious seafood. Most often these people only roam near beaches, shop on the streets and have food on shacks. It is very rare to notice them going to expensive places or fast food joints. They like enjoying the pleasure of Goa's admirable beauty.

Like foreigners, our own Kashmiris like the bright sunshine here. When their own Kashmir reels under cold conditions in winter, Goa gives them much needed relief. Hence, they now visit Goa again and again.

Meanwhile, another reason of the foreign tourists visiting Goa is because it is very reasonable here compared to other India states, thus thousands of tourists having the good time of their life in Goa. Foreigners relate Goa to the exotic place of Hawaii, although, the currency there is high compared to India.

You would find very big presence of Russian tourists in Goa every year. It is said that the Russian lifestyle and culture is very close to that of Goa, because of the earlier Portuguese rule. Also during summer season in Goa, Russia has freezing winter which brings many Russians to relax in Goa. Nowadays, there are a lot of signboards, restaurants and store names written in the Russian language. This makes it easier for them to move around and more visitors are comfortable stepping in Goa. Surely, if Goa is attracting tourists from Kashmir to Russia and other parts of the world, due credit must be given to the Goan government for developing the overall infrastructure of the state. *(The author is a columnist & has penned under 'Gandhi's Delhi')*

Paradox of scientific practice and increased human domination

By: Prabhat Patnaik

There is a paradox at the core of the efflorescence of science that has occurred over the last millennium. In essence this efflorescence has the potential to increase human freedom immensely. It increases the capacity of man within the Man-Nature dialectic; scientific practice aims to go beyond the "given" not just in a once-for-all sense but as a perpetual movement through incessant self-questioning, so that this practice is potentially a collective act of liberation. But this promise of freedom remains significantly unfulfilled; and while its potential has not been realised, this efflorescence of science has been utilised to a great extent for domination by some over other human beings and other societies. The paradox lies in the fact that scientific practice that has the potential to increase human freedom has been utilised to increase domination, that is, to attenuate human freedom.

The roots of this paradox lie in the fact that the unleashing of scientific advance acquired an overthrow of the stranglehold over society of the church (which, it may be recalled, had forced Galileo to recant); and this overthrow could occur only as part of the transcendence of the feudal order, i.e., as part of the bourgeois revolution, of which the 1640 English Revolution was a prime example. The development of modern science in Europe therefore was inextricably linked from the very beginning with the development of capitalism; and this fact left its indelible imprint on the use to which scientific advances were put.

This bourgeois imprint also had major epistemic implications with which philosophers (like Akeel Bilgrami) have been concerned, namely the treatment of nature as "inert matter" and the attribution of a similar "inertness" to indigenous populations in far-flung areas of the world ("people with no history") which "justified" in European eyes the acquisition of "mastery" as much over nature as over such distant populations, and hence "justified" the phenomenon of imperialism.

Keenly aware of the fact that the freedom-enhancing role of science could be fully realised only through a transcendence of capitalism itself, the finest of scientists in the era when such transcendence had come on to the historical agenda, joined the struggle for socialism. This was not just essential for them as citizens, to prevent the abuse of science; it was also a moral imperative for them as scientists: struggling against the abuse of their own praxis that produced scientific advance, had paramount importance for them.

In the matter of struggling for socialism the example of Albert Einstein is well-known. He was not only an avowed socialist, but actively participated in political activities and meetings, because of which the American FBI had put a "tail" on him and kept a dossier on him which is now open to the public; in fact because of his socialist convictions he was not given security clearance for taking part in the Manhattan project that developed the atom bomb. Likewise in Britain, the finest scientists in the twentieth century were part of the Left,

from JD Bernal to Joseph Needham, JBS Haldane, Hyman Levy, GH Hardy, Dorothy Hodgkin and many others.

With the onset of neo-liberalism however there has been a fundamental change. There has been a "commodification" of science, under which the responsibility of funding research has shifted from the State to private, mainly corporate, donors. This has meant that the freedom of the scientist to express political opinions that underscore the need for transcending capitalism has got greatly curtailed. If a scientist wants to engage in a research project then he or she has to be sufficiently acceptable to private donors; and it does not help the scientist if he or she is known to hold socialist beliefs. Even university appointments are determined by the ability of the scientist to attract funds from donors. The same political constraints therefore apply even in a sphere where until recently the academics had the freedom to profess diverse beliefs. Commodification of science in other words produces, as a necessary consequence, a political conformism, and hence a social responsibility, on the part of the scientist. The "luxury" of internalising the moral imperative of attempting to go beyond capitalism, in order to make one's scientific practice contribute towards human liberation, is denied to the scientist in the era of neo-liberalism; and this in turn implies the adoption of scientific advances without adequate discussion of consequences.

An obvious example of such thoughtless adoption that is occurring today before our very eyes relates to artificial intelligence. It has of course several implications which I shall not go into; my concern is only with one implication, namely the creation of massive unemployment, to which the recent strike by the Hollywood script writers drew attention. Any measure that substitutes human labour by a mechanical device is potentially liberating: it can reduce the drudgery of work, or alternatively raise the magnitude of output with the same deployment of labour as before, and hence the availability of goods and services for the population. But under capitalism, every such substitution of human labour by a mechanical device adds to human misery.

Consider an example. Suppose an innovation doubles labour productivity. Under capitalism, each capitalist would use the innovation for retrenching half the workforce that was being employed earlier. This very fact would increase the relative size of the reserve army of labour, because of which those who continue to remain employed would experience no increase in their real wage. There would therefore be a halving of the wage-bill and an increase in the magnitude of surplus, if the earlier level of output keeps getting produced. But because of the shift from wages to surplus at the earlier level of output, there would be a fall in demand (since a larger proportion of wages is consumed than of surplus) and hence the earlier level of output will not be produced and there would be an additional degree of unemployment, this time because of insufficient demand, over and above the

unemployment generated because of the original doubling of labour productivity.

The English economist David Ricardo had not cognized this additional unemployment because of the deficiency of demand. He had assumed Say's Law, that is, that there is never any deficiency of aggregate demand, and that not only are all wages consumed but all surplus in excess of the part that is consumed is automatically invested. From this assumption he had drawn the conclusion that the shift from wages to surplus, while it would lower total consumption out of the earlier output, would raise investment, but leave the earlier output unchanged to start with; and this raising of the share of investment would raise the output growth rate and hence the employment growth rate. The use of machinery therefore, while it may reduce employment immediately, would raise its rate of growth, so that employment exceeds after some time what it would otherwise have been.

Say's Law however has no validity whatsoever. Investment under capitalism is determined by the expected growth of the market and not by the magnitude of surplus (unless there are untapped colonial markets that can be accessed or the State is ever willing to intervene to overcome a deficiency of aggregate demand). The reason why technological change did not historically cause mass unemployment within the metropolis was two-fold: first, colonial markets were available on tap, because of which much of the unemployment generated by technological change was shifted to the colonies (in the form of deindustrialisation); that is, there was export of unemployment from the metropolis. Second, whatever local unemployment was generated by technological change did not linger, because the unemployed migrated abroad. Through the "long nineteenth century" (up to the First World War) 50 million Europeans migrated to the temperate regions of white settlement like Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

Today, however, an entirely different situation prevails. It is not just that colonialism does not exist, but third world markets are inadequate to counter any deficiency of aggregate demand in the metropolis. Likewise, the State cannot counter a deficiency of aggregate demand as it can neither increase its fiscal deficit beyond the FRBM Act limit, nor tax the rich for increasing its expenditure (taxing the working people to increase its expenditure scarcely increases aggregate demand). It follows, therefore, that mechanisation, including the use of artificial intelligence, in the context of capitalism today will inevitably generate massive unemployment.

Consider what would happen in a socialist economy by contrast. Any mechanisation, including the use of artificial intelligence, will reduce the drudgery of work without reducing employment, output and hence the wage-bill of the workers, all of which are centrally determined. This fundamental difference between the two systems explains why the benign use of artificial intelligence is conditionally only upon a transcendence of capitalism. *(IPA Service)*

Inbound for landing Oscar Winning Christopher Nolan's epoch making *Oppenheimer*



By: Kamal Baruah

We gazed in awe at two supersonic fighters, taking off together in formation from the runway. It's the Jamnagar Air Force base, we had our days of aviation in early 2K. Besides intense wargames of over hundred sorties in a day, the airfield owned by IAF, permits both commercial as well as private flights. Until recently, the airport handles just six scheduled flight on a normal day from Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and back, besides it's a premier fighter base for IAF ever since 1951, witnessing a long history.

The combat aircraft launched from this Air Base, have contributed immensely in inflicting damage at Karachi in Pakistan during 1965 and 1971 Wars and also in liberation of Diu in 1961. Its helicopters and transport aircraft were used in peace time operation during Bhuj earthquake in Jan 2001, Tsunami in Dec 2004 and flood-relief operation at Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. The evacuation of Indian from Yemen in April 2015, a C-17 Globe master was sent to Djibouti from its base.

Recently, Jamnagar turned into a temporary international airport for Ambani's Pre-Wedding bash, handling over 300 private and chartered flights. The place made headlines over the "band baaja for baaraat", that creating a hassle for the airport operations staff, when business magnates like Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg graced the occasion. Were they wanderlust to travel India for big wedding? Shockingly, the celebration broke the internet.

It was an affair full of glitz and glamour with Bollywood stars aside from pop star Rihanna's amazing performance with her distinctive and versatile voice. Invites guests were fabulously banqueted and loaded with gifts and they had a good time to witness such lavish affairs. Fat, as any hardcore foodie would tell us, is where the flavour is. Were that three days wedding so hip? I wonder how a single terminal could handle more than 150 passengers at a given time, when thousands of guests arrived for Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant wedding celebration.

Meanwhile, I recall of one occasion, while we were an early bird of our aviation days for hectic early party flying activities. It was another sizzling summer day; we were swamped and felt beat after handling Russian Sukhoi SU-30 at Service Bay on a hot tarmac. In the

meantime, while sipping coffee, a pilot of a chartered flight using its call sign to established contact with our Air Traffic Controller through radio communication "VHF" on a designated frequency for stating intention to request permission to land.

Pilots need to follow a specific procedure to ensure that ATC can properly identify and track the aircraft on radar. ATC considers various factors such as runway availability, air traffic congestion and weather conditions before granting or denying permission. It was shocking before disclosing relevant information such as current position and altitude; the flight went on descending to its own altitude, designated flight path and speed towards the white stripes before any "affirmative" clearance for an approach and landing from tower controller.

We all were chickened out for a moment. It was no sweat, the aircraft touched down its wheel on the runway without additional guidance such as wind direction and runway conditions to ensure a safe landing. After a forced successful landing, there was a shocked silence. This is wack! - the controller murmured. The flight was in hot water. Fortunately, all the flying activities of Squadron came to a standstill during that time Later it became the subject of much IAF fling gossip.

Such was the time, when there was only one chartered flight "Dornier" from Reliance used to land at JGA (IATA Code) airstrip for their employees working in Refinery in the morning and subsequently takes off in the evening. No biggie, no sweat. As the passengers were out of there, we were on a roll to see India's billionaire very often.

Gujarat's Jamnagar sprung to life in recent times and I am stuffed but parched as the guests dressed up in elegant evening cocktail attire and were being treated to chilled refreshing drinks. It was another mesmerizing occasion at Jamnagar, turning its airport to international tag for such a short stint of ten days, while IAF went beyond its usual protocols, permitting access to its sensitive technical area.

The Dornier-228 was probably acted in haste, without understanding the situation. The flying of one and half hour from Mumbai to Jamnagar and back was Reliance's extravaganza, when they pick their destination, the departure, the arrival, and their crew. We were hyped to receive the chartered flight then.

By: Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee

"I have been dreaming about this moment for so long," said Emma Thomas, Nolan's wife and producing partner, accepting the best picture award. *Oppenheimer* is the star-studded biopic thriller that blazed its way through award season. The film, which had 13 nominations going into the night and won seven. Nolan, who won two of his three nominations finished shy of the record for most Oscar wins in a single night. "Parasite" director Bong Joon Ho won four Oscars in 2020 and Walt Disney won the same number in 1954. It was really a thunderous night for *Oppenheimer* and Director Christopher Nolan who bagged the best director Oscar for the epoch making film reflected that the medium of film is only just over a century old; for the Academy to "know you think I'm a meaningful part of it means the world to me" Nolan has won the best director Oscar for *Oppenheimer* at the Academy Awards that took place in Los Angeles. This is the first time Nolan has won the award, having previously been nominated for *Dunkirk* in 2018. He was considered the strong favourite for the statuette, having won a series of best director awards in the run-up to the Oscars, including a Golden Globe, Bafta, Critics Choice Award and Directors Guild of America Prize. At the Oscars, Nolan saw off a strong field *Oppenheimer*, which Nolan also produced and wrote, stars Cillian Murphy as the pioneering nuclear scientist J. Oppenheimer.

"*Oppenheimer*" is a great achievement in formal and conceptual terms, and fully absorbing, but Nolan's filmmaking is, crucially, in service to the history that it relates. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the secret Los Alamos laboratory that designed and built the first atomic bombs. It's a dense, event-filled story that Nolan — who's long embraced the plasticity of the film medium — has given a complex structure, which he parcels into revealing sections. Most are in lush color; others in high-contrast black and white. These sections are arranged in strands that wind together for a shape that brings to mind the double helix of DNA. The atomic bomb and what it impacted define Oppenheimer's legacy and also shape this film. Nolan goes deep and long on the building of the bomb, a fascinating and appalling process, but he doesn't re-stage the attacks; there are no documentary images of the dead or panoramas of cities in ashes, decisions that read as his ethical absolutes.

Yoked with Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* movie using the hashtag #Barbenheimer, the film became a significant commercial hit, with total revenue currently recorded at \$960.6m. *Oppenheimer* is a 2023 epic biographical war thriller film written, directed and produced by Christopher Nolan



starring Cillian Murphy as J. Robert Oppenheimer, the American theoretical physicist credited with being the "father of the atomic bomb" for his role in the Manhattan Project, the World War II undertaking that developed the first nuclear weapons. Based on the 2005 biography *American Prometheus* by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin the film chronicles Oppenheimer's career, with the story predominantly focusing on his studies, his direction of the Los Alamos Laboratory during World War II and his eventual fall from grace due to his 1954 security hearing. It is Nolan's first film not distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures since *Memento* (2000), due to his conflicts regarding the studio's simultaneous theatrical and HBO Max release schedule. Among its many awards, *Oppenheimer* was named one of the top ten films of 2023 by the National Board of Review and the American Film Institute, film is presented as a nonlinear narrative, with two different timelines interwoven together. The first is "Fission", playing out in color, about Oppenheimer giving a subjective account of his life at his 1954 security hearing, while the second is "Fusion", in black and white, which is Lewis Strauss's viewpoint on Oppenheimer during his 1959 Senate confirmation hearing. The plot summary is linear. In 1926, 22-year-old doctoral student J. Robert Oppenheimer grapples with anxiety and homesickness while studying experimental physics under Patrick Blackett at the Cavendish Laboratory in the University of Cambridge. Upset with Blackett's attitude, Oppenheimer leaves him a poisoned apple but later retrieves it.

Oppenheimer completes his PhD there and meets fellow scientist Isidor Isaac Rabi. They later meet theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg in Switzerland. Wanting to expand quantum physics research in the United States, Oppenheimer begins teaching at the University of California, Berkeley and the California Institute of Technology. He assembles a team consisting of Rabi, Hans Bethe, and Edward Teller at the Los Alamos Laboratory, and also collaborates with scientists Enrico Fermi, Leo Szilard, and David L. Hill at the University of Chicago. Teller's calculations reveal an atomic detonation could trigger a catastrophic chain reaction that ignites the atmosphere. After consulting with Albert Einstein, Oppenheimer concludes the chances are acceptably low. Teller attempts to leave the project after his

proposal to construct a hydrogen bomb is rejected, but Oppenheimer convinces him to stay. After Germany's surrender in 1945, some Project scientists question the bomb's relevance. Oppenheimer believes it would end the ongoing Pacific War and save Allied lives. The Trinity test is successful, and President Harry S. Truman orders the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, resulting in Japan's surrender. Though publicly praised, Oppenheimer is haunted by the mass destruction and fatalities. A flashback reveals that Oppenheimer and Einstein's 1947 conversation never mentioned Strauss. Oppenheimer instead expressed his belief that they had indeed started a chain reaction—a nuclear arms race—that would one day destroy the world. Christopher Nolan's complex, vivid portrait of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the "Father of the atomic bomb" is a brilliant achievement in formal and conceptual terms. The film condenses a titanic shift in consciousness into three haunted hours. This film is about genius, hubris and error both individual and collective brilliantly charting the turbulent life of the American theoretical physicist who helped research and develop the two atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II—cataclysms that helped usher in our human-dominate age. The film borrows liberally from the book as it surveys Oppenheimer's life, including his role in the Manhattan Engineer District, better known as the Manhattan Project. He served as director of a clandestine weapons lab built in a near-desolate stretch of Los Alamos, in New Mexico, where he and many other of the era's most dazzling scientific minds puzzled through how to harness nuclear reactions for the weapons that killed tens of thousands instantly, ending the war in the Pacific. The horror of the bombings, the magnitude of the suffering they caused and the arms race that followed suffuse the film. It also isn't a story that builds gradually; rather, Nolan abruptly tosses you into the whirl of Oppenheimer's life with vivid scenes of him during different periods. This fast pace and narrative fragmentation continue as Nolan fills in this Cubistic portrait, crosses and recrosses continents and ushers in armies of characters, including Niels Bohr (Kenneth Branagh), a physicist who played a role in the Manhattan Project. Nolan has loaded the movie with familiar faces — Matt Damon, Robert Downey Jr., Gary Oldman — some distracting. The New York Times nicely wrote, "Nolan is one of the few contemporary filmmakers operating at this ambitious scale, both thematically and technically."

Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee is currently Affiliate Faculty of English in Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond and a Multilingual writer email bhat-tacharj@vcu.edu

What makes us share posts on social media?

By: Sheikh Aqib Farooq

The average internet user spends nearly three hours a day using social media. It's clear that social media is becoming increasingly crucial to sharing important information with the public -- like how to stay safe from COVID-19, for example - and researchers want to know what makes a piece of media compelling enough for people to share it online.

A new study published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* led by University of Pennsylvania researchers Danielle Cosme and Emily Falk analyzed the behaviour of more than 3,000 individuals to explore the psychology behind sharing information online.

It turns out that the answer is quite straightforward: People share information that they feel is meaningful to themselves or to the people they know.

Cosme and her team test what contributes to "value-based virality" - essentially that information on the internet can go viral because people find it inherently valuable, either to themselves or to society.

This finding is key to crafting effective messaging for social causes, says Cosme, a research director at the Annenberg School for Communication's Communication Neuroscience Lab.

Knowing the psychological ingredients that make a person share a post on social media can help scientists share facts about climate change or public

health officials dispel myths about vaccines.

Cosme's research shows that people pay more attention to information they perceive to be related to themselves.

Similarly, humans are social beings and love to connect with each other.

Sharing information activates reward centers in our brain. And when we communicate with others, we consider what the other person is thinking or wants to hear - a quality known as social relevance.

For Cosme's study, participants were exposed to articles and social media posts about health, climate change, voting, and COVID-19. Some participants read headlines and summaries of news articles, others looked at social media posts.

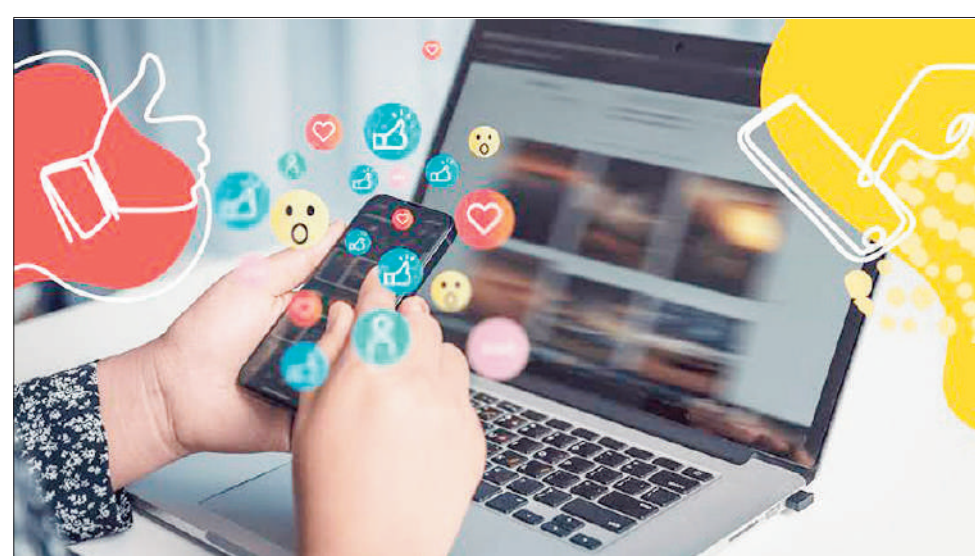
All of the participants rated how likely they were to share each message and how relevant they found each one to themselves and to people they know.

The researchers found that no matter the topic covered or the medium of the message, people were most likely to say they'd share messages that they perceived as self- or socially relevant.

Further, they found that when participants were asked to explicitly write out why a message was relevant to themselves or people they know, they were even more likely to share it than when they just reflected on the topic.

"Sharing information is a critical component of individual and collective action," Cosme says.

"At the beginning of the



pandemic, we needed to quickly spread accurate information about what was going on, how to protect ourselves, how to protect each other. Information spreading within social networks can be really impactful for changing our individual behavior, and also changing our collective behavior through shifting our perceptions of what's normative."

With data on tens of thousands of messages, Cosme and her colleagues at the Communication Neuroscience Lab believe this finding can help shape effective public messaging on social media.

"We're interested in understanding how we can translate psychological theory into real-world interventions to try to promote behavior change," Cosme says.

One way to improve content sharing is to recruit people who find the content self- or socially relevant to share messages

online.

Another is to frame messages to be seen as more self- or socially relevant by audiences without tailoring the messages themselves.

"We developed message frames that could be paired with existing news and social media posts," says Falk, the study's senior author.

"This means that the same prompts that worked in this study could be tested easily in other contexts as well."

The Communication Neuroscience Lab is continuing this research by looking at brain activity in relation to social media sharing.

For these studies, the researchers are using fMRI scanners to understand how specific regions of the brain shape perceptions of self and social relevance.

Overall, the team hopes that the results of the study will give those wanting to create social change the tools to do so effectively.

"Big issues require collective action," Cosme says. And spreading accurate information empowers individuals to join together and act.

"This study highlights key psychological ingredients that motivate people to share information about topics that impact our well-being," Falk says. "Sharing is one key lever for shifting cultural norms and motivating larger scale action, so it's really important to understand what makes it happen." (The author is a distinguished figure in the realms of skill development, civil service training, and insightful commentary, has left an indelible mark on various spheres of professional and intellectual pursuits. His commitment to empowering individuals with the necessary tools for personal and professional growth has contributed significantly to the enhancement of skill sets across diverse sectors)

POEM

The Window of the Mind

Original: Assamese: Mamani Hazarika
Translated by: Mowsam Hazarika

A window into my heart
I'm sitting down.

The window through which
you can get into my heart
the infinite joy of life,
which the window will carry

The memories that make my lips smile,
The window that,
Retrieving the broken dreams of the past
I'll decorate again with desire,
And when he saw it,

The windows are zooming
The sky will laugh,
Even the frozen wind
It's like the window again

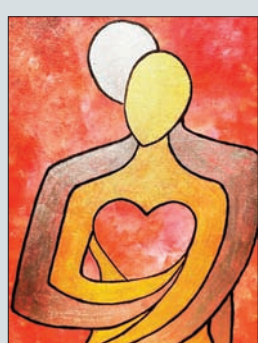
Play with joy.
Through this window,
My depressions, the sighs
I want to send it out,
The unsuccessful desires of my heart

I want to let go,
I'm lost, the moments that make me cry
I want to blow it up.

Therefore, the window of the mind
I'm firmly seated,
Like a guard of my heart

To observe happiness, sorrows,
The nice ones if you want
to embrace,

And, carried by the heart if you wish
To take out the pain.



All About An Intruder

By: Bipul Chandra Kalita

All of a sudden someone intrudes my heart
Confuses its beats
Increases its capacity
To widen my warm arms to hug strangers
Or, decrease its warmth for my well wishers

I know how troublesome the interloper is
I can't ignore impacts though
Very difficult to weigh life without troubles

Probably free hearts ignore minds
Just hug and fool them
Or, get fooled
Just like a bike rider who violates traffic rules

I never hear the intruder's footsteps
Always abrupt
So I try to be alert in vain
Someone robs me
Snatches my alertness
And I feel painfully how I am ruined

When the unexpected one leaves my heart
I refresh it
I reconstruct it
I refill its rooms with fresh dreams
And connect my mind to hopeful visions

Russians cast ballots on Day 2 of election

Voting is taking place at polling stations across Russia's 11 time zones, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine, and online

MOSCOW, March 16: Voters across Russia cast ballots Saturday on the second day of an election set to formalise six more years of power for President Vladimir Putin, who faces no serious challenges after crushing political dissent over his nearly 25 years of rule.

The election comes against the backdrop of a ruthless crackdown that has stifled independent media and prominent rights groups. Putin's fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison in February, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

The 71-year-old Putin faces three token rivals from Kremlin-friendly parties, who have refrained from any criticism of him or his invasion of Ukraine. Putin has cast his war in Ukraine, now in its third year, as an existential battle against the US and other Western powers bent on destroying Russia.



Russia's wartime economy has proven to be resilient, expanding despite bruising Western sanctions. The Russian defence industry has served as a key growth engine, working around the clock to churn out missiles, tanks and ammunition.

Russia's opposition movement has urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to show up at the polls at noon Sunday, the final day of voting, as a form of protest. The strategy was endorsed by Navalny not long before his death.

Voting is taking place at polling

stations across Russia's 11 time zones, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine, and online.

In the run-up to the vote, Putin boasted about battlefield successes in Ukraine, where the Russian troops have recently made incremental gains relying on their edge in firepower. Ukraine, meanwhile, has fought back by stepping up attacks on Russia's border regions and launching drone strikes deep inside the country.

On Friday, Putin described the week's cross-border shelling and incursions by Ukrainian forces as an attempt by Ukraine to frighten Russians and derail the vote. He vowed that the attacks "won't be left unpunished".

Officials said voting was proceeding in an orderly fashion. But despite tight controls, at least half a dozen cases of vandalism at polling stations have been reported, including a firebombing and several people pouring green

liquid into ballot boxes. The latter was an apparent homage to Navalny, who in 2017 was attacked by an assailant splashing green disinfectant in his face.

Western leaders have derided the vote as a travesty of democracy.

European Council President Charles Michel mockingly congratulated Putin Friday on "his landslide victory" in an election that was technically still underway. "No opposition. No freedom. No choice," he wrote on the social media platform X.

Beyond the lack of options for voters, the possibilities for independent monitoring are very limited. No significant international observers were present. Only registered, Kremlin-approved candidates — or state-backed advisory bodies — can assign observers to polling stations, decreasing the likelihood of independent watchdogs. (AP)

Cease-fire talks with Israel and Hamas expected to restart



CAIRO, March 16: Stalled talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in the war between Israel and Hamas are expected to restart in earnest in Qatar as soon as Sunday, according to Egyptian officials.

The talks would mark the first time both Israeli officials and Hamas leaders joined the indirect negotiations since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. International mediators had hoped to secure a six-week truce before Ramadan started earlier this week, but Hamas refused any deal that wouldn't lead to a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, a demand Israel rejected.

In recent days, however, both sides have made moves aimed at getting the talks, which never fully broke off, back on track.

Hamas gave mediators a new proposal for a three-stage plan that would end the fighting, according to two Egyptian officials, one who is involved in the talks and a second who was briefed on them. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to reveal the contents of the sensitive discussions.

The first stage would be a six-week cease-fire that would include the release of 35 hostages — women, those who are ill and older people — being held by militants in Gaza in exchange for 350 Palestinian prisoners being held by Israel.

Hamas would also release at least five female soldiers in exchange for 50 prisoners, including some serving long sentences on terror charges, for each soldier. Israeli forces would withdraw from two main roads in Gaza, let displaced Palestinians return to north Gaza, which has been devastated by the fighting, and allow the free flow of aid to the area, the officials said.

Nearly one in three children under 2 years old in the isolated north are suffering acute malnutrition, the UN children's agency UNICEF reported Friday.

In the second phase, the two sides would declare a permanent cease-fire and Hamas would free the remaining Israeli soldiers held hostage in exchange for more prisoners, the officials said.

In the third phase, Hamas would hand over the bodies it's holding in exchange for Israel lifting the blockade of Gaza and allowing reconstruction to start, the officials said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the proposal "unrealistic". However, he agreed to send Israeli negotiators to Qatar for more talks.

Those talks were expected to resume Sunday afternoon, though they could get pushed to Monday, the Egyptian officials said.

Netanyahu's government has rejected calls for a permanent cease-fire, insisting it must first fulfil its stated goal of "annihilating Hamas". Netanyahu's office also said Friday he approved military plans to attack Rafah, the southernmost town in Gaza where some 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

The United States and other countries have warned such an operation could be disastrous, but Israel says it plans to push ahead to destroy Hamas battalions stationed there.

Many Palestinians fled to Rafah when Israel began attacking Gaza following the Oct 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and left another 250 hostage in Gaza.

Netanyahu's office said the Rafah operation would involve the evacuation of the civilian population, but did not give details or a timetable. The military said Wednesday it planned to direct civilians to "humanitarian islands" in central Gaza.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday: "We have to see a clear and implementable plan" to safeguard innocent people in Rafah from an Israeli incursion.

"We have not seen such a plan," he said.

The Gaza Health Ministry said Saturday that at least 31,553 Palestinians have been killed in the war. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Israel's offensive has driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes. A quarter of Gaza's population is starving, according to the United Nations. (AP)

Saudi crown prince reaffirms full support for cash-strapped Pak

ISLAMABAD, March 16: Saudi crown prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman on Saturday assured newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of full support for Pakistan which has been going through a tough economic phase.

Riyadh has supported cash-strapped Pakistan in recent years by depositing and rolling over large sums of greenbacks to shore up the country's low foreign reserves.

Earlier, Saudi Arabia rolled over its USD 3 billion in deposits at the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) for another year by the end of December 2024. Prime Minister Shehbaz received a congratulatory telephone call from the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, according to a statement by the PM Office.

"The Crown Prince thanked the Prime Minister for his kind sentiments. He said both countries enjoyed close brotherly relations and reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's support for Pakistan," it said.

The prime minister said Pakistan was proud of its historic, deep-rooted and fraternal ties with Saudi Arabia and the two countries had always stood together through thick and thin. He lauded Saudi Arabia for its unwavering commitment and support to Pakistan. (PTI)

North Korea's Kim enjoys a Russian luxury limousine gifted by Putin as the two nations expand ties

SEOUL, March 16: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un used a Russian luxury limousine gifted by President Vladimir Putin recently, Kim's sister said Saturday, praising the car's "special function" and the two countries' deepening bilateral ties.

In February, Putin sent Kim a high-end Aurus Senat limousine, which he had shown to the North Korean leader when they met for a summit in Russia in September. Observers said the shipment violated a United Nations resolution aimed at pressuring the North to give up its nuclear weapons program by banning the supply of luxury items to North Korea.

In a statement carried by state media, Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, said that her brother used that limousine for the first time during an open event Friday.

"The special function of the private car is perfect and can be thoroughly trusted," Kim Yo Jong said. "Kim Jong Un's using of the private car sent by the president of the Russian Federation as a gift is a clear proof of (North Korea)-Russia friendship, which is developing in a comprehensive way on a new high stage."

According to Russian state media, Aurus was the first Russian



luxury car brand, and it's been used in motorcades of top officials since Putin first used an Aurus limousine during his inauguration ceremony in 2018.

Kim Jong Un, 40, possess a collection of foreign-made luxury cars believed to have been smuggled into his country. During his Russia visit, he traveled between meeting sites in a Maybach limousine that was brought with him on one of his special train carriages. Other limousines he's reportedly used include a

Mercedes-Maybach S600 Pullman Guard and a Maybach S62.

Over the past year, North Korea and Russia have sharply boosted their military and other cooperation as they face separate confrontations with the West — North Korea for its advancing nuclear program and Russia for its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Drawing the biggest outside concerns was North Korea's purported shipments of conventional weapons to support Russia's war with Ukraine to receive high-tech

Russian weapons technologies and other support.

Russia, together with China, have repeatedly blocked the United States and its partners' attempts to impose fresh U.N. sanctions on North Korea over its barrage of banned ballistic missile tests.

North Korea's state media separately reported Saturday that Kim Jong Un guided his troops conducting parachuting training the previous day. It's unclear if Friday's training was the same event in which Kim rode in the Russian limousine.

The parachuting training was the latest in a series of military drills that Kim has supervised in recent days, likely in response to the annual 11-day South Korean-U.S. military exercises that ended Thursday. Kim views his rivals' exercises as an invasion rehearsal.

After watching Friday's training, Kim ordered his military to conduct future training more intensively and make full preparation for a war, according to the North's official Korean Central News Agency. Kim made similar demands after he guided other recent drills involving tanks, long-range artillery guns and combat soldiers. (AP)

Not endorsing Trump: Former US Vice Prez Mike Pence

NEW YORK, March 16: Former Vice President Mike Pence says he will not be backing Donald Trump in the 2024 election.

"It should come as no surprise that I will not be endorsing Donald Trump this year," Pence said in an interview with Fox News Channel on Friday, weighing in for the first time since the former president became the presumptive GOP nominee. Pence ran against Trump for their party's nomination but dropped his bid before voting began last year.

The decision makes Pence the latest in a series of senior Trump administration officials who have declined to endorse their former boss's bid to return to the Oval Office. While Republican members of Congress and other GOP officials have largely rallied behind Trump, a vocal minority has continued to oppose his bid.

It also marks the end of a metamorphosis for Pence, who had long been seen as one of Trump's most loyal defenders but broke with his two-time running mate by refusing to go along with Trump's unconstitutional scheme to try to remain in power after losing the 2020 election.

When Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021, trying to disrupt the certification of Joe Biden's win, Pence was forced to flee to a Senate loading dock as rioters chanted, "Hang Mike Pence!" outside.

In order to participate in the Republican primary debates, Pence was required to sign a pledge saying that he would support the party's eventual nominee. And during the first debate in Milwaukee, Pence was among the candidates who raised their hands when asked whether they would support Trump even if he were convicted in one of his four criminal indictments.

But Pence had made clear he had come to harbour serious reservations about Trump's actions and his policy stances.

"I believe anyone that puts themselves over the Constitution should never be president of the United States and anyone who asks someone else to put them over the Constitution should never be president of the United States again," he said during his campaign launch speech.

As the campaign progressed, he raised alarms about the party's resistance to sending aid to Ukraine and called on his fellow Republicans to reject what he called the "siren song of populism" espoused by Trump and his followers.

In the interview on Fox's "The Story with Martha MacCallum," Pence said he was "incredibly proud" of his and Trump's record in office, but said, "During my presidential campaign I made it clear that there were profound differences between me and President Trump on a range of issues, and not just our difference on my Constitutional duties that I exercised on January the 6th."

"I mean, as I have watched his candidacy unfold, I've seen him walking away from our commitment to confronting the national debt. I've seen him starting to shy away from a commitment to the sanctity of human life," he went on, also referencing what he called Trump's "reversal on getting tough on China and supporting our administration's effort to force" the sale of the popular TikTok app.

"In each of these cases, Donald Trump is pursuing and articulating an agenda that is at odds with the conservative agenda that we governed on during our four years. And that's why I cannot in conscience endorse Donald Trump in this campaign," he said.

Pence declined to say whom he would be voting for — "I'm going to keep my vote to myself," he said — but made clear it wouldn't be Biden.

"I would never vote for Joe Biden," he said. "I'm a Republican." (AP)

Round 14 of India-UK FTA talks close ahead of election schedule

LONDON, March 16: The 14th round of the free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations between India and the UK has now closed, with formal negotiations being put on hold as India heads into election campaign mode as the general election schedule is announced on Saturday. According to UK officials familiar with the discussions, a lot of progress has been made but the teams are not in a position to conclude an agreement which led to the Round 14 closing on Friday.

The next round of formal trade talks can commence only after the Lok Sabha polls have concluded.

The India-UK FTA negotiations, which opened in January 2022, are aimed at securing an "ambitious" outcome for bilateral trade — currently worth around GBP 38.1 billion a year as per official statistics from last month.

"We anticipate that while some talks might happen between rounds,

the next round of negotiations will take place after the Indian elections," official sources in the UK said.

"Neither side is walking away from talks. It's just that we don't have what we need yet to finalise a deal that meets our joint ambition across goods, services and investment. We're very proud of the track record we have and how far we've been able to come with this trade deal so far. Negotiators have worked really hard in the past few years and we've managed to get a lot of chapters closed," the sources said.

The development follows a phone call between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his UK counterpart, Rishi Sunak, earlier this week when both leaders reaffirmed their commitment towards "securing a historic and comprehensive deal" and reiterated the importance of reaching an "ambitious outcome". (PTI)

Pak court slams interior ministry for failing to deport Indian national held 11 years ago

KARACHI, March 16: A Pakistani court has slammed the interior ministry for its failure to deport an Indian national arrested nearly 11 years ago despite court orders and warned that the secretary concerned would be summoned to explain how his department is working in such cases.

The single-judge bench of the Sindh High Court (SHC) headed by Justice Mohammad Karim Khan Agha on Friday directed the interior ministry to depute an officer well-versed with the facts of the case or file a compliance report at the next hearing, the Dawn newspaper reported on Saturday.

Abdul Mugni was arrested in 2013 by the Mobina Town police station near Abul Hassan Ispahani Road and booked under various provisions of the Foreigners Act. A sessions court sentenced him to six months in prison in 2017. The convict filed an appeal against his conviction before the SHC.

The court during the hearing observed that the appellant was an Indian national, while the interior ministry was not able to confirm his nationality apparently due to lack of efforts, the report said.

The bench said that since the appellant had already served out his sentence, the jail superintendent had been directed to make arrangements for his deportation through the home department.

However, at the last hearing, it also noted that the focal person of the home department of Sindh had submitted that a correspondence was made with the Ministry of Interior on the subject matter and it did not respond and thereafter, the court had issued a notice to the secretary to send an official familiar with this case to explain as to why the appellant had not been deported yet.

On Friday, a section officer of the ministry turned up and said that the

deportation did not happen due to certain procedural issues.

The bench in its order said: "I find it quite extraordinary that after a lapse of seven years, the Ministry of Interior has not been able to confirm whether the appellant is an Indian national or not. Prima facie this is because of lack of efforts on the part of the Ministry of Interior."

The bench stated that when the Section Officer was confronted, he was not even aware if the Indian government had a similar computerised national identity card system (Aadhar) like the Nadra.

"In the event, the impugned order dated 24.08.2017 regarding the deportation of the appellant is not complied with by the next hearing, this court will have no option except to call the secretary, Ministry of Interior, government of Pakistan in person to explain as to how his department is working in such like matters," it added. (PTI)

Reporters aboard a US military plane watch small batches of aid airdropped on a destroyed Gaza

ABOARD A US MILITARY AIRCRAFT, March 16: As American military pilots closed in on the northern coast of Gaza, Associated Press journalists aboard the aid mission could hardly spot a single building left untouched by six months of brutal war.

They watched as three tons of humanitarian aid — food, water and hygiene products supplied by Jordan — tumbled out of the rear of the C-130 transport plane, a mess of parachutes trailing behind. It was the 11th American airdrop of aid since the US began the program at the start of March.

"We understand that 6,400 pounds is a drop in the bucket. There are so many people that need aid out there," Jeremy Anderson, the American lieutenant colonel with the 26th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron aboard the aircraft, told the AP reporters who observed the aid delivery



Thursday. "We're doing what we can right now, and opening ground gates or anything outside of air dropping is out of our control."

The airdrops are part of an international effort to work around extreme difficulties plaguing ground transport of aid into Gaza. Truckloads of aid have been stalled by political and security concerns.

The US also plans to construct a sea bridge, but it will likely be several weeks before it is operational.

Israeli warplanes and ground troops have conducted a scorched-earth campaign on the strip since Hamas' October 7 attack on southern Israel.

The Israeli offensive has killed at least 31,553 Palestinians,

the Gaza health ministry said Sunday. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. The offensive has also pushed a quarter of the strip's population to the brink of starvation, according to UN officials.

The situation is most desperate in the north, where the C-130 crew conducted the airdrops on Thursday. Up to 300,000 Palestinians are believed to have remained there despite Israeli evacuation orders. Cut off since October, many have resorted to eating animal feed in recent weeks.

Recent airdrops of aid by the U.S. and other countries provide far lower amounts of aid than truck deliveries, which have become rare and sometimes dangerous. They have been met with some skepticism from UN officials and

rights groups, who say that the method is not best practice when it comes to distributing much-needed aid. Dropping aid from the sky can be dangerous — a recent airdrop killed five people when a package's parachute failed to engage.

Anderson said the crew's equipment was built to avoid similarly fatal incidents.

"If a chute doesn't open, it's going to go in the water and nobody's going to get hurt. As far as receiving, these chutes are light enough and have a slow enough rate of fall that even a child could get under it and tip it over on its way down, and it would prevent injury or death to personnel," he said.

The journalists looked on as, one by one, the aid packages rolled off the aircraft and disappeared from view. The plane turned west, toward the Mediterranean Sea, away from the rubble below. (AP)

Top officials of all the security agencies in Manipur were directed to put their personnel on alert

Security measures enhanced for smooth conduct of LS polls: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, March 16: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Saturday said that security measures have been enhanced for the smooth conduct of the upcoming Lok Sabha in Manipur. Talking to the reporters on the sideline of flagging off of a bus carrying a team of media persons on an external tour to Andaman Island, Biren Singh said that the state government had already taken up security measures for the smooth conduct of the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

Top officials of all the security agencies in Manipur were directed to put their personnel on alert during a security review meeting held yesterday, he also said.

During the meeting, he said, "I have instructed all the concerned security officials to keep alert their personnel to avoid any untoward incident during the elections."

The chief minister made the statement in the morning hours ahead of the announcement of the election scheduled for the upcoming 18th Lok Sabha elections by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Soon after ECI made the announcement in New Delhi, chief electoral officer (CEO) Manipur stated that the polling for the two Lok Sabha seats of the state will go on two



phases, that is, on April 19 and 26.

Earlier, the chief minister flagged off a bus carrying a team of media persons on

an external tour to Andaman Island from the Chief Minister's Bungalow. The chief minister wished the team a successful and

safe trip.

Altogether 30 media persons including DIPR officials are part of the team for the tour organized by the All Manipur Working Journalists Union under the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR).

During the tour, the team will witness a light and sound exhibition at Cellular Jail, visit Mount Manipur National Park and Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park, Wandoor, Jolly Buoy Island, Limestone Cave, Baratang Island, Ross and Smith Island among others.

The trip will be a significant one, said the chief minister while expressing gratitude toward the Central leaders for the recognition of Manipur's historical significance, particularly the replacement of Mount Hurriet with Mount Manipur.

He also lauded the initiative of the Manipur journalists in visiting the place to trace the footsteps of the forefathers who were put in jail in the Island after the British invented the erstwhile Kingdom.

The flag-off ceremony was also attended by some MLAs, IPR commissioner M Joy Singh and DIPR director Dr Th Charanjit Singh among others. (NNV)

1,058 polling stations 'vulnerable critical': Manipur chief electoral officer

IMPHAL, March 16: Manipur chief electoral officer Pradeep Kumar Jha on Saturday said 1,058 polling stations out of 2,955 have been identified as "vulnerable critical" in the state.

Addressing a press conference here, Jha said, "The first phase of polls on April 19 will cover 47 assembly segments while the second phase on April 26 will have 13 assembly segments. The last date for filing nominations is March 27."

He said the state has a total number of 10,47,929 females and 9,80,855 male voters in addition to 239 transgender electors. To check election expenditure, 197 flying squads, 194 static surveillance teams, 92 video surveillance teams, 60 video viewing teams and 60 accounting teams have been constituted.

"Trained officials have visited polling stations for identification of vulnerable locations. A total of 1,058 polling stations have been identified as vulnerable and critical," he said, adding, "Steps have been taken to identify history-sheeters, trouble mongers, and persons who might create trouble." "These critical and vulnerable polling stations will be brought under webcasting/videography" along with deployment of micro observers and additional deployment of CAPFs," he said. (PTI)



Voting in Nagaland's lone LS seat on April 19



DIMAPUR (NAGALAND), March 16: Nagaland will go to polls for the lone Lok Sabha seat on April 19, the Election Commission announced on Saturday.

The last date for filing of nominations is March 27 and the last date for withdrawal of candidatures is March 30. The date for scrutiny of nominations is March 28 and counting will be held on June 4.

Chief electoral officer, Nagaland Vyasan R said consequent on the announcement of the schedule for the General Election to the Lok

Sabha, the model code of conduct comes into operation with immediate effect from March 16 and will be in force till the completion of the elections.

In this regard, the chief electoral officer convened a meeting with all recognized political parties on March 18.

The ruling NDPP-led alliance fielded Dr Chumben Murry, Advisor to the CM, as its candidate for the lone Lok Sabha seat. The Congress named its state party president S Supongmeren Jamir as its candidate. (PTI)

Congress welcomes single-phase poll schedule in Arunachal Pradesh

ITANAGAR, March 16: The Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Saturday welcomed the Election Commission's decision to hold the Lok Sabha and assembly polls in a single phase on April 19.

In a statement, the party pledged its complete cooperation to ensure a free and fair election, adhering to the Constitutional principles and guidelines set by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The party has encouraged voters to exercise their democratic right and contribute to the nation-building process by casting their valuable votes. Kon Jirjo Itham, a spokesperson for the party, has urged the state election machinery to administer the polls impartially and transparently.

The APCC called upon the Election Commission to strictly enforce the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for all parties involved.

The party emphasised the importance of conducting the elections without any bias or undue influence from the ruling party, stressing the need for fairness and justice in the electoral process. (PTI)

Tipra Motha joined BJP govt realising development of tribals: CM

AGARTALA, March 16: Chief minister Manik Saha on Saturday said that Tipra Motha, which emerged as Tripura's main opposition party in the 2023 elections, joined his government as it realised that only Prime Minister Narendra Modi could ensure the development of the indigenous people.

Addressing a programme organised by the BJP Janajati Morcha at the Town Hall, he said the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) also joined hands with the BJP before the 2018 assembly polls keeping faith in the PM for the welfare of the tribal people.

"After the IPFT, the Tipra Motha joined the BJP-led coalition realising that only PM Modi could ensure the development of the tribal people of Tripura. The state government is also working for the socio-economic development of the indigenous people," he said.



Claiming that the BJP will win both Lok Sabha seats in the state, Saha said various initiatives have been undertaken for the welfare of the indigenous people.

"The government has already sent a proposal to convert the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) into

Tripura Territorial Council, with an increase in the number of seats from 28 to 50 to ensure representation of all the 19 tribes," he said.

The TTAADC budget has been increased from ₹ 619.26 crore in 2022-23 to ₹ 650.94 crore in 2023-24, he said, adding that the outlay

of the tribal sub-plan has also been enhanced from ₹ 4,720 crore in 2022-23 to ₹ 5,608 crore in 2023-24.

Claiming that the Left Front saw the tribals as a vote bank, Saha said the socio-economic-cultural life of the tribal people has changed after the BJP came to power in the state in 2018.

"Almost all the tribal-dominated blocks have been identified as aspirational to intensify development works. Expenditure of additional 10 per cent funds of the total outlay of any scheme or project has been made mandatory in these aspirational blocks," he said.

The BJP's candidate for the West Tripura Lok Sabha seat Biplob Kumar Deb and its East Tripura candidate Kriti Singh Debbarma, who is the sister of Tipra Motha founder Pradyot Debbarma, were present at the programme. (PTI)

Polling in Mizoram's lone Lok Sabha seat on April 19

AIZAWL, March 16: Polling for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Mizoram will be held on April 19, the Election Commission announced on Saturday. The counting of votes will take place on June 4.

The last date for filing nomination is March 27, while the last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 30, state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Madhup Vyas said, adding that the scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on March 28. Vyas said that more than 8.6 lakh voters, including 4.41 lakh female voters, are eligible to exercise their franchise.

Among the 8.6 lakh electorate, 36,214 are young voters (18-19 years), 4,758 are above 85 years of age and 3,399 people are with disabilities (PwD), he said. (PTI)

Kohima licensed arms holders asked to deposit arms and ammo

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, March 16: With the Election Commission announcing the schedule for the upcoming general elections, Kohima deputy commissioner and district magistrate Kumar Rannikant on Saturday directed all licensed arms holders in Kohima district to deposit their arms and ammunition at the nearest police stations by March 30.

The DC issued the order in preparation for the election to the Lok Sabha in accordance with the Election Commission's guidelines.

The order said the deposited arms and ammunition will be kept in police custody until one week after the declaration of election results. It said each depositor will receive a receipt from the officer in



charge of the respective police station, who will also maintain proper records and ensure the safe custody of the arms.

It further stated that non-compliance with this directive will result in the cancellation of arms licenses and may incur penal action as per relevant sections of the law.

The DC further announced the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct following the Election Commission's declaration of dates of the general election. The Code of Conduct, effective immediately,

applies throughout Kohima district until the election process is complete, he said.

He urged all political parties, prospective candidates, government departments/establishments, and the public to adhere strictly to the guidelines and extend cooperation to the district election machinery for the peaceful conduct of the election.

Meanwhile, the ruling NDPP in Nagaland asked the rank and file of the party to strictly adhere to the Model Code of Conduct and election rules.

Any action that is in contravention of the rules and the model code of conduct will invite strict disciplinary action, party president Chingwang Konyak said in a notice on Saturday.

India's first FFB Processing Unit under National Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP)

India's first oil palm processing unit commences operations in Arunachal Pradesh

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: In a historic milestone for India's agricultural sector, India's first integrated Oil Palm Processing Unit by 3F Oil Palm, one of India's largest Oil Palm development companies, started its commercial operations on Saturday. The factory situated at Roing in lower Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh, carries forward Mission Palm Oil, representing a pivotal step in India's journey towards self-reliance in edible oils, catalyzed by the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP). This integrated Oil Palm project will include a cutting-edge oil palm factory (Palm Oil Processing and Refinery), a zero-discharge effluent plant, a palm waste-based power plant, and additional structures and go-downs for support purposes. This factory marks the first Oil Palm factory in Arunachal Pradesh and India's first Oil Palm Factory under NMEO-OP.

The inauguration of the 3F Oil Palm Processing Unit in Arunachal Pradesh, was virtually carried out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 9, marking the commencement of a transformative journey. Hon'ble Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for various other projects worth over ₹ 55,000 Crore, reinforcing the govern-

ment's commitment to the development of the Northeast.

Speaking about this inauguration at the Viksit Bharat - Viksit Northeast event in Arunachal Pradesh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the government's focus on Mission Palm Oil, with a special focus on Northeast, to not only achieve Atmanirbharta, but also to empower farmers and boost farmer income. He thanked Northeast farmers for their enthusiastic participation and dedication to palm cultivation following the launch of the Palm Mission, which holds a promise for a brighter future.

Talking about the prospects of Palm Oil in India, Sanjay Goenka, Managing Director & CEO, 3F Oil Palm Pvt Limited, stated, "With the ever-increasing demand for edible oils, palm oil has become an important component to ensure food security of the nation. The commencement of operations of country's first oil palm processing unit by 3F Oil Palm in Arunachal Pradesh is in line with the objective of encouraging domestic oilseeds production. Northeast holds immense potential for palm oil production, and we have already invested ₹ 100 crores in the region and have planned investments of ₹ 1100 crores in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh by 2030 creating jobs for 1,70,000 people. We express gratitude to



Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his vision and emphasis on Mission Palm Oil. 3F Oil Palm is proud to play a pivotal role in this transformative journey of India's economic development. We thank the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh for its continued support and ensuring ease of doing business in the state." In Arunachal Pradesh, 1,30,000

hectares of land suitable for Oil Palm cultivation has been identified, with the Northeast region alone housing a significant 33% (9.6 Lakh hectares) of the government-designated area fit for cultivation. Only 4% of this potential in the Northeast has currently been utilized for Oil Palm Development. Despite this vast potential, India grapples with a formidable challenge of achieving self-suf-

ficiency in edible oils, importing a staggering 96% of its required palm oil, accounting for 67% of the country's edible oil import bill, exceeding ₹ 1 Lakh crores. Addressing this critical issue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary initiative NMEO-Oil Palm Policy was introduced, aiming to reduce dependence on imported edible oils by promoting domestic oil palm cultivation, particularly in the Northeast, through financial, technical, and infrastructural support.

3F Oil Palm's state-of-the-art Integrated Oil Palm Processing Unit has been designed to process fresh fruit bunches (FFBs) into high-quality palm oil with an impressive capacity of 10 metric tons per hour. With 2,500 hectares of oil palm currently being planted across a farmer base of 500 farmers, 3F Oil Palm Pvt Ltd is a leader and pioneer in Arunachal Pradesh's oil palm development program.

3F Oil Palm's strength lies in its farmer-centric, technology-driven approach. One Key Differentiator of 3F Oil Palm, is its innovative Farmer Excellence Centres known as "3F Akshaya Kendra" - a One Stop Solution for Farmers, providing a range of agricultural products, equipment and transportation rentals, labour services, financial services and more. Technology is embedded in every

segment of 3F Oil Palm's operations, with its proprietary plantation management software 3F Smart Palm, and Farmer Mobile App 3F Akshaya. 3F Oil Palm is a pioneer in leveraging drone and satellite analytics for crop health monitoring using cutting-edge AI based image processing tools.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the company is the first in the state to import high-quality hybrid variety seed sprouts from specialized and recognized international companies. 3F Oil Palm is also the first oil palm company to provide agricultural inputs to farmers in Arunachal Pradesh. Both initiatives are anticipated to greatly boost farmer yields and encourage ease of planting. Owing to all these firsts and the additional traction produced by the Oil Palm Factory, the company is targeting to add 5000 Ha each year over the following five years in Lower Dibang District, Arunachal Pradesh.

3F Oil Palm has established a strong presence in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. The company is currently dedicated to formulating a robust growth strategy for the Northeastern region, encompassing Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The inauguration and commencement of operations symbolize a significant step in that direction.

India remains committed to partner Bhutan in its quest to become high-income nation: PM Modi conveys to Tobgay

Tobgay arrived in Delhi on Thursday on a five-day visit to India, his first foreign trip after assuming the charge of the top office in January

NEW DELHI, March 16: India and Bhutan vowed to further strengthen their "exceptional" ties with Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveying to his Bhutanese counterpart Tshering Tobgay that New Delhi remains committed to partner with Thimphu in its quest to become a high-income nation.

Two days after the Modi-Tobgay talks, a joint statement released on Saturday said the two prime ministers agreed to expand the existing India-Bhutan energy partnership beyond the hydro-power sector to include solar, wind power and green hydrogen.

It said India's development assistance for Bhutan will be geared towards the development of infrastructure, building connectivity in its "broadest form" which includes road, rail, air and digital connectivity.

In the talks, Modi appreciated Bhutanese King's vision of the Gelephu Mindfulness City as it will lead to economic prosperity in Bhutan and in the region in a sustainable manner, besides further strengthening India-Bhutan economic and investment linkages, the statement said.

It said Tobgay thanked India



for its development assistance of ₹ 5000 crore for Bhutan's 12th five-year-plan, which has "immensely contributed" to the socio-economic well-being of the people of that country.

Tobgay arrived in Delhi on Thursday on a five-day visit to India, his first foreign trip after assuming the charge of the top office in January. The Modi-Tobgay talks took place hours after his arrival.

The joint statement said both sides reaffirmed their resolve to further strengthen the "long-standing and exceptional bilateral ties that exist between the two countries."

"Prime Minister Modi con-

veyed that India remains committed to partner with Bhutan in its quest to become a high-income nation in consonance with the vision of His Majesty the King and the priorities of the people and the Royal Government of Bhutan," it said.

"The India-Bhutan partnership is characterized by utmost trust, goodwill, and mutual understanding at all levels and is reinforced by robust people to people linkages and close economic and development partnership," it noted.

On cooperation in the energy sector, it said both prime ministers agreed to expand the existing India-Bhutan energy

partnership to non-hydro renewables, such as solar and wind as well as green initiatives for hydrogen and e-mobility besides energy efficiency and conservation measures.

The two sides reaffirmed the significance of cooperating closely in the energy sector.

Modi and Tobgay reiterated their "firm commitment" to expanding hydro-power cooperation and directed their officials to hold expeditious consultations on implementation modalities for new projects.

"The two sides expressed satisfaction with the progress in construction of the 1020 MW Punatsangchu-II hydro power project and looked forward to its commissioning in 2024," the joint statement said.

They noted with satisfaction the progress made towards finding a technically safe and cost-effective way forward on the Punatsangchu-I hydro power project.

"Both sides welcomed measures to enhance connectivity between India and Bhutan, including the development of rail and road connectivity and the upgradation of trade infrastructure for the seamless move-

ment of people and goods," according to the statement.

It said the two sides noted with satisfaction the progress on opening of additional points for immigration and trading routes.

"The two sides noted the progress towards establishment of two rail-links Banarhat (West Bengal) -- Samtse (Bhutan) and Kokrajhar (Assam) -- Gelephu (Bhutan). Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is undertaking the Final Location Survey (FLS) of the two rail-links in consultation with the Bhutanese side," it said.

India and Bhutan also reaffirmed their desire to continue strengthening the positive collaboration between India and Bhutan in new and emerging areas such as digital technology and start-ups.

"India's development assistance will be geared towards the development of infrastructure, building connectivity in its broadest form which includes road, rail, air and digital connectivity, and in sectors like agriculture, healthcare, education, skill and cultural preservation," the statement said. The Bhutanese prime minister left for Mumbai on Saturday. (PTI)

Last chance to save democracy, Constitution: Cong after EC announces LS election schedule

NEW DELHI, March 16: Soon after the announcement of the Lok Sabha election schedule, the Congress on Saturday said that it was "perhaps the last chance to save democracy and our Constitution from dictatorship".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the people of the country will together fight against hatred, unemployment and price rise.

"The 2024 Lok Sabha elections will open the 'door of Nyay' for India. This would be perhaps the last chance to save democracy and our Constitution from dictatorship."

"We the people of India' will together fight against hatred, loot, unemployment, price rise and atrocities. 'Haath Badlega Halaat' (the Hand will change the situation)," Kharge said on X, referring to the Congress' poll symbol.

Congress spokesperson Pawan Khara said at a press conference that these "milestone" elections are happening under "a cloud of scams" of electoral bonds, jailing, suspension and raiding of opposition parties and politicians and freeing of funds of the primary national opposition party, which is "unprecedented".

"It is a milestone election because this election will decide whether our democracy will be protected or not, whether Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution will be protected or one man's whims and fancies will decide the direction and future of our democracy. It is a very crucial election," Khara told reporters.

He alleged that the BJP has reduced the constitutional status of the Election Commission and noted that the Congress gave a dissenting note on the appointment of the election commissioners.

"We have been raising issues that matter to farmers, youths and women, especially to the unemployed youth through the two yatras that Rahul Gandhi undertook. We have underlined the need for India's politics to focus on these issues. People have been waiting for this election."

"People want to elect a party that thinks of the youth. The promise of giving 30 lakh jobs to the youths, the promise of putting an end to paper leaks and the promise of tough laws to deal with this. These are promises that have changed the way politics need to be done in the country and no political party can afford not to focus on these issues," he asserted.

Khara also said that 18 million new voters would be voting this time and they would be "remembering and thanking Rajiv Gandhi who gave voting rights to the youth".

"BJP's slogan is for the BJP's benefit only. Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge gave guarantees for the country and its people. The Congress' guarantees, slogans and narrative are for the people and not for themselves," he asserted.

He claimed that in the next two months, the country would be rid of the "rhetoric" by the BJP and the prime minister.

Lok Sabha polls will be held in seven phases beginning from April 19 and the counting of votes will take place on June 4 for the world's biggest election exercise, according to the schedule announced by the Election Commission.

Khara also said that for the last 10 months, opposition parties have been struggling to meet the Election Commission and the poll body should answer why it is not finding time to address their concerns. (PTI)

Owaisi moves SC seeking stay on CAA Rules

NEW DELHI, March 16: AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi has moved the Supreme Court seeking a stay on the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Rules till the apex court disposes of the petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

The Centre had on March 11 paved the way for the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, with the notification of the relevant rules, four years after the contentious law was passed by Parliament to fast-track Indian citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

Owaisi, one of the petitioners who have challenged the validity of certain provisions of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, has now filed an application in the top court seeking a stay on the implementation of the Act and the 2024 rules till the final disposal of the petitions.

He has also sought a direction that "no applications seeking grant of citizenship status be entertained or processed by the respondents herein under section 6B of the Citizenship Act, 1955 (as it stands amended by the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019) during the pendency of the proceedings". (PTI)

'Cong guarantees comprehensive social, economic and caste census'

BENGALURU, March 16: Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday promised to pass a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs, and a comprehensive social, economic and caste census.

The promises are part of another five guarantees, each for 'Shramik Nyay' and 'Hissedari Nyay' announced by the party on Saturday.

"The Congress Party guarantees a comprehensive social, economic and caste census. Through this, the population, socio-economic condition of all castes and communities, their share in national wealth and their representation in institutions related to governance will be surveyed," Kharge said, listing out guarantees under 'Hissedari Nyay'.

He said this affirmative action policy will bring in a revolutionary change in the country.

"The Congress also guarantees that it will pass a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservation for SC, ST and OBC...50 per cent may go to 60, 65. Like Tamil Nadu, what they did, we want to do," Kharge added.

Further noting that the Congress guarantees to revive and implement by law the special component plan of SCs and STs, he said, this step has already been taken by some Congress-ruled states.

Speaking about 'Right to Jal-Jangal-Jameen' (Legal right to water, forest and land), he said the Congress guarantees protection of tribal forest rights.

The party guarantees to resolve all pending Forest Rights Act claims within one year and initiate a transparent process to review rejected claims within 6 months, Kharge said. (PTI)

MHA revises count of LWE-hit districts covered by special funding scheme to 58 from 72

NEW DELHI, March 16: The number of Left Wing Extremism-hit districts in the country covered under the special SRE funding scheme has come down to 58 from 72 following a "comprehensive" review by the Union home ministry and the 10 affected states, official sources and records state.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) division concerned with Left Wing Extremism (LWE) issued a communication earlier this week to the chief secretaries and the directors general of police (DGPs) of these states, saying the new categorisation would be effective from the financial year beginning on April 1.

The MHA communication, accessed by PTI, says that a number of interventions, both security- and development-related, are being made by the ministry and the states and as a result, there has been a "marked improvement" in the LWE scenario.

The LWE or Maoist vio-

lence-affected districts covered under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme were last reviewed by the MHA in 2021, and at that time, there were 72 such districts spread across 10 states.

After the latest review, this number has come down to 58, according to the official sources.

These districts are provided with various grants under the SRE scheme as part of the national policy and action plan to address the LWE issue "holistically", they said.

These districts are categorised under two broad heads -- LWE-affected and Legacy and Thrust districts (LT districts).

The highest number of LWE-affected districts as per the new categorisation, out of 38 in total, is in Chhattisgarh (15), which is followed by Odisha (7), Jharkhand (5), Madhya Pradesh (3), Kerala, Telangana and Maharashtra with two each and West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh with one each.

As per the ministry, LWE-affected districts are those where violence and other Maoist activities are continuing.

These LWE-affected districts have been further sub-categorised as 'most affected districts', a terminology brought in 2015, and 'districts of concern' (DOC), which was coined by the MHA in 2021.

There are 12 'most affected districts' after the latest review. This count was at 35 in 2015 and it went down to 30 in 2018 and 25 in 2021 following reviews, as per official records.

Seven of these 12 districts are in Chhattisgarh, two are in Odisha and one each is in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

DOC was added to the LWE terminology to "address the resource gap where the Maoist influence was waning". Eight districts were categorised as DOC for two years between 2021 and 2023, and all of them have now been deleted and nine new ones have been added, according to the MHA.

The latest DOC are in Jharkhand (4), Odisha (2) and one each in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana.

'Legacy' districts are those which are no longer LWE-affected but support to states is required for consolidating the position and continued support in respect of security and development measures for some more time, the ministry said.

The 'Thrust' districts are those that are considered "prospective sites" of LWE expansion and hence, continued support would be required for capacity building of the states, according to the MHA.

A total of 20 districts are included under the LT categorisation and these are in Bihar (8), Jharkhand (6), Odisha (3), and one each in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana.

The MHA told the states that the resources and funds envisaged in the SRE scheme to combat the LWE menace "will be utilised in a focussed manner on the districts as per the revised categorisation". (PTI)

BJP busy plotting murder of democracy banking on donations from capitalists: Kalpana Soren

RANCHI, March 16: Jailed former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana on Saturday lashed out at the BJP saying while her husband was in "unjust imprisonment" for over 45 days now, the saffron party was busy plotting the murder of democracy banking on donations and electoral bonds from capitalists.

Kalpana Soren embarked on a political journey at the 51st foundation day celebration of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in Giridih district on March 4, claiming that a conspiracy had been orchestrated by opponents ever since the Hemant Soren coalition government came to power in 2019.

Hemant Soren was arrested by the ED on January 31 in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud, subsequent to his resignation as CM.

"It has been more than 45 days since Hemant ji is in unjust imprisonment...Today the 'elephant flying people' (BJP) are busy plotting the murder of democracy with the help of electoral bonds and other donations given by the capitalists," Kalpana posted on 'X'.

Flying elephant was the mascot of the Global Investors' Summit held in February 2017 in Ranchi during the regime of previous BJP government under Raghubar Das in Jharkhand.

"They (BJP) have nothing to do with tribals, Dalits, backward and minority classes," Kalpana posted.

It is yet not clear whether she will contest the Lok Sabha elections from any of the constituencies in Jharkhand as the INDIA bloc was yet to announce its list of candidates. CM Champai Soren had on Friday said the names of party candidates for the parliamentary elections will be announced soon.

While the final decision is pending, it is highly likely that JMM will field its candidates in five seats including Jamshepur Lok Sabha constituency and may even contest the Singhbhum (Reserved)

seat. "I am able to meet him (Hemant Soren) for some time once a week. He remains worried about the health of his father and mother. Along with enquiring about the state, he also asks about our children. Hemant ji's love and dedication towards the people of the state keeps giving me strength. Even in this unjust imprisonment, he smiles and says that you are a mother, you will take care of everything," Kalpana wrote on 'X'.

He keeps expressing concerns over problems of the poor and helpless prisoners in jail, her post said adding, "We wonder how they should get justice."

Just a few days ago, Hemant ji sent a request to the government regarding the facilities for women constables, she said.

"The largest number of prisoners lodged in the jails of the country including Jharkhand are tribals, dalits, people from backward and minority classes. I remember that while being the Chief Minister, Hemant ji had also given instructions to release some such prisoners," the post added.

After the ruling JMM-led alliance proved its majority on February 5 and her husband made a fiery speech in the Jharkhand Assembly, Kalpana Soren had taken to X to announce that the "fight against injustice and oppression will continue".

Kalpana, who was previously considered a frontrunner for the position of chief minister but faced opposition from Sita Soren, the elder daughter-in-law of Shibui Soren, had said, "I have fought, and I will continue to fight! We have won, and we will win!"

She had posted, "Until Jharkhand warrior (Hemant Soren) defeats the conspiracy of the Centre and the BJP and joins us, I will manage his account. Our brave forefathers fought against injustice and oppression, and now the time has come again. May your love and blessings remain the same." (PTI)

Will Rahul Gandhi return electoral bonds that Congress received, asks Fadnavis

MUMBAI, March 16: Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for criticising BJP over the electoral bonds scheme, and asked whether his party would return the bonds that it has received.

He said Gandhi was critical of electoral bonds as the scheme has stopped his party's source of black money for elections.

Rahul Gandhi, whose Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will conclude in Mumbai on Saturday, has been targeting the Narendra Modi-led central government over the electoral bonds scheme. He termed the scheme as an extortion racket used by the BJP for toppling governments and breaking



political parties. Talking to reporters after the state cabinet meeting, Fadnavis said, "The BJP is the largest party with 303 MPs, so we got 30 per cent of the total bonds, while the rest of the opposition, including the Congress, received 70 per cent bonds."

"Will Rahul Gandhi return the electoral bonds that the Congress received? Whom did the party threaten to get the funds?" Fadnavis asked.

The BJP leader said electoral bonds are accounted money that is shown in the balance sheet of political

parties as well as that of corporate houses.

"The court will fix the loopholes if there are any in the scheme," the former CM said. "Rahul Gandhi's outburst is because the source of black money of his party has been sealed. Congress wants black money for election funding," he alleged.

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who was present at the press conference, said there was no issue left with Gandhi to speak about.

"He has no right to speak against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Only 'Modi Guarantee' works in India and people know it. There is no alternative to him. Rahul Gandhi is upset over Modi's popularity the world over," he said. (PTI)

Covid-19 origin in more probability unnatural than natural, lab leak potential source: New study

'Modified GFT provides a risk analysis framework that can be applied to differentiate between natural and unnatural epidemics'

NEW DELHI, March 16: The Covid-19 pandemic in more probability had an unnatural origin than a natural one with a potential source being a lab accident or leak, according to new research that employed a commonly used risk analysis tool to arrive at this conclusion.

Originally designed to distinguish between natural epidemics and deliberate biological attacks, researchers modified the Grunow-Finke Tool (mGFT) by tweaking the criteria to determine the likelihood of the nature of the pandemic's origin.

The study, findings of which were published in the Journal Risk Analysis, said the possibility of a laboratory origin of the Covid pandemic cannot be easily dismissed.

The mGFT tool, previously applied to smaller outbreaks, contains 11 criteria such as intensity and dynamics of the pandemic, including its rapid and unusual geographic spread, an unusual strain of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and peculiarities in clinical symptoms experienced.



The researchers at the University of New South Wales, Australia, assigned points from one to three to each criterion

based on available evidence collected from literature and case data from the public source 'Our World in Data' that gathers in-

formation from the WHO, John Hopkins University and official government reports.

Factors such as biological risk of bat virus research at Wuhan Institute of Virology, unusual strain, pandemic intensity and dynamics were assigned points of three, three, and two, respectively, while clinical symptoms was assigned two points.

Each criterion was multiplied by a weighting factor (1-3) to compute a score. A final score of more than 50 per cent favoured unnatural origins, while less favoured natural origins.

The final score that the mGFT algorithm calculated produced a total of 41 out of 60 points. Being more than 50 per cent, the researchers concluded a higher probability of Covid-19 originating unnaturally, with a focus on lab accidents or leaks as potential sources.

Being used in the context of a pandemic for the first time, the researchers said the tool may require further testing and train-

ing. Also, higher scores tend to be assigned to criteria such as pandemic intensity and unusual rapid spread, which can lead to overall high scores favouring unnatural origins.

To minimise subjectivity in scoring, the team's results were reviewed by two other experts.

The researchers said the modified GFT provides a risk analysis framework that can be applied to differentiate between natural and unnatural epidemics and the tool should be included in the toolset for investigating the pandemic's origins.

"The strengths of this study include a more comprehensive analysis of factors ranging from traditional virology, epidemiology, and medical factors to situational and other intelligence," the authors wrote in their study.

"The debate about the origins of SARS-CoV-2 has been focused largely on medical evidence but not on other intelligence, which is key to identifying unnatural epidemics," the researchers wrote. (PTI)

Hours before poll schedule announcement, LDF government implements revised rubber subsidy

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 16: Just hours ahead of the notification of the Parliamentary election schedule, the LDF government in Kerala on Saturday announced increasing the rubber subsidy to ₹ 180 as announced in the state budget.

Further, ₹ 628 crore has been sanctioned towards pension arrears.

State Finance Minister K N Balagopal said the state government has implemented the Rubber Production Incentive Scheme in view of the fall in prices of natural rubber.

The government had on February 5 announced in the assembly that in the budget for 2024-25, the subsidy amount for rubber has been increased by ₹ 10 from ₹ 170 per kg. It had said the same would come into effect from April 1.

On Saturday, the minister claimed that even as the price of rubber rises in the international market, the policies adopted by the central government are causing its rates to fall in the country.

In this situation, the state government had decided to help the rubber farmers as much as possible despite its financial difficulties, Balagopal said in a statement.

The development comes in the wake of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday saying that both the LDF and UDF governments



have turned a blind eye to the struggles of rubber planters.

Besides that, the Rubber Board had on Friday announced an incentive of ₹ 5 per kg for the export of rubber sheets.

In the statement issued by the minister's office, Balagopal said the shortfall in rubber prices from the market rate would be given as a subsidy to the farmers.

He also said that an additional ₹ 24.48 crore has been sanctioned as production bonus to rubber farmers in the state.

More than 1.50 lakh small and marginal rubber farmers, who are on the Rubber Board's approved list of beneficiaries, will get the benefit, the minister said.

In April 2021, the subsidy

amount was raised to ₹ 170 per kg.

The minister also announced that the third installment of the arrears of the 11th pension reform of retired employees and teachers has been sanctioned.

He said ₹ 628 crore has been sanctioned for this purpose and it would benefit around 5.07 lakh people.

The government has also sanctioned ₹ 130 crore for the Life Mission project under which houses are provided to the homeless, the minister's office said.

The amount sanctioned is the state's share under the project, it said.

It also said that ₹ 356 crore has been given to the project this year. (PTI)

3.4 lakh central security personnel along with state forces to be deployed in Lok Sabha polls

'NOTA has made no difference as far as criminality is concerned, in fact the number of candidates with criminal cases has increased'

NEW DELHI, March 16: The Election Commission is expected to deploy 3.4 lakh Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) personnel along with state police forces in the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections and the assembly polls in four states beginning April 19, officials said.

A maximum of 92,000 personnel of CAPFs are likely to be deployed in politically volatile West Bengal, where elections will be held in seven phases, followed by 63,500 personnel in militancy-hit Jammu and Kashmir, where polling will be held in five phases.

As many as 36,000 personnel will be deployed in Naxal-affected Chhattisgarh, where polling will be held in three phases.

The EC has considered the requests made by the state CEOs and decided to deploy a maximum of around 3,400 companies of the CAPFs in all states and Union territories in a phased manner to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections, an official privy to the development said.

A CAPF company comprises around 100 personnel.

The entire force mobilisation will be completed in the next few days.

Assembly elections in Andhra



Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim will also be held coinciding with the Lok Sabha polls.

A maximum of 920 companies of CAPFs are expected to be deployed in West Bengal in a phased manner, followed by 635 companies in Jammu and Kashmir, 360 companies in Chhattisgarh, 295 companies in Bihar, 252 companies in Uttar Pradesh and 250 companies each in Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Punjab, the official said.

The CAPFs are the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and National Security Guard (NSG).

The combined strength of all CAPFs is around 10 lakh.

In other states where a sizeable number of CAPFs are expected to be deployed are: 200 companies each in Gujarat, Manipur, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, 175 com-

panies in Odisha, 160 companies each in Assam and Telangana, 150 in Maharashtra, 113 in Madhya Pradesh, 100 in Tripura among others.

Those forces which will be deployed in West Bengal, Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas and Jammu and Kashmir have already reached their respective destinations.

According to the plan, about 2,000 companies were mobilised as part of the pre-poll deployment in sensitive and hyper-sensitive constituencies beginning March 1. About 1.5 lakh personnel will move through roads and rail as part of this mobilisation, another official said.

The Railways have also made available adequate rolling stocks with all appropriate facilities in trains, thereby ensuring hassle-free and timely movement of the forces to perform election duties.

Officials said the the CAPF personnel are being deployed for poll-related duties, such as area domination, confidence-building measures, poll day-related duties, guarding of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and strong room centres, counting centre security, etc during the elections. (PTI)

Over 48,000 transgenders eligible to vote in Lok Sabha elections

NEW DELHI, March 16: Over 48,000 transgenders are eligible to vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar said on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference to announce the schedule of general elections for the 18th Lok Sabha, Kumar said according to the updated electoral rolls, there are 97 crore registered voters.

"Out of 97 crore electorate, transgender voters are 48,000," Kumar said.

The number of transgender voters in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls was 39,075 with the maximum number of them from Uttar Pradesh (7,797) followed by Tamil Nadu (5,793) and Karnataka (4,826). The states and Union territories with no transgender voters were Arunachal Pradesh, Daman and Diu, Goa, Lakshadweep, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim.

According to the Election Commission, to abide by its "no voter be left behind" mandate, necessary efforts have been undertaken to ensure the inclusion of all sections of society in the electoral process.

"Enrolment of transgenders in the electoral rolls and motivating them to participate in the electoral process has been a huge challenge for the Election Commission. Numerous measures have been adopted to spread awareness among the transgenders, resulting in an increase in the number of third gender electors," read the polls panel's report on the 2019 general elections.

The polls for 543 Lok Sabha seats will be held in seven phases, starting with voting for 102 seats in the first phase on April 19. The counting of votes will be held on June 4. (PTI)

Despite economic turmoil, Pak military remains threat for us: CDS Gen Anil Chauhan

NEW DELHI, March 16: Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan on Saturday said Pakistan may be in a kind of economic turmoil but militarily there has been "no denting" in its capabilities and its armed forces "remain a threat for us". During an interaction at a conclave here, he also said that India has resources to "take care of our borders", especially disputed borders in the north, very well. He said this in response to a question on some of the biggest security challenges for India in the 21st century during a session at India Today Conclave 2024.

"I think if you look at the armed forces, the biggest challenge would be mostly external (ones). And they are of immediate concern. But then external challenge also unite a nation. We have seen it in Kargil, we have seen it in Galwan," Gen Chauhan said. The interaction was on the subject of "Vision National Security: The Challenges Before the Indian Military".

"As far as the armed forces are concerned, our immediate challenge is the rise of China and the unsettled boundary problem. We have two neighbours, both adversarial to us. Both of them profess that their friend-

ship is higher than the Himalayas and as deep as the oceans. And they are both nuclear capable," the CDS said. But both of them are predictable actually and the Indian military knows that these are the kinds of threats, he said. "What is unpredictable, and for us what the biggest challenge would be, is the way warfare is changing in future. And, because of this, we will have to introduce new weapon systems, technologies and tactics and strategies are going to change. And, probably organisation systems," Gen Chauhan said.

"This particular path of how to predict and what paths to take right now so that we are at the right place at the right time that I think is the biggest challenge for us," he added. He was also asked if a "financially weaker Pakistan" continues to remain a threat. "Pakistan may be in economic kind of turmoil and may be politically also slightly unstable, now they have a proper government. But militarily there has been no denting in its capabilities actually. And, we should.. give full marks to the adversary. That's a better way of looking at things, that is how I look at things," the CDS said.

"They retained their capabilities... so, Pakistan remains a threat, you can't say that Pakistan armed forces will not remain a threat. Yes, there may be a challenge for them to fight a long war because of the current economic problems which they have. But they remain a threat for us," he added. The remarks from the top general of the armed forces comes days after the Indian military conducted the mega exercise 'Bharat Shakti' at Pokhran near the international border, where it showcased the prowess of its indigenous defence equipment and platforms.

Gen Chauhan and other members of India's top military brass had also witnessed the exercise held in the field firing range located in the arid terrain of Pokhran in Jaisalmer district. As far as the border is concerned, they are "reasonably well secured", the CDS said during the conclave.

"We have resources to take care of our borders, especially disputed borders in the north very well," he said. The CDS also spoke about the recent testing of Agni-5 and how it will strengthen deterrence.

India on March 11 successfully

carried out the first flight test of the indigenously developed Agni-5 missile with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) under its 'Mission Divyasthra', joining a select group of nations having such a capability. The MIRV feature ensures that a single missile can deploy multiple warheads at different locations, sources earlier said.

"We have a nuclear doctrine which professes, no-first use. Hence, the credibility of our deterrence has to be very, very high. This particular test actually testifies this, the credibility of our doctrine," Gen Chauhan said.

"When we talk about deterrence, there is an element of communication into it. That means we should be able to communicate, if you don't communicate to the adversary what you possess, then the deterrence is of no value. So, this particular test is part of a communication, so this will strengthen deterrence and I believe in the long run will promote strategic stability in the neighbourhood. But, right now it's time to congratulate the people involved and the DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation)," he added. (PTI)

Murder accused hosts social media live from UP Jail: 3 jail warders suspended

BAREILLY (UP), March 16: The jail administration has suspended three jail warders of the Bareilly Central Jail in Uttar Pradesh following an investigation into the matter of an inmate accused of murder possessing a mobile phone on which he hosted a live video on a social media platform.

The probe was ordered after a purported video of a murder accused Asif lodged in Bareilly Central Jail hosting a live video surfaced on a social media platform on Thursday.

In the two minute-long video, Asif is heard saying, "I am in heaven and enjoying it."

On seeing the video on social media, the deceased's brother met District Magistrate Umesh Pratap Singh on Thursday and gave him a written complaint.

The authorities have also shunted a deputy jailor and sought written explanation from the two jailors regarding the incident.

"Three jail warders Ravi

Shankar Dwivedi, Hans Jeev Sharma and Gopal Pandey have been suspended for dereliction of duty on Friday. The deputy jailor Kishan Singh Baidia has been attached to the Jail Headquarters Lucknow," Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Prisons Kuntal Kumar on Saturday said.

"A written explanation has also been sought from jailors Vijay Kumar Rai and Neeraj Kumar regarding the incident," he added.

The officer said that no objectionable item was recovered in barrack searches held as part of the investigation.

Asif is accused of shooting a public works department (PWD) contractor Rakesh Yadav (34) to death in broad daylight on December 2, 2019, in Sadar Bazar Police Station area of Shahjahanpur.

Another accused Rahul Chaudhury was also accused to have killed Yadav and the duo are currently lodged in Bareilly Central Jail. (PTI)

Sandeskhali ED attack: CBI arrests three, including Shajahan Sheikh's brother

NEW DELHI, March 16: The CBI on Saturday arrested three people, including the brother of suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh, for being allegedly involved in the January 5 attack on an Enforcement Directorate team at Sandeshkhali in West Bengal, officials said.

Sheikh Alomgir, who is Shajahan Sheikh's brother, Mafujar Molla, the president of the TMC's student wing in Sandeshkhali, and Sirajul Molla, a local, would be produced before a local court on Sunday.

The agency took into custody Sheikh's brother and two others during their questioning.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) took over three FIRs registered by

the West Bengal Police on the directions of (ED) officials on January 5 and instigated a crowd to target the team when they went to raid the premises of Sheikh at Sandeshkhali in West Bengal, they said.

After detailed examination, and according to technical evidence collected, they were arrested by the CBI today, the officials said.

With these arrests, the number of people nabbed by the CBI in the case has increased to 14.

The agency suspects that these people were allegedly part of the attack on Enforcement Directorate



that went to search his house in an alleged ration distribution scam.

They were arrested on February 29 after 55 days on the run following violent protests led by women, alleging sexual atrocities and land grab. He went missing after a mob attacked the ED team

The state CID took over the investigation into the allegations against him. He was later handed over to the CBI on an order of the Calcutta High Court.

On March 10, the court sent him to CBI custody for four days which was later extended by another eight days -- till March 22.

The CBI has taken over the investigation in three cases related to incidents on January 5, when the ED team was attacked by an around 1,000-strong mob. A former state minister has been arrested in the ration scam case.

Sheikh was arrested by the state police on February 29, a day after the high court ordered that the CBI, ED or the West Bengal Police could arrest him. (PTI)

Gujarat gov announces new purchase policy with incentives

AHMEDABAD, March 16: The Gujarat government on Saturday announced its purchase policy 2024 with special incentives for MSMEs and women entrepreneurs in the government procurement of goods and services.

The Gujarat Purchase Policy 2024, announced under the direction of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, will be implemented from April 1, and remain in force till another policy is announced, incorporating any amendments or additional provisions, the chief minister's office (CMO) stated in a release. The new policy will cover the procurement of goods and services by all state government departments, HODs, district offices, authorities, grant-in-aid institutions, boards, corporations and societies, it said.

"Through this policy, the government aims to provide special incentives for MSMEs and women-powered industries in government procurement in keeping with the Prime Minister's mantra of 'Vocal for Local'," the release said.

The new policy will encourage procurement from micro, cottage, and small enterprises (MSMEs), especially ones owned by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women entrepreneurs, it said.

It will also support procurement from Gujarat-based MSMEs, compared to other suppliers, and encourage startups in the state, it said.

The policy promotes local suppliers by exempting eligible suppliers from tender fees and earnest money deposits (EMD). Under the policy, the state government has fixed various limits in the range of Rs 5 lakh to Rs 15 lakh for purchases without tender process, the release said.

Additionally, startups have been exempted from minimum prior experience and minimum turnover requirement criteria resulting in a boost to their businesses. (PTI)

Attempts to spread anarchy before LS polls restarted under pretext of farmers' stir: RSS in report

NAGPUR, March 16: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has alleged that ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, attempts "to spread anarchy under the pretext of farmers' agitation have been restarted", and said "separatist terrorism" has raised its "ugly head" through it in Punjab.

It also said the "atrocities committed against hundreds of mothers and sisters" at Sandeshkhali in West Bengal has shaken the conscience of the entire society.

The Sangh also raised concerns over the ethnic conflict in Manipur, saying it created "mistrust" between the two sections of the society- Meitei and Kuki that caused "deep wounds".

The RSS, the ideological fountainhead of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), made these remarks in its annual report 2023-24 presented by its general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale at the Sangh's annual 'Akhil Bharatiya Pratidin Sabha' conclave that started in Nagpur on Friday.

The report's concluding part titled 'National Scene' talked about vari-

ous incidents and developments in the country.

It said, the year 2024 will be remembered forever as the "golden year of pranpratishtha (consecration) of Shri Ram Lalla in the newly-constructed magnificent temple at Ayodhya" in Uttar Pradesh.

"The historic event held on January 22, 2024 has been the realisation of dreams and resolve of millions and millions of Hindus the world over for many centuries. Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram is the civilisational icon of all noble and pious qualities and Sri Ram Mandir is the symbol of national identity," it said.

On the farmers' agitation, the RSS said, "The separatist terrorism in Punjab has raised its ugly head again. Under the pretext of farmers' agitation, especially in Punjab, attempts have been restarted to spread anarchy, just two months before the Lok Sabha elections."

On February 13, thousands of farmers began marching towards the national capital to push for their demands, notably the Minimum Support Price (MSP).

The three Delhi borders -- Singhu,



Tikri and Ghazipur -- have been witnessing a heavy deployment of paramilitary personnel to stop the ongoing protest of the farmers demanding to march to Delhi. Hundreds of farmers are still sitting at Punjab-Haryana borders for the past one month.

The Dilli Chalo march, also known as the Farmers' Protest 2.0, is the second round of continuous protests and road blockades initiated by farmers in the northern states of Punjab and Haryana.

In the report, the RSS further

talked about the Sandeshkhali incident.

"The incident of atrocities on hundreds of mothers and sisters, especially of the Scheduled Caste and tribal communities, in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal, has shaken the conscience of the entire society. It cannot be imagined that such incidents have been going on for years in any part of independent Bharat," it said.

"But what is even more abominable is that instead of giving the harshest punishment to the guilty persons, the government there (West

Bengal) made efforts to save them. All parties should, rising above their political interests, unanimously take such drastic action on the issue of women's safety and honour that no one can even think of committing such a crime in the future," he said.

Sandeshkhali, a village in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, has been at the centre of a political storm for nearly a month and has witnessed unprecedented protests over allegations of sexual abuse by scores of women against local TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh.

On the Manipur violence, the RSS said the conflict created mistrust between the two sections of the society- Meitei and Kuki - causing deep wounds.

"It is unfortunate that the border state is undergoing a deep, inexplicable pain, and the psychological division of society is dangerous," it said.

The Sangh karyakartas (volunteers), on the basis of their communication with relevant people, have tried to save the situation, strengthen the society by morale-boosting and create an atmosphere of mutual co-

operation and coexistence in Manipur, it added.

While on one hand there is perceptible awareness and enthusiasm for useful action in the Hindu society, a few problems are also challenging the nation, the RSS said.

"The disruptive and divisive forces are never happy with any positive development. Their agenda is to create disturbances and reap political and other benefits. The incidents at Nuh in Mewat area (of Haryana) where a section of Muslim community violently attacked a VHP yatra that triggered violence. The social tension prevailed for months and the issue is not settled," it said.

The forces that are inimical to anything, that is Bharat, Hindutva or Sangh, are ever active in search of newer plans and designs to disrupt or denigrate these three, it added.

"The frequent rising of the bogie, such as Sanatan Dharma, is the cause for all ills of our nation, or the separatist issue of cutting South, or the play of politics in the sensitive matter of caste census - all these are aimed at disunity of the nation through distorted narratives," it said. (PTI)

Process to unlock biometrics can begin with CAA implementation: Himanta

GUWAHATI, March 16: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said with the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, a clarity has emerged and the process to unlock the biometrics of those frozen during the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) can begin.

"I will discuss the process with All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and other stakeholders and hopefully, a solution will be reached soon after the elections", Sarma said at a press conference here on Friday.

The biometrics of around 27 lakh people in the state were locked and they were unable to get Aadhaar cards.

During the last two years, following the enactment of the law, "we were doing the

groundwork to dispel doubts raised about the CAA. Now it is clear that anybody who came after 2014 will not be given Indian citizenship", he said.

Sarma said he was 100 per cent convinced that not even a single person will come to Assam through the CAA and "only those who had applied for NRC will get citizenship".

The CM admitted that blocking of the biometrics created problems in getting ration cards and employment and "we will take up the matter and resolve it".

He urged people not to be guided by emotion but by sound logic on the CAA issue.

"We have already captured the data by the NRC process and those not included in the

list would have anyway got citizenship through the Foreigners' Tribunal, if not the CAA", Sarma said.

The CM further said he expects around six lakh people, three lakh each from Barak and Brahmaputra valleys, will get citizenship and not 20 lakh as being spread by certain sections.

The Supreme Court-monitored Assam's National Register Citizens (NRC) published on August 31, 2019, which excluded 19 lakh of the 3.4 crore applicants, was a fallout of the Assam Accord signed in 1985 which had the provision for "detection and deportation" of all persons who entered the state from Bangladesh post-March 24, 1971.

The NRC and CAA are not linked in the

rest of the country but in Assam, the only state engaged in NRC updating exercise, a sizable population of Bengali Hindus were left out due to lack of proper legacy data documents or legacy data.

With the notification of CAA rules, the Centre will now start granting Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who came to India till December 31, 2014. These include Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians.

The CAA was passed in December 2019 and subsequently got the president's assent but there were protests against it in several parts of the country, including Assam where five persons died in the violence. (PTI)



Student body to carry out more agitations across state in near future AJYCP takes out torch rally against CAA in Nagaon



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 16: Along with the rest of the state, the district unit of Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) took out a torch rally against the implementation of CAA in front of the office of the Nagaon district commissioner on Saturday evening.

Hundreds of activists from the district unit of the students and youths' organization participated in the stir and strongly criticized the BJP led governments at the centre as well as in the state for forcefully bringing the act into action in the country.

Pragjyotish Bonia and Debasish Das, the president and secretary of the district unit of the organization said the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad will not accept the act under any circumstance and will carry out more democratic agitations in the days to come in the district.

They however asserted that the act will dilute the identity of the Assamese people as well as its language in future even in the state itself.

Tezpur University's FET department wins MSME Academia Excellence Award



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 16: The food engineering and technology (FET) department of the Tezpur University has been conferred with the prestigious Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) Academia Excellence Award by the Chamber for Advancement of Small & Medium Businesses (CASMB).

This recognition signifies the department's remarkable contributions in providing expertise, guidance, and actively supporting the growth and innovation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the region. The MSME Academia Excellence Award acknowledges the university's FET department's unwavering commitment to empower SMEs. The department's

dedication to collaborative efforts and knowledge sharing has demonstrably bolstered the growth and innovation capabilities of SMEs in the surrounding area.

Earlier, the department has also received Eat Right Research Institute Award by the Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) in 2022. The department has also been recognized as the State Level Technical Institute (SLTI) for Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh and is in the process of establishing common incubation centre in food processing under the PM-FME scheme of the Union ministry of food processing industries.

Laxmikant S. Badwaik, head of the department received the award in the presence of esteemed guests including Pallavi Darade, commissioner of income tax, Shekhar Channe, commissioner of Right to Information and Atul Chaturvedi, executive chairman of Shree Renuka Sugars during an event organised at Jio Convention Centre in Mumbai.

Shambhu Nath Singh, vice-chancellor of Tezpur University extended his heartfelt congratulations to the department for their achievement in winning the MSME Academia Excellence Award.

National Seminar held at Rabindranath Tagore University

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, March 16: The department of history of the Rabindranath Tagore University has organized a national seminar on 'Nationalism and Nationalist Upsurge Against the Colonial Rule with Special Reference to the Unsung Heroes of North-East Bharat'.

The seminar, sponsored by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) in collaboration with the Ithas Sankalan Samiti, Assam, was held on March 14 and 15.

The inaugural ceremony began with the welcome address of Amalendu Chakrabarty, vice-chancellor of the Rabindranath Tagore University. Afterwards Utpal Phukan, director of IQAC of the university gave a brief description about the Rabindranath Tagore University. The convener and head of the department of history, Pallabita Das explained the purpose of the seminar.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Rajib Handique, head of the department of history, Gauhati University as the chief guest. In his persuasive speech, he recalled the unsung heroes of Northeast India as well as the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore in the nationalist upsurge in India. The keynote speech was delivered by Subhajit Choudhury, assistant registrar of the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati also spoke about the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore to the Indian national movement, the role of the INA and the contribution of the unknown heroes of Northeast to the freedom struggle.

The first volume of the department's annual periodical 'The Tales of Time' was also inaugurated by Rajib Handique within this inaugural ceremony. The editors of that periodical are Parishmita Hazarika, Jonali Das and Gautam Sarmah, the fac-

ulty members of the department of history. The periodical is enriched by the different write-ups written by the teachers and students of the department.

The technical session was conducted both online and offline platforms at the Bharat Tirtha Bhawan and the commerce laboratory of the university. More than 25 papers were presented and discussed in this session.

Rajib Handique, Uttam Bathari and Subhajit Choudhury were presented as the resource persons for the technical session on the first day. The resource persons for the second day of the technical session were Sagar Barua, former principal of the Khagarijan College and Kamal Nayan Patowary, principal of the Nalbari College.

The technical session on the second day consisted of the presentation and discussion of more than 30 papers. The organizing committee for this seminar had received papers from various institutions in Assam, Northeast as well as from various parts of the country.

Finally, the valedictory session began with the inaugural address by the registrar Tilak Chandra Kalita. Nitin Kumar, assistant director of ICHR (research) delivered the valedictory speech and discussed the work of freedom fighters of Northeast. He also informed the audience on the various facilities offered by the ICHR for research.

A book exhibition cum sale centre was also inaugurated at the premises of Rabindranath Tagore University under the leadership of ICHR Librarian Muktinath Sharma. The students of the department also staged dance performances. Chief convener, Pallabita Das and co-convener Parishmita Hazarika, Jonali Das and Gautam Sarmah thanked ICHR and all stakeholders for their kind cooperation.

Nagaon ADP College gets Best NCC College Award



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 16: The Nagaon Anandaram Dhekial Pookan (ADP) College has bagged the Best NCC College Award in the Northeast, which was presented to the college during a function held at the Brahmaputra Hall, Narengi Army cantonment in Guwahati.

The National Cadet Corps (NCC) was introduced in the ADP College in 1963 and since then it has been working with great enthusiasm and dedication under the supervision of 8 Assam BN NCC of Tezpur group. As a result of its persistent effort, it has achieved the prestigious award. The award was officially declared by the NCC Directorate of North Eastern Region on February 28. It solidifies ADP College's dedication and commitment to the (NCC) programme. The award was handed over to the college on March 14.

Sadananda Payeng, the principal of the college received the award from the lieutenant general Gurbirpal Singh, AVSM, VSM, director general of NCC. Singh also presented banners and trophies to the best NCC group, unit,

college, and schools across the northeast region. Various dignitaries like additional director general of NER, Major General Gagan Deep along with the group commanders of Northeast, commanding officers, ANOs, JCOs, NCOs, Pls, NCC cadets of Army, Navy, Air Force wings of the northeastern region were present on the occasion. The gathering celebrated the remarkable achievements of ADP College and its NCC company, acknowledging their outstanding contributions to the NCC fraternity. The NCC unit of the college has consistently endeavored for excellence under the dynamic leadership of Lt Jalini Chetia, ANO, Army wing and the supervision of 8 Assam BN NCC Army Wing under Tezpur Group of Northeast region. Sadananda Payeng in a press note remarked that the ADP College remains committed to upholding the values of the NCC and contributing to the nation's defence and development. In a personal message, state education minister, Ranaj Pegu also congratulated the principal of the college for this prestigious achievement.

Agriculture drone training center to come up in Biswanath

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 16: The agricultural drone training center will be established at the North Eastern Vision Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute in Biswanath Chariali very soon. Joint secretary of the state department of agriculture and farmers' welfare, Rukmani Sundaram and assistant commissioner of agriculture along with higher officials from the agriculture department reached were present on the occasion. Addressing the two-day sessions, the joint secretary also stated that Namu Drone Devi scheme will be introduced in the field of agriculture for women empowerment and to mechanize the agriculture sector. He made a humble appeal to the women community to join hands to enhance and enrich the agriculture sector. He further added that two new projects will likely be introduced at the North Eastern Vision Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute. The projects are a farm machinery bank and custom hiring center. The two-day programme was attended by students of the Karnataka Engineering University, members of local self-help groups, officials and local farmers.

Tata Bluescope Steel hosts Dealer meet-2024



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 16: Tata Bluescope Steel hosted Dealer meet-2024. Kailash Lohia (managing partner) - Bajrang Steel (Sales) Corporation, Rahul Lohia, Nupur Lohia, Vikas Pundir (VP - Tata Bluescope Steel Ltd), Arup Das (asst general manager, TBSL), Anupam Mandal (asst general manager, TBSL) & dealer fraternity across Northeast were present.

Mittal Industries, Tinsukia was honoured with distributor of the Year, Infinitia & JBI Bricks & Hardware, Nalbari was handed over the runner up trophy. In Durashine business Krishna Steel Store, Moran was handed over the dealer of the year trophy & LR Steel, Nagaon was handed over the runners up trophy.

NDA-backed candidate Jayanta Basumatary felicitated in Gossaigaon

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, March 16: With the Lok Sabha election round the corner the NDA-backed candidate for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha seat, Jayanta Basumatary on Saturday urged the voters to help in nation-building by electing Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of the country for the third consecutive time.

After arriving at Gossaigaon as a candidate for the first time Basumatary was felicitated by various committees.

On the other hand, former MLA Hemendra Nath Brahma and president of the election steering committee of Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, claimed that the victory of the candidate is undoubtedly and that everyone is ready to vote for the NDA government in the country again.

Brahma said that thousands of people are already joining the NDA. Thousands of people including Shalbari MCLA Jai Basumatary have joined the saffron party in the presence of Rajnath Singh. Now the officials have to work with a focus. As the chairman of the campaign committee, candidates have won every time. However, stating that emotions have no place in politics, he hoped that it would work for the welfare of the people in our society.

Addressing the huge gathering Jayanta Basumatary asserted that the victory of the NDA is certain and hence, no other party will come to power in the Centre.

Lecture series highlight pivotal role of supply chains in enhancing industrial performance Industry experts discuss AI for supply chain management

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 16: The department of mechanical engineering at the Tezpur University has organised an online lecture series on 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Supply Chain Management'.

The highlight of the lecture series was an intellectual discourse by Utkarsh Mittal, the manager of Machine Learning & Automation at GAP Inc USA. Mittal's expertise shone through as he delved into the transformative potential of generative AI in revolutionizing supply chains. His talk, titled "Revolutionizing Supply Chains Through Generative AI," not only captivated the audience but also provided invaluable insights into the symbiotic relationship between artificial intelligence and supply chain dynamics.

During the event, Dinesh Kumar, a distinguished figure in the domain, and a retired professor of the department of mechanical and industrial engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee explained the role of supply chain in improving the performance of the industry. His presentation offered a comprehen-



sive overview of the pivotal role supply chains play in enhancing industrial performance.

Speaking on the occasion, Paragmoni Kalita, head of the department of mechanical engineering said that with a blend of theoretical frameworks and practical applications, the lecture series would facilitate a deeper understanding of AI's integration with supply chain management.

Dhaneswar Saikia conferred with Moghai Ojah Award

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 16: Dhaneswar Saikia of Bokakhat, an accomplished dhol player of the state has been conferred with the 14th Moghai Ojah Award at a ceremony held at the auditorium of Jorhat Science Centre and Planetarium.

The award was instituted in 2011 by the Jorhat district unit of the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) in the name of the legendary dhol maestro, Moghai Ojah of Jorhat, who made dhol famous outside the state by his enthralling performances. The award carrying a cash prize, a se-leng chadar, gamusa, japi, xori, a citation, and a memento, is annually presented on March 15, the death anniversary of Ojah.

Dhaneswar Saikia was pre-

sented the award at the function, presided over by AJYCP state president Palash Changmai and inaugurated by chief advisor of the body, Rana Pratap Baruah. The welcome address was delivered by the general secretary, Ratul Borgohain.

In the same function, Rishna Saikia, a meritorious student from an economically backward was awarded by the Moghai Ojah Academic Award, also instituted by the students' body.

Earlier, the programme was presided over by Palash Changmai and inaugurated by Rana Pratap Baruah. Ratul Borgohain stated the objective. Family members of the great musician (Moghai Ojah) attended the function as special guests.

HOPE HE IS NOT FINISHED, SAYS DRAVID ON ASHWIN



CHENNAI, March 16: Rahul Dravid hopes that he doesn't call it quits anytime soon. Ravi Shastri would like to see him harass batters for at least two more years while Anil Kumble finds it perplexing that he isn't a regular in India's overseas fixtures.

If ever Ravichandran Ashwin needed validation for being a rare talent, three national coaches — one current and two former — provided it heartily on the same evening, at the same platform and almost at the same time.

"I hope he is not finished. He has moved the craft of spin bowling through his hard work, dedication and innovation. That's a great legacy to have. Fantastic! Well done and inspired a whole generation of young spinners," Dravid said during a felicitation function organised by the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) to celebrate Ashwin crossing the 500-wicket mark and completing 100 Tests.

"He always has the desire to contribute to the team's success.

Have really enjoyed my time with him," The Wall' added.

What stands out for Dravid is Ashwin's quest for excellence and being ever inquisitive about the game of glorious uncertainties, which he finds challenging as a coach.

"The good thing about him is that he challenges you, and as a coach, you want that. Looking forward to more such memories with him. He is one of a kind."

Dravid's immediate predecessor Shastri, in his inimitable baritone, urged Ashwin to continue playing with the minds of the batters for a few more years.

"Achievements of gigantic proportions. It's no joke. Wish you the best. I believe you still have a lot of cricket left. Spinners mature with each passing age. Feel very proud. Well done, enjoy and keep harassing batsmen for at least a couple of years more," said Shastri.

Kumble, whose 619 wickets remains the most telling benchmark in Indian Test history for bowlers, spoke about Ashwin's heady contribution in India's success during the last decade.

"In my book, he is one of the best to have represented the country. His numbers have been outstanding. He has an overwhelming co-relation with his and India's success. He was never satisfied and always wanted more," Kumble, who was present in person, said.

The former Indian skipper felt that had Ashwin not been overlooked during overseas Tests, he would have played 100 Tests much earlier.

"He should have played his 100th much earlier. However, he doesn't always get picked while India travels overseas, which perplexes me," Kumble termed the 37-year-old a leader who didn't need a designation to be heard in the Indian dressing room.

"Although he hasn't been the official Indian captain, he has always been a leader in the dressing room. Wonderful to see him dedicate his 500th wicket to his proud father. He still has some international and IPL cricket left in him. Looking forward to see him perform more," Ashwin's long time spin bowling partner Ravindra Jadeja and skipper Rohit Sharma expected the champion bowler to create more memories.

"Your contribution to the Indian team has been priceless. Looking forward to more," Jadeja said in a virtual message. (PTI)

Not really co-relating with what happened with the men's team:

RCB's Mandhana

NEW DELHI, March 16:

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Smriti Mandhana doesn't want to put too much pressure on her side ahead of the Women's Premier League final against Delhi Capitals here on Sunday, and added that she is not in the mood for comparisons with their men's team counterparts in the IPL.

The RCB men's team has failed to win a single IPL title in the last 17 years, finishing runners-up thrice (2009, 2011, 2016). But just into the second WPL season, the Mandhana-led women's team has a great chance to win the title on Sunday.

"Firstly, I think this year was really important for us to connect to the whole franchise with what's happened with the men, sometimes it puts pressure.

"So we were just thinking that we are two seasons into it, so let's not put too much stress. So not really co-relating with what happened with the men's team," Mandhana said in the post-match press conference after defeating Mumbai Indians by five runs in the Eliminator here on Friday.

RCB did not have a very good first edition of the WPL last year, finishing fourth in the league standings, but Mandhana believes it is important to live in the present.

"What cricket has taught is it is important to live in the present.

It's just about playing good cricket on that particular day, whoever plays the best cricket tomorrow is going to win," she said. "Last year wasn't the greatest campaign for RCB. (But) the conversation in the last 25 days has always been around we are enjoying each other's company, really focussed on the process, training well. So doesn't change anything. We are not changing anything overnight because it is a final."

The left-handed opener has high regard for rival captain Meg Lanning of DC, but she feels a skipper is always as good as the

team.

"We give a lot of importance to the role of captain but the captain is as good as the team. Nothing changes tomorrow, we are playing a good Delhi Capitals side, who have played some amazing cricket over the last two seasons," Mandhana said.

"I always looked up to her (Lanning). Little conversation with someone who understands batting as much as she does really helps. Really taught me how to look up to other players. From the time I (made my) debut, Lanning was the top run scorer for Australia. It's been nice to watch the way she has gone about."

DC skipper Lanning hoped her side plays its best cricket of the tournament on Sunday and lifts the title, which eluded them last year. DC finished finished runners-up in 2023 after losing to Mumbai Indians in the final.

"We are really in a good space heading into tomorrow. It's going to be a cracking game. We are really excited to be involved, give ourselves an opportunity to go out there and win it," Lanning said.

"We are looking forward to taking it on and play our best game of the tournament."

Lanning doesn't want to think about what happened last year, saying they are only focussed on a taking on a very good RCB side on Sunday.

"RCB has played some excellent cricket, they played some great cricket when they were under the pump. What a challenge for our group to go out there and take them on. I have got full confidence that we will be able to deliver what we need to," she said.

"I don't think we thought about what happened in the last year. It's important what happens tomorrow. It's about performing on the day. The experience of last year helps in a way but it doesn't drive us any thing differently. It's pretty cool we get the chance to do it again." (PTI)

Theegala shoots 67 to move to tenth as Wyndham Clark leads by four

PONTE VEDRA (USA), March 16: Indian-American Sahith Theegala found six birdies against one bogey to card 5-under 67 and jump to 10th spot after the second round at the PLAYERS Championship at TPC Sawgrass.

He was tied 37th after the first round but made a big leap with birdies in 10th, 14th and 16th hole. On his second nine, he birdied the second, fourth and eighth and dropped one shot at the third.

The lead was held by Wyndham Clark, the reigning US Open champion. Clark

shot identical rounds of 65 to be 14-under and four ahead of Xander Schauffele (69) and Canadian Nick Taylor at 10-under at PGA Tour's flagship event.

England's Matt Fitzpatrick and American Maverick McNealy are tied fourth at 9-under while defending champion Scottie Scheffler, Canadian Corey Connors and course-record holder Tom Hoge are six shots off the pace at 8-under.

Scheffler needed physiotherapy treatment on a neck complaint during his round. Yet, the world No. 1 managed to

post 69. Chinese Taipei's CT Pan feeling sore in his left wrist saved a huge par save on his last hole at The Stadium Course to post a 4-under 68 for tied 10th place on 7-under. Asia's challenge was also being carried by Japan's Hideki Matsuyama who fought back from a slow start for the second straight day and signed for a successive 69 to sit on 6-under in the USD 25 million showpiece.

Korea's Si Woo Kim, the 2017 PLAYERS champion, will enter the weekend on 3-under after a 71 while compatriot Sung-

jae Im shot a 72 to lie on 2-under.

Rory McIlroy was 6-under par going into the weekend, eight shots behind leader Clark.

Will Zalatoris (71-74) and Justin Thomas (73-75) missed the cut and were the biggest names to make an early exit. Also missing out are Eric Cole (72-74), Matthieu Pavon (70-77) and Nick Dunlap (77-70).

Past PLAYERS champions Webb Simpson (2018) and Matt Kuchar (2012) also missed the cut. (PTI)

Lifter Achinta caught entering women's hostel at night, expelled from national camp

NEW DELHI, March 16: Commonwealth Games gold medallist weightlifter Achinta Sheuli has been expelled from the Paris Olympics preparatory camp after he was caught entering the women's hostel at night at NIS Patiala.

The disciplinary breach occurred on Thursday night. The 22-year-old, who competes in the men's 73kg weight class, was caught by security personnel, who made a video of the lifter.

"Obviously, such indiscipline will not be tolerated. Achinta was asked to leave the camp immediately," an Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWLFF) official told PTI on condition of anonymity.

The Sports Authority of India and NIS Patiala Executive Director Vineet Kumar were immediately made aware of the incident. Since there was video evidence of the incident, SAI did not constitute an investigating panel.

"The video was sent to NIS Patiala ED Vineet Kumar and the SAI headquarters in New Delhi and IWLFF was asked to remove Achinta from the camp," a SAI source said.

Sheuli, who won the gold medal at the 2022 Birmingham CWG with a Games record, left the camp on Friday.

The facility in Patiala has separate hostels for men and women athletes. Currently, women boxers, athletes and wrestlers are stationed at the NIS.

This is not the first time the IWLFF has taken strict action against a lifter for a disciplinary

breach. CWG and Youth Olympics champion Jeremy Lalrinnunga was evicted from the national camp on grounds of indiscipline before.

Following his expulsion, Sheuli's chances of qualifying for the Olympics have also ended as he will not be travelling for this month's IWF World Cup in Phuket, Thailand, which is a mandatory event for Paris Games qualification.

Sheuli is currently placed 27th in the Olympic qualification rankings and had a chance of making the cut via the continental quota.

"It is such a pity because he had actually started getting back on track after his injury," the source added.

Only Tokyo Olympics silver medallist Mirabai Chanu (49kg) and CWG silver medallist Bindyarani Devi remain in contention for the Paris Games.

The two will be travelling to Thailand later this month to take part in the IWF World Cup.

The tournament will mark Chanu's return to competition after suffering a hip tendinitis injury in August last year.

Under the 2024 Olympic qualification rule, a lifter has to compulsorily compete in the 2023 World Championships and the 2024 World Cup.

Apart from the above, the lifters also have to participate in three of the following events -- the 2022 World Championships, the 2023 Continental Championships, the 2023 Grand Prix I, the 2023 Grand Prix II and the 2024 Continental Championships. (PTI)

Sanjna sizzles again as Bengal seal quarter-final berth with 11-0 win over Telangana

PUNE, March 16: Sanjna nHoro continued her rich vein of form, registering yet another hat-trick as Hockey Bengal thrashed Telangana Hockey 11-0 to qualify for the quarterfinals of the Senior Women National Championship here on Saturday.

In a lop-sided contest, Sanjna (4th, 20th, 21st, 38th, 44th minutes) scored five goals, while Susmita Panna (6th, 10th, 42nd) also slammed a hat-trick for Bengal. Monika Nag (7th, 40th) struck a brace, while skipper Anjana Dungdung (5th) also found the back of the net at the Major Dhyanchand Hockey Stadium.

Sanjna had earlier scored eight goals against Hockey Gujarat.

Hockey Bengal finished with an all-win record and collected nine points from Pool H, which also includes Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu and Hockey Gujarat.

However, it was the end of the road for Uttar Pradesh Hockey despite registering a dominating 11-2 win over Hockey Andhra Pradesh in a Pool C match.

Veteran Vandana Katariya (43rd, 50th, 55th minutes) slammed a hat-trick, while Mumtaz Khan (27th, 47th) and Upasana Singh (35th, 46th) struck twice each.

Shashikala (14th), Reetu Singh

(27th), Swarnika Rawat (38th) and Simran Singh (57th) found the net once each for Uttar Pradesh. Kalyani Swarnapoodi (7th) and Garlanka Varahalamma (57th) were on target for Hockey Andhra Pradesh.

Uttar Pradesh Hockey finished second in the three-team Pool C behind Hockey Jharkhand, while Hockey Andhra Pradesh remained win-less.

Both Uttar Pradesh Hockey and Hockey Jharkhand had four points from one win and one draw but the former were second in the standings by virtue of an inferior goal difference.

Hence, Hockey Jharkhand

qualified for the quarterfinals from Pool C. In other matches of the day, Delhi Hockey beat Kerala Hockey 4-1 in Pool B but failed to progress ahead of Hockey Maharashtra, who have two wins in as many games.

Sonali (37th, 59th) found the net twice, while Tanya (21st) and Manshi (54th) were the other goal-scorers for Delhi. Kerala Hockey's lone goal came from the stick of Swetha (33rd).

Elsewhere in Pool A, Chhatisgarh Hockey recorded their first win in two matches, beating Hockey Bihar 2-0 as the latter slumped to their second straight loss.

Anisha Sahu (8th) and Aanchal Sahu (51st) scored for Delhi Hockey. The win, however, was not enough for Delhi Hockey to enter the knockout stages, finishing second behind Hockey Maharashtra.

Hockey Madhya Pradesh, Hockey Jharkhand, Hockey Maharashtra and Hockey Bengal have sealed their places in the quarterfinals.

Later in the day, Hockey Gujarat will take on Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu in a Pool H tie, while Hockey Uttarakhand will be up against Dadara & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu in Pool G. (PTI)

Sreejesh aspires to be Indian hockey team's chief coach by 2036



that we have got the potential to finish on the podium for sure but you can't be overconfident."

Renowned mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton, who was with the squad in Hangzhou Asian Games, will be working with the Indian players in the run upto the Olympics and will there in Paris too, a fact confirmed by chief coach Craig Fulton. And Sreejesh feels Upton's presence will be of great help for the players to deal

with the "mental confusion".

"The Olympics is not a normal platform. There a lot of things, it's a pressure venue, it's a magical world, it's a festival. It is a kind of situation which can fascinate any player. Paddy was a part of the cricket team when we won the World Cup in 2011, he is an experienced person who can help us to choose wisely and clear our mental confusion."

India will travel to Perth next

month for a five-Test series against Australia and Sreejesh believes the tour holds great significance. "It was a good phase (India leg of Pro League), we enjoyed and learned from it. We are now moving forward because it's a process towards Olympics. We tried a lot of new things. Pro League is sort of a model exam before the big call."

"Most of the teams we played here whom we will meet in the Olympics. We wanted to try some things and we wanted to see how they react to that. Second thing how other teams reacted to our changes and lastly how the players reacted to the pressure," he said.

"The upcoming Australia tour will be the last kind of preparation where everyone will get an opportunity. Overall it's a sort of rehearsal before the Olympics."

After the tour of Australia, India will travel to Antwerp, Belgium for the second leg of Pro League in May, which will be their last round of preparations before the Olympics. (PTI)

In-form DC look to win maiden WPL title after falling short last year

NEW DELHI, March 16: In-form Delhi Capitals, led by the inspirational Meg Lanning, would hope to be second time lucky and lift their maiden Women's Premier League title when they take on a plucky Royal Challengers Bangalore in the summit clash here on Sunday.

After missing out on the title in WPL's inaugural edition last year, losing by seven wickets to Mumbai Indians in the final, DC looked a rejuvenated side this year.

DC have been in superb form this year, topping the five-team league standings with 12 points from eight matches.

Lanning has led DC from the front, scoring 308 runs from eight innings, while South African all-rounder Marizanne Kapp and Australian left-arm spinner Jess Jonassen are the highest wicket-takers for the side with 11 scalps each.

DC's only two defeats this season came against Mumbai Indians UP Warriorz. Leaving aside those two matches, they have enjoyed a near-perfect campaign.

Going into the final, they will definitely start as favourites, having never lost to RCB in four

meetings.

But having said that, past results will hardly have any significance in the final. It will be a new day and the side which can withstand pressure and expectations will lift the title.

DC will expect the explosive Shafali Verma to provide them with a quick start alongside Lanning.

Jemimah Rodrigues has been in fine nick in the middle, but Lanning would expect more contributions from the likes of all-rounders Alice Capsey and Kapp.

On the bowling front, Jonassen has been the star performer but the likes of Kapp and Shikha Pandey too have contributed.

Left-arm spinner Radha Yadav has also been effective with 10 wickets and the home team will definitely depend a lot on its spinners in a relatively slow Kotla pitch.

RCB, on the other hand, finished third in the league phase after an inconsistent run that yielded eight points from as many games but they clicked when it mattered, knocking out defending champions MI by five runs in the eliminator here on Friday.



All-rounder Ellyse Perry will be key to RCB's success on Sunday as besides being the highest run-getter with 312 runs, the

Australian has been impressive with the ball, scalping seven wickets.

If not for Perry's all-round show

against MI on Friday, the result could have been different. She first played a vital 50-ball 66-run knock and then returned with fig-

ures of 1/29 to play a key role in RCB's journey to the final.

But Perry would look for more support from the likes of skipper

Smriti Mandhana, Sophie Devine, Richa Ghosh and Sophie Molineux with the bat.

However if RCB were to stop DC, they would need efforts from their bowlers, especially the likes of Renuka Singh, Shreyanka Patil, Georgia Wareham etc.

All in all it promises to be a cracker of a contest with the balance slightly tilted towards hosts DC.

Teams (from):

Delhi Capitals: Taniya Bhatia (wk), Laura Harris, Meg Lanning (c), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Alice Capsey, Marizanne Kapp, Shikha Pandey, Annabel Sutherland, Jess Jonassen, Minnu Mani, Poonam Yadav, Arundhati Reddy, Titas Sadhu, Radha Yadav, Ashwani Kumari, Aparna Mondal, V Sneha Deepthi.

Royal Challengers Bangalore: Richa Ghosh (wk), Disha Kasat, Smriti Mandhana (c), Sabbhineni Meghana, Indrani Roy, Satheesh Shubha, Heather Knight, Simran Bahadur, Nadine de Klerk, Sophie Devine, Shreyanka Patil, Ellyse Perry, Asha Sobhana, Ekta Bisht, Kate Cross, Sophie Molineux, Shraddha Pokharkar, Renuka Singh, Georgia Wareham. (PTI)

Pant's recovery earlier than anticipated, his background in gymnastics played huge role: NCA staff

NEW DELHI, March 16: Rishabh Pant's mental strength and his background in gymnastics has helped the dashing wicket-keeper-batter to make an early recovery.

Fifteen months after Pant was involved in a horrific car accident on the Delhi-Dehradun highway in December 2022, the wicket-keeper-batter received a green signal to play in the IPL, starting March 22.

"The mental strength and confidence inside him made us give our 100 per cent in doing the rehab part for him," Thulasi Yuvraj, a physiotherapist at the National Cricket Academy told 'bccv.tv'.

"The doctors believed that he may take up to two years. Once he came to NCA, it was like a progressive phase for him," he added.

Pant had dabbled in gymnastics



at a young age and that served as an asset in his recovery, according to Nishanta Bordoloi, the strength and conditioning coach at NCA,

"One thing was that Rishabh has a background for gymnastic which was a very very big asset for us because there are a few

things that come naturally to him," Bordoloi said.

"Anytime he would feel he couldn't move, he could tumble or roll over back to his feet again. Which was so much of an added advantage for him.

"The beginning phase was to get foundational strength in him, making his body understand what the movements are like.

"It's completely reconstructed thing and once it's reconstructed it takes a lot of mind and body connection. The neural system need to understand, the muscle, tendons have to function," he added.

Although Pant left no stone unturned, ticking all the boxes, the 26-year found the rehab mundane.

"Rehab is very irritating, have to do same thing again and again. But you have to do it because you

don't have any other choice. It's boring but the more you do the better you get," said Pant.

But returning to the cricket field has made him love the sport more than he could imagine.

"I feel so happy when I go to the ground. The love of cricket has gone up. I used to love it more than anything before but still there is an increase."

His treating doctor, renowned orthopedic surgeon Dinshaw Pardiwalla has credited the NCA staff and the cricketer's extreme motivation for his comeback.

"NCA keeping a physio with him daily. Making sure the determination and intensity was there each and every day. He has returned so quickly, six months earlier than anticipated. It is because of his drive, his extreme motivation and also he expertise in rehab aspect," Pardiwall said. (PTI)

Six share lead with two rounds to go in Grand Prix Chess Series

MUMBAI, March 16: As many as six players shared the lead after the fifth round of the ₹ 2.5 lakh prize money Grand Prix Chess Series, organised by Indian Chess School, here on Saturday.

Despite their best efforts, the leaders have been unable to break the deadlock, setting the stage for a nail-biting conclusion. All of them are at 4.5 points.

The highly-anticipated match between overnight leaders Arnav Koli and Guru Prakash unfolded as a gripping encounter in the Kan variation of the Sicilian Defense.

Despite Guru Prakash's early blunder on move 16, Arnav's decision not to seize the g7 pawn kept the game in balance, allowing Guru to regain momentum and stay competitive.

Arnav missed a crucial opportunity when Guru made a significant blunder on move 42. Despite the chance to capitalise, Arnav instead opted for a perpetual check, ultimately resulting in a draw.

IM Vikramaditya Kulkarni, Arvind Iyer, Mihir Shah, and Sanjeev Mishra secured victories against Milind Parle, Ishan Roy, Yohan Boricha, and Yash Kapadi, respectively.

Their wins propelled them to join Guru and Arnav, resulting in a thrilling six-way tie at the top. (PTI)



Ram Baboo breaches Paris Games qualification mark; seventh Indian male athlete to do so

NEW DELHI, March 16: India's Ram Baboo on Saturday achieved the Paris Olympics men's 20km race qualification standard, clocking a personal best time of 1:20:00 at the Dudinska 50 Meet in Slovakia.

Baboo, a bronze winner in the 35km walk race at the Hangzhou Asian Games, gave a good account of himself in this Race Walking Tour Gold-Level event finishing third. This is the first time an Indian athlete is finishing on the podium in this meet. The cutoff mark for Olympic qualification is 1:20:10.

Cesar Rodriguez of Peru finished top with a timing of 1:19:41, while Ecuador's Brian Pintado came second clocking 1:19:44.

The 24-year-old Baboo is also the seventh male walker from the country to breach the above-mentioned qualification mark, while the others are: Akshdeep Singh, Suraj Panwar, Servin Sebastian, Arshpreet Singh, Pramjeet Bisht and Vikas Singh.

Priyanka Goswami remains the lone female walker to have qualified for the quadrennial extravaganza, having achieved the feat at last year's National Open Race Walking Championships in Jharkhand.

However, a country can send only three athletes in an individual track and field event in the Olympics and it will now be up to the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) to determine who makes the cut for the Paris Games out of the seven race walkers.

Chief athletics coach Radhakrishnan Nair had said that the final selection could be made in June.

Irrespective of that, the Olympic qualification comes as a big step-up for Baboo, who hurdled over penury in his formative years.

The son of a daily-wage worker, Baboo worked as a waiter to self-finance his athletics training and joined his father in road construction under MGNREGA scheme during the Covid-19 lockdown, as his family was hard-pressed. He initially ran marathons, 10000m and 5000m but developed knee pain.

On the advice of a local coach, Pramod Yadav, he later shifted to race walking which does not put too much pressure on his knees.

He initially started with 50km race walk but shifted to 35km race walk after World Athletics removed that event from its programme. (PTI)

Sen outlasts Lee to enter semifinals at All England C'ship



BIRMINGHAM, March 16: India's Lakshya Sen displayed great mental resolve on his way to a stunning win over former champion Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia to progress to the men's singles semifinals of the All England Championships here.

The 22-year-old Indian, who had finished runner-up in 2022 edition, produced good variations while attacking and kept fighting to outlast Lee 20-22, 21-16, 21-19 in an absorbing quarterfinal that lasted 71 minutes on Friday.

"It was a really good match and happy to be on winning side. It was all about keeping the nerve. I knew he has the quality to comeback and give a tough fight," Sen said.

"Even when I was 18-14 up, I knew if I play a little bit lose, he will grab the opportunity. For me, it was important to dictate the pace. In the end, it was about not giving him an open chance to hit and keep the shuttle down."

World no. 18 Sen, the reigning Commonwealth Games champion, will take on Indonesia's world no. 9 Jonatan Christie in the semifinals.

Sen played four three-game matches last week at the French Open before engaging in two back-to-back long matches in the past

couple of days but despite that he was able to maintain a high pace.

"It (physically) was really good. The way I played last week and now too. Now it is all about recovering as there is not much time. My support team will have to be really on their toes to get me up for next match," Sen said.

The two shuttlers played some excruciating rallies but Sen managed to grab a 8-3 lead as Lee made too many errors at the net.

Soon Sen was 12-7 up but Lee, who has defeated the Indian only once in four meetings, recovered in time to claw back at 12-12 and then 20-20 before taking the opening game.

In the second game, Sen kept himself ahead 11-9 at the mid game interval and then upped the pace to take seven points on the trot to roar back into the contest.

In the decider, Sen kept a high pace to take 7-5 and 11-8 leads in the break. He didn't let the advantage slip despite Lee gaining four successive points from 15-19.

However, Sen got the two crucial points to register his fourth win over the Malaysian.

In the end, the Malaysian shot one long to hand the Indian the win as he fell on his back to celebrate. (PTI)

We will miss Hardik's experience but I never tried to convince him to stay back: Ashish Nehra

AHMEDABAD, March 16: Gujarat Titans head coach Ashish Nehra on Saturday said he never tried to convince Hardik Pandya against returning to Mumbai Indians but conceded that the star all-rounder's experience would be dearly missed by the team in the IPL beginning on March 22.

Pandya, who led GT to IPL title in their maiden year before taking them to the final last year, has moved back to Mumbai Indians as their skipper for the upcoming season.

"In any sport, you have to move on. You cannot buy experience and to replace someone like Hardik Pandya or (an injured) Mohammed Shami isn't going to be easy. But that's a learning curve and that's how team moves forward," Nehra told mediapersons here on Saturday.

Pandya-Nehra combination had worked wonders for GT in their first two seasons and the inevitable question arose whether the head coach tried to stop the skipper from joining Mumbai Indians.

"I never tried to convince Pandya to stay back. As you play more, you gain experience. I could have stopped him had he gone to any other franchise. He (Pandya) played here for two years but he has gone to a team (MI), where he has played previously for 5-6 years," Nehra was frank in his admission.



The way Pandya's transfer took place, Nehra feels that day isn't far away when IPL goes the European club football way.

"The manner in which the sport (cricket) is moving, we will have trades and transfers like we see in international soccer. It's a new challenge for him and may be he will learn something new and we wish him the best."

Nehra was predictably asked about how he looked at Shubman Gill's elevation as the skipper and how he would manage a team full of seniors.

"As a new captain, I want to see how he (Gill) operates and not just me, the whole India would like to see because he is that kind of a player," the former

left-arm seamer said.

"He is looking to play and do well in all three formats, so we as a franchise would like to help him grow more as a person than as a captain. If he grows as a person, he will grow more as a captain going forward and get better and better," the coach said. He cited Pandya's example when he was roped in 2022 as the team's skipper.

"Before Hardik joined GT, he had no prior experience of captaining any side. There are 10 IPL teams and you will see more and more new captains. Shreyas Iyer and even Nitish Rana did captaincy for KKR. Let's see which guy capitalists moving ahead." The 2011 World Cup winner is bullish about his team's

possible replacements with Shami ruled out following a surgery on his achilles tendon and Rashid Khan recuperating from a back surgery.

"IPL is now a 12-people game (Impact Player added) and to fill in Hardik and Shami's shoes, it is not going to be easy but we have enough people. We have Umesh Yadav, who has been playing the IPL for more than 12 years," Nehra said.

He is also hopeful that Tamil Nadu skipper R Sai Kishore, who got 55 wickets in Ranji Trophy, will deliver the goods.

"Sai Kishore didn't play (much) last year, but he has been doing so well. So every year you will be seeing new new guys, you have to believe in yourself and prepare for that," he said. When asked if Rashid doesn't get fit in time, Nehra said: "About spinners, it's not that we don't have experienced spinners. We have Jayant Yadav and Sai Kishore. I am a firm believer of playing to your strengths. In Chennai and Lucknow, there will be slow tracks and we need to be prepared." The coach also informed that rookie Jharkhand keeper-batter Robin Minz, who recently met with a bike accident in Ranchi, is unlikely to play IPL this year.

"It is unfortunate but we were also excited about a guy like Minz," the coach concluded. (PTI)

ATURKIMI ACADEMY, DIPHU

under the aegis of Aturkimi Society, Diphu
Affiliated to CBSE, New Delhi, Affiliation No. 230122, School Code:35206

ADMISSIONS OPEN

From Montessori to Class IX (Session 2024-25)
New Session will begin from 5th of April 2024
First Private CBSE School in Town
Results of All India Secondary School Examination (Class X)
SCHOOL TOPPERS

Limited Seat

Class	Fee
Montessori	150/500
Class I	270/300
Class II	270/300
Class III	270/300
Class IV	270/300
Class V	270/300
Class VI	270/300
Class VII	270/300
Class VIII	270/300
Class IX	270/300

NEET (UG) - 2023 Qualified Candidates

Name	Roll No.
ROHIT KUMAR	150/500
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300
ADARSH KUMAR	270/300

Our facilities:

- Boys & Girls Hostel
- Creche (Baby Sitter)
- Computer Lab
- Science Laboratory
- Digital Smart Class
- Art & Music (Vocal) Class

For more details kindly scan QR Code or visit the school

Registration Forms are available at School Office
on all working days from 1st week of February 2024 from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Aturkimi Academy, Diphu
Rukasen, Amlapatty, Karbi Anglong

Log on to <http://www.aturkimiacademy.org>

910136350 (Principal)
913485738 (Vice Principal)
9502021927 (Primary Headmistress)
9591442228 (Receptionist)